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Role of a Spy in Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* and Chang-rae Lee's
Native Speaker
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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se bude věnovat způsobu zobrazení postavy špiona v románech *Sympatizant Viet Thana Nguyena* a *Native Speaker Chang-rae Leeho*. Student za pomoci sekundární literatury zasadí oba romány do historického a literárního kontextu a okomentuje jejich žánrové zařazení (např. historický román, thriller, špionážní román, postmoderní román, atd.) a okomentuje také zda-li mají oba romány postmoderní literární prvky, a které to konkrétně jsou. Nastíní také dobový kontext související s válkou ve Vietnamu, kontext nepokojů v USA a imigrační problematiku USA. Oba autory také zařadí do kontextu asijsko-americké literatury. Jádrem práce bude analýza a porovnání vybraných románů z hlediska působu, jakým je postava špiona zachycena: např. zda-li jde o tajného agenta typického pro tradiční špionážní román, či jde o parodii na špiona, zda-li špion působí ve válce fyzické, či psychologické (s jeho okolím a/nebo sám se sebou). Student také zmíní použité literární prostředky obou románů. Svě analýzy bude ilustrovat ukázkami z primárních děl a bude je konfrontovat s kritickými zdroji. Závěrem je shrne a vyvodí obecnější závěry o roli a zobrazení špiona ve vybraných dílech.

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ANNOTATION

This thesis deals with the portrayal of spy roles as depicted in the novels *Native Speaker* by Chang-rae Lee and *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen. It depicts the relevant literary and historical context of the two novels as well as the novels' genres such as postmodernism and spy fiction. The main characters are contrasted according to their roles as spies from literary, professional, and immigrant perspectives.

KEYWORDS

Asian American literature, spy fiction, postmodernism, Vietnam War, alienation

NÁZEV

Postava špiona v románech *Sympatizant* Viet Thana Nguyena a *Native Speaker* Change-rae Leeho

ANOTACE

Tato práce se zabývá ztvárněním špionážních rolí, jak je vykreslují romány *Native Speaker* od Chang-rae Leeho a *Sympatizant* od Viet Thanh Nguyena. Práce zobrazuje relevantní literární a historický kontext obou románů a také definuje jejich žánry, jako je postmodernismus a špionážní fikce. Hlavní postavy jsou kontrastovány podle jejich rolí špionů z literární, profesionální a přistěhovalecké perspektivy.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Asijsko americká literatura, špionážní fikce, postmodernismus, válka ve Vietnamu, odcizení

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Introduction

This thesis aims to analyze the possible interpretations of the role of a spy as it is depicted in the story of Henry Park in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* and the nameless narrator of Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*. The novels are categorized according to their genre, and literary and historical context. Finally, the thesis also determines how the novels fit the theme of postmodernism and specify what postmodernist tools are used.

In terms of the literary acclaim of the mentioned authors, both are considered to be significant contributors to the Asian American literary canon. Chang-rae Lee is one of the most well-known authors of Korean American literature. According to Wenying Xu, "his first novel *Native Speaker* (1995), was an instant success, for which he received the PEN/Hemingway Award for Best First Fiction, the Discover Award, and the American Book Award."¹ Lee's novel depicts important topics for Asian American literature such as identity or alienation. Viet Thanh Nguyen, representative of Vietnamese American literature, is acclaimed for his novel *The Sympathizer*, which earned him a Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2016. In the story, he "force[s] readers to think anew about the Vietnam War and ponder questions of memory, representation, and reconciliation."²

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The theoretical and practical parts are intertwined in order to make the analysis coherent and to give examples immediately to provide a better foundation for the understanding of the topic.

The first chapter primarily focuses on the literary and historical context of the novels. It describes the development of Asian American literature and its significant authors, waves, themes, and literary works. Korean American literature and Vietnamese American literature are discussed in further detail, as the novels subjected to this analysis are representative of each of these subcategories respectively. Furthermore, it provides historical context to the novels, presenting the topics of the Vietnam War, the Los Angeles riots of 1992, and Asian American immigration as well as the related U.S. immigration policies.

The second chapter concerns the categorization of the novels in terms of their genre. Therefore, it introduces spy fiction, its aspects, and its authors, as well as how popular spy fiction compares to *The Sympathizer* and *Native Speaker*. Furthermore, the topic of postmodernism is portrayed, along with the typical postmodern tools. From this chapter

¹ Wenying Xu, *Historical Dictionary of Asian American Literature and Theater* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press 2012), 153.

² Viet Thanh Nguyen, "A Novel Intervention: Remembering the Vietnam War a Conversation With Pulitzer Prize - Winning Author Viet Thanh Nguyen," *World Policy Journal* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 65.

forward, both novels and their respective protagonists are compared in terms of their individual qualities and aspects.

The third chapter begins the analysis of the characters of Henry Park and *The Sympathizer*'s nameless narrator. More specifically, it describes the spy roles from a professional point of view. This includes the methodology and tools used by the novels' protagonists and the psychological effects of their profession. Other aspects of their professions, such as the job environment, their superiors, and the subjects of their espionage are also included.

The final chapter focuses on the spy roles of the protagonists from the immigrant point of view, as well as their alienation and identity struggle. The analysis in this chapter revolves around the characters' relationships, their issues with identity, communication, and their struggle to fit in with society.

1 Literary and Historical Context of the Novels

It is important to the focus of this thesis to provide essential background information about the novels and their authors. In this paper, Korean American and Vietnamese American literature will be discussed in a greater detail as both the authors and the main protagonists from their stories trace their roots back to these two respective countries - South Korea and Vietnam.

For the purposes of this work, Asian American literature is defined as literary works written by people of Asian descent who were either born in or have migrated to North America, as described by King-Kok Cheung.³ Asian American authors can be divided into several subcategories. These categories are listed by Wenying Xu: the authors can be either “immigrants, American born to immigrant parents, or adopted from [Asian] regions. Some authors are third, fourth, and fifth generation Asian Americans while others are biracial or multiethnic.” She also names some of the common themes found in Asian American literature, as follows: “ethnicity, Americanization, racialization, homeland, gender and class exploitation, sexuality, generation gap, the common misperception of Asian Americans as permanent aliens.” Commonly discussed questions include: “What does it mean to be an American? At what cost does one become an American? How does one recognize oneself as a racial minority? What does the hyphenated identity mean?”⁴

Outside of the Korean American and Vietnamese American authors, some of the most notable writers come from the Chinese American, Japanese American, and Filipino American communities. Xu regards these writers as “the pioneers of Asian American literature and theater.”⁵ Published in 1974, *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* is one of the most essential works that helped Asian American literature get established and viewed as relevant and serious among the public. This anthology further supports the fact mentioned above because only writers from these three groups and their works are presented.⁶ It displays the depth and variety of Asian American literature, which ultimately meant more public recognition and critical acclaim that Frank Chin and the other editors hoped for and succeeded in acquiring. However, in the present time including only the groups already mentioned is very

³ King-Kok Cheung, “Re-viewing Asian American Literary Studies,” *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. King-Kok Cheung (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

⁴ Xu, *Historical Dictionary*, 1–2.

⁵ Xu, *Historical Dictionary*, 124.

⁶ Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong, “Preface” in *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, ed. Frank Chin Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong (New York: Mentor, 1991), xi.

limiting. Xu further emphasizes that it is of key importance to distinguish between the many regions of the Asian continent, as there are significant cultural differences among them.⁷

Korean American literature traces its beginnings to the 1930s, and according to Elaine H. Kim, the writings of this period are mostly autobiographies and primarily speak from the points of view of educated exiles. As further stated by Kim, Younghill Kang represents one of the earliest and most significant authors from this period of Korean American writing. Writing in English, he had come to present the land of Korea and Koreans to Western readers and serve as “both purveyor of the unfamiliar, in terms of a faraway Oriental nation, and reinforcer of the familiar, in terms of popular notions about backward peoples yearning for the light of the West.”⁸

When describing Korean American literature, Kim Foreman divides it into three waves, according to the generation the authors belong to. Richard Kim and the aforementioned Younghill Kang are stated by Foreman to be the sole representatives of the first wave of Korean American authors.⁹

Following is the second wave, comprised of the early 20th-century immigrants’ children. Among these, Foreman highlights authors such as Mary Paik, Cathy Song, and Ronyong Kim. The second wave’s authors are described as “proud supporters of the Korean independence movement.”¹⁰

The third and perhaps final wave of authors described in this thesis emerged after 1990 when “[t]he children of Koreans who immigrated in the 1970s grew to adulthood with English as their primary language.” Kim Foreman comments that the authors from this wave not only offered a distinctive perspective on growing up in two cultures but also explored the topics of racism, power, and gender in their books, unlike the previous waves of Korean American writers. Foreman proposes names of several authors that stand out, like Nora Okja Keller, Susan Choi, Leonard Chang, and Patti Kim. One more name mentioned among these authors, which is at the same time the most significant for this thesis, is the name of Chang-rae Lee.¹¹

Xu describes Lee as one of the more significant Korean American authors among the post-1968 immigrant children. Born in 1965 in Korea, he came to the United States when he

⁷ Xu, *Historical Dictionary*, 1.

⁸ Elaine H. Kim, “Roots and Wings: An Overview of Korean American Literature 1934–2003,” in *The Sigur Center Asia Papers: Korean American Literature*, ed. Young-Key Kim-Renaud, R. Richard Grinker, and Kirk W. Larsen (Washington: George Washington University Press, 2004), 3.

⁹ Kim Foreman, “Korean Americans: Literature” in *Encyclopedia of Asian American Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Jonathan H.X. Lee and Kathleen Nadeau (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 695.

¹⁰ Foreman, “Korean Americans: Literature,” 695.

¹¹ Foreman, “Korean Americans: Literature,” 695.

was three years old. He started his writing career during the 1990s and had his first novel called *Native Speaker* published in 1995. Lee then wrote several more novels, such as *A Gesture Life* or *Aloft*. Furthermore, Xu mentions that the themes that repeat themselves in his writings are “alienation, cultural dissonance, and emotional distance that one finds in his writings about immigrants.”¹²

It is likely that Lee would reflect a portion of his own experience in his first novel *Native Speaker* through the character of Henry Park. In an interview, Kenneth Quan asks Lee, how much of his own life inspired the narrative and character in *Native Speaker*. Lee replies:

[t]he outer form might be similar but that's about it – it's the least interesting thing. [...] Henry Park's concerns, are more intensified and more dramatized, made more extreme for the sake of fiction and I think that my life is very undramatic and not terribly interesting.¹³

Even though Lee puts Henry in a similar situation that he was in himself, Lee admits that the novel takes barely any inspiration from his personal life experience, meaning it is a work of fiction with little to no autobiographical elements.

Events that carry a considerable influence on certain story aspects of Lee's *Native Speaker* are the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The Korean-African American conflict, also known as the Black-Korean conflict was a series of civil disturbances in 1992 in Los Angeles. During the riots, many Korean American shops and businesses were pillaged or burned down, leading to several demonstrations as retaliation by the Korean American community.¹⁴

The story of *Native Speaker* is set in New York. While the riots, as the name suggests, took place in Los Angeles, there are instances of violence and unrest between the Korean and African American communities portrayed in the book. The first interpretation for the reason why these conflicts are reflected in the book resides in the fact that *Native Speaker* is not a historical novel, and Chang-rae Lee, writing the book just three years after the riots took place, may have wanted to bring attention to the issue in his book, regardless of the inaccuracy in terms of location. The second interpretation points to the fact that while the riots did take place in Los Angeles and mainly affected local residents, the events influenced the Korean and African American communities and their relations throughout the entirety of the United States.

In *Native Speaker*, there is an instance of violence from a group of African Americans inflicted upon Henry's father. The incident happened in Mr. Park's vegetable store, which is

¹² Xu, *Historical Dictionary*, 153.

¹³ “Interview with Chang-rae Lee,” UCLA Asia Pacific Center, last modified May 21, 2004, <https://www.international.ucla.edu/asia/article/11432>.

¹⁴ Edward Taehan Chang, “Toward Understanding Korean and African American Relations,” *OAH Magazine of History* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25163103>.

located in the Bronx neighbourhood. The Bronx is known for being one of the neighbourhoods where the population consists heavily of African Americans and the Hispanic community. The events happened as described by Henry in the book:

Some black men had robbed the store and taken him [Henry's father] to the basement and bound him and beaten him up. They took turns whipping him with the magazine of a pistol. They [the black men] would have probably shot him in the head right there but his partners came for the night shift and the robbers fled.¹⁵

In relation to the *Native Speaker*, the influence the 1992 Los Angeles riots have on its story is significantly smaller than the effect of the Vietnam War on *The Sympathizer*, which is perceptibly more present in its story.

According to Veronica Hendrick, the Vietnam War was a conflict that occurred from 1959 to 1975 between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. The war ultimately ended with the fall of Saigon as North Vietnamese forces emerged victorious.¹⁶

As further described by Hendrick, the beginning of the war tracks back to the period when Vietnam was under French rule. By 1900, Vietnam had been declared a French colony, and there were several uprisings against the French. As a number of rebel groups gained power, they eventually combined their forces under the moniker of the Vietminh. Due to its backing of the Vietminh, the United States became involved in this conflict.

Per Hendrick's description, Vietminh actively resisted the French-aided expansion of the Japanese presence in Vietnam. The United States provided military assistance and equipment to the Vietminh to fight the Japanese forces. Ho Chi Minh, one of the leaders of the Vietminh organization, benefited from this backing by acquiring military and political authority. Years after receiving funding from the American military, Ho Chi Minh would then lead the Communist Party, also known as Vietcong, and fight a long-lasting battle against South Vietnamese and U.S. forces.¹⁷ By this action, he would ultimately lose the support of the United States since the country was against his ideology and tried to rid the world of communism. According to Ronald H. Spector, Vietcong was supported by the Soviet Union and China, whose regime was used to shape the one of North Vietnam. Spector also calls the Vietnam War a "manifestation of Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies."¹⁸

¹⁵ Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (New York: Berkley Books, 1995), 56–57.

¹⁶ Veronica Hendrick, "Vietnam War (1959–1975)," in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Asian American Literature*, ed. Guiyou Huang (London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 950.

¹⁷ Hendrick, "Vietnam War (1959–1975)," 950.

¹⁸ "Vietnam War," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified March 3, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>.

Hendrick states that the war resulted in the deaths of more than 58,000 Americans as well as an estimated three to four million Vietnamese casualties from both the North and the South. On top of that, the war also claimed the lives of one and a half to two million people from Cambodia and Laos, which are the neighbouring countries of Vietnam.¹⁹ According to Xu, “The Vietnam War impacted the neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos, and a Communist takeover occurred simultaneously in all three countries when the United States withdrew in 1975.”²⁰

The fall of Saigon in 1975 is also the event during which the story of Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* begins. Vietnam War is important not only for the context of *The Sympathizer* but also the Vietnamese American literature and the immigration of Vietnamese to the U.S. in general. As stated by Wenying Xu, Vietnamese Americans were so few in number before the end of the Vietnam War that very little about them was documented. However, via the Orderly Departure Program, a significant influx of Vietnamese refugees started arriving in the United States in 1979.²¹ This influx meant the creation of Vietnamese American communities and the beginning of Vietnamese American literature.

To further clarify the exact meaning and extent of the Orderly Departure Program, Judith Kumin explains in her article:

The [Orderly Departure Program] was designed to make it possible for persons wishing to leave Vietnam to do so in a safe and organized way [...] In the first 8 years of the program (1979–87), just 125,000 persons were resettled. But over the next 10 years, more than half a million Vietnamese left their country under the auspices of the program, to resettle in more than 30 different countries.²²

It is only natural that one of the most frequently appearing topics in Vietnamese American literature is the Vietnam War. Daniel Y. Kim and Viet Thanh Nguyen stress that because Vietnam is closely associated with the Vietnam War in the American mind, it has proven difficult for Vietnamese American authors to escape this stigma. Kim and Nguyen further explain that both Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans have opposed this expectation, and have made efforts to reflect the wide range of other Vietnamese experiences. However, majority of Vietnamese American writers, including Nguyen, still make the war and its consequences the focus of their work.²³

¹⁹ Hendrick, “Vietnam War (1959–1975),” 954.

²⁰ Xu, *Historical Dictionary*, 276.

²¹ Xu, *Historical Dictionary*, 14.

²² Judith Kumin, “Orderly Departure from Vietnam: Cold War Anomaly or Humanitarian Innovation?,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2008): 104–105. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45054295>.

²³ Daniel Y. Kim, and Viet Thanh Nguyen, “The Literature of the Korean and Vietnam War,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh, and Daniel Y. Kim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 66–67.

Wenying Xu also mentions other recurring themes in Vietnamese American literature, such as: “memory, ethnicity, sexuality, and colonialism.”²⁴ The most prominent of the recent examples of the Vietnam War literature is the 2015 novel *The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen.

As stated in an interview, Nguyen was born in Vietnam in 1971, during the ongoing Vietnam War. Forcing him and his parents to flee to the United States, Vietnam War came to be of great interest to Nguyen, who had written multiple books focusing on the topic. His first book, *The Sympathizer* especially brought him great success. He also wrote a nonfiction book called *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*.²⁵

Nguyen never had any direct involvement in Vietnam War nor was he known to work as a spy, therefore it is reasonable to assume that *The Sympathizer* takes inspiration from neither his personal nor his professional life. When it comes to the message that Nguyen is trying to send to his audience through *The Sympathizer*, Nguyen himself stated in the same interview that part of the point of the novel is to remind the readers that the American point of view has significant limitations and that other viewpoints should be considered. He further adds that the other point on the literary level would be to display a non-Western character in a more realistic light, with various flaws and a spectrum of human qualities, and not to display them in accordance with stereotypes.²⁶

It can be said that the entirety of Asian American literary history is rooted in immigration. According to Cuong Nguyen Le, the first major wave of Asian immigrants occurred in 1848 when the news of the California gold rush travelled around the world and convinced many Chinese to come to the U.S. and search for fortune. Starting in 1865, many of them would begin to work on the transnational railroad. After 1869 when the railroad was completed, the Chinese were suddenly not needed for their labor and became frequent targets of racial abuse and discriminatory government policies. This was due to the Whites perceiving the Chinese as a threat to the economy, as further stated by Le.²⁷

Following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the American legislature had several more discriminatory changes. Essentially, one act of key importance was passed that reduced the number of Asian immigrants immensely. As per Maddalena Marinari’s words, the 1924 Immigration Act excluded Asian immigrants, who were “ineligible for citizenship.” This meant

²⁴ Xu, *Historical Dictionary*, 277.

²⁵ Nguyen, “A Novel Intervention,” 65.

²⁶ Nguyen, “A Novel Intervention,” 66.

²⁷ Cuong Nguyen Le, *Asian American Assimilation: Ethnicity, Immigration, and Socioeconomic Attainment* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2007), 15–16.

that “Asian immigrants previously allowed into the country—the Japanese in particular—would no longer be admitted to the United States and that immigrants from northern and western Europe would receive priority.”²⁸

According to Le, this situation remained unchanged until the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act, which significantly increased the number of immigrants allowed to travel to the U.S., including those from Asia.²⁹ Ronald Takaki stresses in his book how great of a difference the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act made in regards to the amount of immigrants arriving in the U.S. from Korea. Takaki claims that from 1960 the number of Koreans living in the U.S. increased from 10,000 all the way to 500,000 in 1985.³⁰

In both Henry’s story in *Native Speaker* and the narrator’s journey in *The Sympathizer*, Asian immigration to the U.S. plays a major role. In *Native Speaker*, it can be deduced from the book’s context that Henry, albeit at the time an infant born on the plane, is along with his mother and father among the immigrants coming to the U.S. after 1965. It is essential to emphasize that it is not stated explicitly that Henry arrived during that particular period. However, the story takes place around the time of the book’s release in 1995, and with Henry being roughly in his thirties, it is reasonable to assume that Henry’s parents would migrate to America after 1965 to make a living in the United States.

Immigration to the U.S. from Vietnam was relatively different compared to immigration from other parts of Asia. The country was in turmoil, rebelling against the French and engaging in a fully-fledged civil war afterward, meaning that there were only a few immigrants from Vietnam in the U.S. before 1975, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. A closely related piece of information is that thanks to the so-called Orderly Departure Program a large number of Vietnamese refugees arrived in the U.S. after 1979. However, *The Sympathizer*’s protagonist, had landed in America in 1975 on a plane reserved for the escaping American troops four years before the Orderly Departure Program took place. After arriving in the United States of America, he continues to perform his duties as a spy for North Vietnam.

²⁸ Maddalena Marinari, “The 1921 and 1924 Immigration Acts a Century Later: Roots and Long Shadows,” *Journal of American History* 109, no.2 (September 2022): 277.
<https://academic.oup.com/jah/article/109/2/271/6747696#376913755>.

²⁹ Le, *Asian American Assimilation*, 19–20.

³⁰ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 436–437.

2 Postmodernism and Spy Fiction

Since the literary and historical context was analysed, the thesis will now focus on the categorization of the novels in terms of their literary genre. *Native Speaker* is a novel, specifically classified as spy fiction. In the case of *The Sympathizer*, its categories are a combination of a historical novel, spy fiction, war novel, and epistolary novel because a large part of the book is written in the style of a confession. Nevertheless, it is necessary to clarify that while *The Sympathizer* is classified as a historical and war novel, it is a work of fiction. *The Sympathizer*'s story is set during true historical events of the Vietnam War, but the happenings from the nameless narrator's point of view are entirely fictional. Both novels share some similarities, starting with each book applying literary techniques typical for postmodern literature. As described by Chris Baldick, postmodern in literary terms means:

[n]otoriously ambiguous, implying either that modernism has been superseded or that it has continued into a new phase. Postmodernism may be seen as a continuation of modernism's alienated mood and disorienting techniques and at the same time as an abandonment of its determined quest for artistic coherence in a fragmented world.³¹

Tatyana Fedosova explains that there are no set definitions of how postmodern literature should be structured.³² Nonetheless, there are multiple themes that are commonly used by postmodern writers. Fedosova names some of these "fundamental postmodern principles" in her article. Those that are relevant to the analysis of the novels include: "a discourse fragmentariness; [...] paradoxicality; playing with the text, with time, and with the reader [...]"³³ Dino Franco Felluga further adds two literary techniques used in postmodern literature, that are also relevant to the novels, being "[i]rony and parody."³⁴

According to Baldick, parody is an exaggerated replica of the form of a work of literature, mocking the stylistic tendencies of an artist or school.³⁵ Irony is then described by Baldick as a slightly comical impression of inconsistency, wherein an ostensibly simple remark or action is weakened by its context to have a radically different significance. Furthermore, he adds that:

[t]he more sustained structural irony in literature involves the use of a naïve or deluded hero or unreliable narrator, whose view of the world differs widely from the true

³¹ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 201.

³² Tatyana Fedosova, "Reflection of Time in Postmodern Literature," *Athens Journal of Philology* 2, no. 2 (June 2015): 78.

³³ Fedosova, "Time in Postmodern Literature," 79.

³⁴ Dino Franco Felluga, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 227.

³⁵ Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary*, 185.

circumstances recognized by the author and readers; literary irony thus flatters its readers' intelligence at the expense of a character (or fictional narrator).³⁶

The themes of irony and parody are spread through the stories of Henry and the narrator. To begin with the character of Henry, Tina Chen stresses that he is a "highly ironic and self-conscious narrator." Chen portrays that by underlining the expectations of the reader raised by the genre of espionage story, Henry ironically subverts the standards of the genre throughout the length of *Native Speaker*.³⁷ The character knows that the job he does differs greatly from the spies that have been popularized by fiction.

In addition, the titles of the novels can be observed as a part of the irony when the context is considered. *Native Speaker* is narrated by and centered around a character who barely knows Korean, the language of his parents. What is more, Henry even struggles with expressing himself in English, his first language. Tina Chen describes that:

The tensions that structure Henry's stories, both the ones he tells others and the ones he tells himself, make their telling a difficult enterprise. His lyricism and eloquency falter into strange silences, broken narratives, cryptic phrases.³⁸

This argument is further supported by the character of Lelia, Henry's American wife, who calls Henry a "*False speaker of language*" which signals Henry's inability to communicate or use the language properly.³⁹ Near the end of *Native Speaker*, there is a metaphor used to point at Henry's failed mastery of language. Henry plays the role of the "Speech Monster" during a language practice for children, taught by his wife Lelia.⁴⁰ As opposed to the novel's title, Henry's language ability is portrayed as not reaching the level of a native speaker.

In contrast to Henry, the narrator does not deal with the same problem language-wise. In fact, the narrator is quite the opposite, as he appears to be an exceptional speaker of English. The irony between the book's title, *The Sympathizer*, and the narrator is rooted in the idea of his split identity, which is presented as him having *two minds* meaning two perspectives, as well as in his unreliable narration. In the book, the narrator states that he is "a man of two minds," and that he can "see any issue from both sides."⁴¹ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson provide an explanation of what it means to sympathize: "agree with a sentiment,

³⁶ Baldick, *Oxford Dictionary*, 130.

³⁷ Tina Chen, "Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts in 'Native Speaker' by Chang-rae Lee," *Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 3 (2002): 643. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26286693>.

³⁸ Chen, "Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts," 638–639.

³⁹ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 6.

⁴⁰ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 348.

⁴¹ Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* (London: Corsair, 2016), 1.

opinion, or ideology.”⁴² The two ideologies, namely communism and capitalism, presented in the novel are in direct disagreement with each other. Therefore, the narrator’s ability to see any issue from both sides would make him incapable of being a sympathizer for a single cause, as he cannot agree with either of the ideologies to their full extent. Furthermore, the narrator’s unreliability in his storytelling stems from the fact that his writing takes the form of a confession, written during his time in a Vietnamese prison camp. There is a high possibility that the narrative is written and edited in such a way that his captors would find pleasing, and thus, be more likely to allow the narrator to be released. This leads to the argument that if the narrator were to be captured by the opposing side, his narrative would shift to favouritism of their respective values. Wolfson further supports this claim as she states that the narrator’s confession is “rife with information that must be continually questioned, given that its production under duress renders the narrator’s testimony unreliable.”⁴³

Both of the novels are told from the first-person perspective. According to Baldick, “some first-person narrators are unreliable.” He explains that: “[their] accounts may be partial, ill-informed, or otherwise misleading.”⁴⁴ In terms of postmodern literature, Richard Lane educates that “[t]he notion of an ‘unreliable narrator’ is *de rigueur* within postmodernism; indeed ‘unreliability’ could be thought of as the defining feature of a postmodern narrator.”⁴⁵ In terms of the narrative of *Native Speaker* and *The Sympathizer*, there are facts that point towards its unreliability. As per Roberta Wolfson’s words, “the narrator’s characterization as a man of two faces and two minds renders him an unreliable signifier [...]”⁴⁶ This was thoroughly discussed in one of the previous paragraphs. The narrative of *Native Speaker* is also questionable in its reliability, as Tina Chen states:

Henry is a problematic storyteller. There are questions that others—his boss, his wife, his colleagues, and his friends—have about his reliability. Even more importantly, Henry himself cannot always distinguish his facts from his own narrative impulses: his confusion about which stories to tell and how to tell them results from his multiple betrayals, each one contributing to the unraveling of both his narrative and identity.⁴⁷

This in combination with Henry’s stream-of-consciousness style of storytelling points to Henry’s unreliability as a narrator.

⁴² Catherine Soanes, and Angus Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English: Second Edition, Revised*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1788.

⁴³ Roberta Wolfson, “‘A Man of Two Faces and Two Minds’: Just Memory and Metatextuality in The Sympathizer’s Rewriting of the Vietnam War,” *College Literature* 50, no. 1 (2023):” 59.

⁴⁴ Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 166.

⁴⁵ Richard Lane, *The Postcolonial Novel* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 72.

⁴⁶ Wolfson, “‘A Man of Two Faces,’” 58.

⁴⁷ Chen, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts,” 639.

Another important element of postmodern literature is the use of metafiction or metatextuality. Defined by Chris Baldick as:

[a] fiction about fiction; or more especially a kind of fiction that openly comments on its own fictional status. [...] the term is normally used for works that involve a significant degree of self-consciousness about themselves as fictions, in ways that go beyond occasional apologetic addresses to the reader.⁴⁸

The usage of metatextuality in *Native Speaker* is pointed out by Chen as follows: “Henry’s spying is a metaphor for his uneasy position as a Korean American trying to figure out his place in American society.” Thus, it is portrayed that spying transcends the metaphor and gives the author of the book a chance to explicitly critique the general rules that make conveying Henry’s story challenging.⁴⁹ Henry’s trouble with his own identity will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Wolfson expresses that one of the most evident examples of metatextuality in *The Sympathizer* occurs when the narrator allows the commandant to assume control over the writing of his confession, insisting on edits from the narrator until his confession “conform[s] more clearly to the North Vietnamese government’s self-serving narratives.”⁵⁰ This way the narrator admits to the shifting fluidity of his narrative.

To conclude the topic of metatextuality in the novels, the authors use the stories and characters as a platform to address issues they deem important and express their opinion. Similarly, this way, the Commandant actively manipulates the narrator’s confession to his liking, as suggested earlier by Wolfson.

Time distortion or, as it was named in one of the paragraphs above, playing with time, is a recurring theme in both *The Sympathizer* and *Native Speaker*. The way in which the story is told does not follow a chronological order, and the narration often shifts between different timelines. In both novels, the story in its entirety is narrated in the past tense. Therefore, the most recent past can be considered the main timeline. Other timelines are located in the further past and occur when the narration focuses on the main characters’ memories and flashbacks. These shifts happen sporadically, following the stream of consciousness of the protagonists. The digressions are almost exclusively used to provide the reader with context for the narrative unfolding in the main timeline. To further specify, the main timeline of *The Sympathizer* is situated during the narrator’s time writing the confession in the North Vietnamese prison camp.

⁴⁸ Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 151.

⁴⁹ Chen, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts,” 638.

⁵⁰ Wolfson “A Man of Two Faces and Two Minds,” 65.

Henry's main timeline in *Native Speaker* follows Henry's assignment with John Kwang as well as the development of his relationship with his wife Lelia.

Paradoxicality is also one of the story elements in both novels. Henry Park and the narrator are both spies by profession. It is an essential part of their job to be able to blend in with any environment, yet both protagonists encounter issues in their personal life to fit into society. This creates a paradoxical parallel between the duality of their spy identity, which will be analyzed more thoroughly in the chapter focusing on the alienation of the protagonists.

As has been mentioned, the genre that the two novels have in common besides postmodernism is spy fiction. According to Emily Martin, spy fiction is a "sub-genre of crime fiction that includes espionage as a major plot device."⁵¹ The story oftentimes happens beyond the bounds of the law. Whether the events happening in the spy fiction genre books are realistic or not, it provides the reader with a glimpse into a world that in real life is obscured, covered in secrecy and deception. For many, this is the only way to get an idea of what exactly is the job of a spy and how their tasks are performed. Paul O'Sullivan expresses in his review that: "With the institutionalisation of espionage and counter-espionage as aspects of modern statecraft during the 20th century, the exploration of the relationship between individual, organisation and society has been grist for the mill in this genre." Additionally, O'Sullivan mentions that the popularity of spy fiction also stems from the satire within it and points to examples such as Austin Powers films.⁵²

As per John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg, the spy narrative slowly rose to prominence throughout the nineteenth century and became largely popular around the period of World War I. The first novel that could be considered spy fiction came out in 1821 in the form of *The Spy* from *The Leatherstocking Tales* series by James Fenimore Cooper. The novel's contents described a story about a fictional American spy whose mission was to spy on the British, presumably around the time of the American Revolution.⁵³ Martin adds that the next prominent author was John Buchan whose spy novels were largely published during the First World War. His stories following the fictional character of Richard Hannay called *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Greenmantle* depicted not only the war but also the collision of different cultures. Martin furthermore elaborates on the topic of the popularity of spy fiction as follows:

While wars and international conflicts have always triggered more of an interest in spy books, the spy fiction genre really took off during the Cold War. With the threat of nuclear

⁵¹ "Novel Investigations: A Brief History of Spy Fiction," Novel Suspects, accessed on March 3, 2023, <https://www.novelsuspects.com/articles/spy-fiction/>.

⁵² Paul O'Sullivan, "Spy Fiction: Then and Now," *New Zealand International Review* 35, no. 5 (September/October 2010): 20.

⁵³ John G. Cawelti, Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Spy Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 34.

war and terrorism, distrust and fear spread across the world. Readers turned to spy fiction to see the United States and its allies fight against the ever-threatening Red Menace (Russia and the international threat of communism). With so much anxiety and speculation surrounding the tense relationship between these world powers, spy novels became a way for writers to take a guess what was going on behind the scenes during this political turmoil. And it was a way for readers to assuage any fears they had about the state of the world.⁵⁴

Martin also notes that perhaps the most notable author to emerge from the spy fiction boom of the Cold War is Ian Fleming with his James Bond series. Starting in 1953, Ian Fleming published twelve novels and two short stories about the famous secret agent also known as 007.⁵⁵ In regards to the narrative of the popular spy fiction, and more specifically James Bond, Chen notes that

“Ian Fleming’s James Bond, whose espionage practice is characterized almost entirely by the ‘unnecessary display’ [...], is perhaps the best-known example of such an agent.” Additionally, she states that “[w]hile it would seem that 007’s excessive displays make him a bad spy because they are so at odds with the secret agent’s injunction to be unnoticed, what makes James Bond a bad spy in reality is precisely what makes him a popular fictional character.”⁵⁶

Cawelti and Rosenberg further list other significant authors contributing to this genre throughout history such as William Somerset Maugham, Eric Ambler, Graham Greene, Robert Duncan, and John le Carré.⁵⁷

Henry Park, operating on the same foundation of secretly collecting information, does not resemble the stereotypical spy of popular spy fiction. Tina Chen explains that:

Henry’s lack of flamboyance, the quality that makes him an excellent mole, is also ironically what makes him an unconventional spy hero. However unrealistic, one of the genre’s primary conventions involves the nature of the protagonist as hero and the representation of his mission as dangerous and exciting.⁵⁸

Henry’s narrative is a lot more mundane and closer to reality than that of James Bond. William Somerset Maugham discusses that “[t]he works of an agent in the Intelligence Department is on the whole monotonous. A lot of it is uncommonly useless. The material it offers for stories is scrappy and pointless; the author has himself to make it coherent, dramatic and probable.”⁵⁹ The fact that “Henry employs only a computer,” as stated by Chen⁶⁰, shows that Henry does not use a disguise or any kind of special equipment. It further supports the novel’s distancing

⁵⁴ Novel Suspects, “Novel Investigations.”

⁵⁵ Novel Suspects, “Novel Investigations.”

⁵⁶ Chen, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts,” 641.

⁵⁷ Cawelti, and Rosenberg, *The Spy Story*, 34–54.

⁵⁸ Chen, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts,” 641.

⁵⁹ William Somerset Maugham, *Collected Short Stories: Volume 3* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), preface.

⁶⁰ Chen, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts,” 641.

from the popular imagining of a spy and closeness to a more realistic picture of how a spy operates.

According to O’Sullivan, “no-one personifies the heroic individual as boldly, as brashly, and as downright sumptuously as 007 — James Bond.”⁶¹ He further adds that James Bond “has no real identity beyond his job, beyond his status as 007. It is almost as though the very openness and optimism of the Bond identity — and his phoenix-like indifference to setbacks — forestall the deeper questions that infuse more serious spy fiction writing.”⁶²

This is where the character of James Bond differs the most from *The Sympathizer* and *Native Speaker*’s protagonists. The question of identity is central to both Henry and the narrator, as their stories are explored beyond the boundaries of their job. Their narrative also extends to their personal struggles with social and racial differences, as well as dealing with the rejective stance of society towards their nature. Wolfson, who focuses on the metatextual properties of the novel in her article, states that:

[the narrator’s] dual identity, first as a person of mixed-race heritage and second as a communist spy, establishes him as a figure of metatextuality. This dual identity relegates the narrator to a position of social liminality, such that he is constantly being read by others but never accurately interpreted. He thus serves as an embodiment of metatextuality, given that he is continually made aware of his status as an ambiguous signifier who can be variably deciphered depending on context. This ambiguity allows [the narrator] to move across American, South Vietnamese, and North Vietnamese spaces yet never find acceptance in any of them.⁶³

The narrator further entertains the trope of his two minds by employing the use of different points of view in the final chapters. Although it can be argued that the shift between points of view is the result of torture by sleep deprivation, making the narrator nearly lose his sanity, it can also be interpreted as a tool to emphasize his identity struggle. During the torturing, the narrator starts referring to himself in the third person. More importantly, however, after leaving the camp, he instead starts using the first-person plural, to stress his duality of mind. This shift can be observed in the following example: “[...] only a man of two minds could get this joke, about how a revolution fought for independence and freedom could make those things *worth less than nothing*. I was that man of two minds, me and myself. We had been through so much, me and myself.”⁶⁴

In comparison to James Bond, the question of identity is central to Henry’s life. Through the combination of his choices, his struggle with communication and his invisibility, Henry

⁶¹ O’Sullivan, “Spy Fiction,” 21.

⁶² O’Sullivan, “Spy Fiction,” 22.

⁶³ Wolfson “A Man of Two Faces and Two Minds,” 64–65.

⁶⁴ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 487.

struggles to find his true identity. After he joins Dennis Hoagland's company, he finally believes he may have found his true place in the society. However, the reality of having to spy against and betray the people he sympathizes with, and the issues it brings into his personal life, not being able to communicate with his wife about his job, the question of identity resurfaces for Henry once more, making it a constant struggle of the protagonist.

Compared to *Native Speaker*, *The Sympathizer* is a lot closer to resembling the more action-filled lifestyle of a popular spy fiction character like James Bond. However, there are some noticeable differences between the way the narrator is portrayed compared to James Bond. The most prominent of these differences lies in the psychology of these two characters. This is hinted at by the narrator himself when he refers to James Bond directly: “[p]erhaps James Bond could slumber peacefully on the bed of nails that was a spy’s life, but I could not.”⁶⁵ This primarily refers to the narrator’s consciousness, which is part of a matter discussed later on in the thesis.

⁶⁵ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 96.

3 Methodology and Role of a Spy from the Professional Perspective

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, espionage is “the practice of spying or of using spies, typically by governments to obtain political and military information.”⁶⁶ As suggested by Terry Crowley, espionage has been utilized for millennia. The oldest preserved record dates back to around 1274 BC to the battle of Kadesh, when the Hittites waged war against the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses.⁶⁷

Since the battle of Kadesh, the craft of espionage developed in many ways. In today’s age, there are multiple intelligence services, such as the notorious CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) in the United States or SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) in the United Kingdom, which are an integral part of modern espionage.

CIA states on its webpage that its activities aim to “[l]ead specialized, multidisciplinary Mission Centers to address high-priority issues including nonproliferation, counterterrorism, counterintelligence, organized crime, narcotics trafficking, and arms control, to name a few.”⁶⁸ Another of the current security services, MI5, explains on its website that today’s spies are referred to as intelligence operatives and agents. According to them,

[t]he methods used by intelligence officers vary widely, and are often limited only by their ingenuity. They will often take advantage of the latest technology, using it to eavesdrop, tap telephone calls and communicate secretly. [...] Agents operate by exploiting trusted relationships and positions to obtain sensitive information. They may also look for vulnerabilities among those handling secrets.⁶⁹

They further add that “[e]spionage is also carried out in cyberspace” and “can be an attractive method of intelligence gathering for several reasons.” The reasons named by MI5 are cost-effectiveness, remoteness, and the potential amount of data to be gathered.⁷⁰

One of the central and most essential parts of espionage are the spies. *Oxford Dictionary* defines a spy as “a person employed by a government or other organization to secretly obtain information on an enemy or competitor.”⁷¹ In both *The Sympathizer* and *Native Speaker*, the

⁶⁶ Soanes, and Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 592.

⁶⁷ Terry Crowley, *The Enemy Within: A History of Espionage* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 15.

⁶⁸ “About CIA,” CIA, accessed December 19, 2022, <https://www.cia.gov/about/>.

⁶⁹ “How Spies Operate,” MI5, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/how-spies-operate>.

⁷⁰ MI5, “How Spies Operate.”

⁷¹ Soanes, and Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1715.

main protagonists serve as agents with the task of procuring information deemed valuable by their employers or their clients.

Both Henry and the narrator are spies by profession. Their respective jobs share common aspects, but they also differ significantly in various features. One of the commonalities is that both of them operate outside the boundaries of the law, albeit Henry Park's crimes of invading and exploiting someone's privacy seem insignificant in comparison to the narrator's two murders. Other shared aspects include their direct and rather close involvement with the targets of their espionage, their close proximity to the danger of being exposed, and lastly, their profession deeply affecting their personal lives and relationships. For Henry, the most prominent part of his life that is affected is his marriage. For the narrator, it is the relationship between him and his two best friends, Man and Bon. These relationships are the most significantly shaped and developed throughout the story.

In *Native Speaker*, the most noteworthy close involvement with the espionage target is between Henry and his target, John Kwang. Throughout the story, John Kwang gradually becomes an object of Henry's admiration and respect. Henry appreciates the values Kwang represents. Don Lee comments on this, saying that: "[m]ore than a father figure to Park, Kwang represents the heretofore unimaginable: a Korean man as a public figure in America—vocal, charismatic, and unafraid."⁷² Lee says this to highlight the values that Henry cherishes, even when he should have remained emotionally neutral towards him.

The proximity to the danger of being exposed, while being present in both novels, is portrayed in a different way for each protagonist. The narrator's case is more obvious, as he finds himself in an environment filled with people, like the General, who would not hesitate to have him killed, in case of his exposure as a spy. This is shown in the case of the crapulent major, who was ordered to be killed by Bon and the narrator after being falsely accused of espionage. Therefore, the narrator has to proceed through his assignment with utmost secrecy. Henry's proximity to the danger of being exposed is also present, except the main factor in a potential exposure is Henry's own unreliability as a spy. During his assignment with Dr. Luzan, Henry nearly exposed himself and the entire operation to the doctor before being promptly taken away by his colleagues.

⁷² Don Lee, "Review of Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, by Chang-rae Lee," *Agni*, no. 42 (1995): 184. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23007607>.

The differences between the two characters start with their employers. The narrator serves the North Vietnamese government and gets his orders assigned through a person referred to as Man, his handler. According to Norman Polmar and Thomas B. Allen, a handler is “[an] [i]ntelligence officer, coopted person or case officer who is directly responsible for the operations of agents.”⁷³ The narrator is surrounded by soldiers, military officials, and politicians - people who, especially during the time of the novel, are wary of spies.

On the other hand, Henry Park is an employee of Dennis Hoagland’s company. The company receives job assignments from their clients, which are then communicated to Henry by Hoagland himself. Henry describes the firm’s clients in the following example:

Our clients were multinational corporations, bureaus of foreign governments, individuals of resource and connection. We provided them with information about people working against their vested interests. We generated background studies, psychological assessments, daily chronologies, myriad facts and extrapolations. These in extensive reports.⁷⁴

During Henry’s assignments, he mostly deals with people who are unsuspecting of espionage, as compared to the narrator.

In one of the previous paragraphs, it was mentioned that both the narrator and Henry are in close proximity to danger while doing their job. However, as suggested earlier, similarly to the comparison of the two protagonists crossing the boundaries of the law, the narrator appears to completely outdo Henry in this category as well. Firstly, the narrator is forced to maintain his façade constantly due to his environment. Throughout the novel, he scarcely meets anyone who knows of the fact that he is a spy, compelling him to remain vigilant and cautious at all times. It is heavily implied that any mistake that would cause the narrator to be a subject of suspicion could and most likely would result in the narrator being assassinated. This becomes especially clear when the crapulent major is shot in the head by Bon after being wrongfully accused of espionage by the narrator. To provide further explanation, Bon is the narrator’s best friend, along with Man. Throughout the whole novel, Bon is unaware of the narrator’s mission as a spy for North Vietnam.

In the case of Henry Park, it is suggested that a possible danger in terms of physical harm could arise from the company he works for. However, except for Henry’s own suspicions and his wife’s worries, there is no evidence of Hoagland’s intention to cause any harm to Henry.

⁷³ Norman Polmar, and Thomas B. Allen, *Spy Book: The Encyclopedia of Espionage* (New York: Random House, 1997), 253.

⁷⁴ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 18.

Furthermore, Henry manages to successfully retire from his job with no harm from his former employer whatsoever. Furthermore, Henry himself explains that during his or his colleague's assignments, any kind of danger was minimal.

We pledged allegiance to no government. We weren't ourselves political creatures. We weren't patriots. Even less, heroes. We systematically overassessed risk, made it a bad word. Guns spooked us. Jack kept a pistol in his desk but it didn't work. We knew nothing of weaponry, torture, psychological warfare, extortion, electronics, supercomputers, explosives. Never anything like that.⁷⁵

In regards to this, the narrator is nearly the complete opposite. The narrator pledged allegiance to two governments, he is very politically oriented, he constantly undergoes high risk situations and tasks, uses weapons on multiple occasions, and has substantial knowledge in torture. To elaborate, in his confession, the narrator mentions the time when he was being educated in the matters of torture and information extraction, as well as performing torture himself. The narrator operates at a very high risk of harm. While he does survive the story of *The Sympathizer*, he does not do so unscathed. In the final chapters, the narrator is subjected to torture by sleep deprivation, and as mentioned in one of the previous chapters, it is likely that the torture left him psychologically damaged. This is most prominent in the shifts of perspectives from which the story is narrated during and after the torture is concluded.

Henry Park and the narrator are both engaged in psychological warfare. The narrator additionally engages in physical warfare, which is directly intertwined with the psychological one, especially when it comes to the narrator's torture and the effects that some of his violent acts have on his consciousness. Dr. Ursula M. Wilder states that:

The covert activities inescapably exert a powerful influence on the person's overt life. They necessitate ongoing efforts at concealment, compartmentation, and deception of those not witting of the espionage, which includes almost everyone in the spy's life. For some people, sustaining such a double identity is exciting and desirable; for others, it is draining and stressful.⁷⁶

The emphasis on psychological aspects of espionage is apparent, especially in *The Sympathizer*. In *Native Speaker*, the psychological factor related to his job is included in his assignments with Dr. Luzan and John Kwang. Simultaneously, it is projected into his personal life, affecting his already deteriorating relationship with his wife Lelia. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from the book:

⁷⁵ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 17.

⁷⁶ Ursula M. Wilder, "The Psychology of Espionage," *Studies in Intelligence* 61, no. 2 (June 2017): 19.

We were hardly talking then, sitting down to our evening meal like boarders in a rooming house, reciting the usual, drawn-out exchanges of familiar news, bits of the day. When she asked after my latest assignment I answered that it was *sensitive* and *evolving* but going well, and after a pause Lelia said down to her cold plate, *Oh good, it's the Henryspeak.*⁷⁷

The following job-related influences on Henry's psychology include the aforementioned assignments with Dr. Luzan and John Kwang, both of which are thoroughly described in the following text regarding the characters' motivation.

An unavoidable aspect of espionage is that just by doing their job properly, spies are likely to make people around them suffer severe consequences. The protagonists understand this, and it is the primary reason for Henry's reluctance to provide incriminating evidence on John Kwang, after becoming close to him.

Nearing the end of *The Sympathizer*, the narrator is troubled by his conscience to an extreme degree. Throughout the novel, the reader is offered a view of the narrator's gradual psychological decline. The key events contributing to the narrator's psychological detriment include the deaths or murders of the crapulent major and Sonny that he either committed or planned by himself. In the case of the crapulent major, the narrator had to act to protect his cover, while Sonny was murdered by the narrator in order for him to be allowed to leave for Thailand on a mission in Vietnam so that he could attempt to save his blood brother Bon. The consequences of these actions influence the protagonist greatly, causing the major and Sonny to appear in the narrator's hallucinations. These are shown in several instances throughout the book, for example, at a wedding that the narrator is invited to not long after the major's death: "One simply must grin and drink unless one wants to sink to one's neck in the quicksands of contradiction, or so said the sad crapulent major, his severed head serving as the table's centerpiece."⁷⁸

Besides hallucinations, the narrator also suffers from insomnia and shows a tendency towards alcoholism. In the final chapters, during the narrator's torture by sleep deprivation, it is revealed that he had suppressed a traumatizing memory of a fellow communist spy, whom he had failed to save, getting raped by multiple members of the Saigon police. During his torture, this memory surfaces, and the narrator is faced with the vivid horrors of memory so

⁷⁷ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 6.

⁷⁸ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 147.

terrible his brain had forced him to forget it. There is a mention of the communist agent early on in the novel, showing that the narrator regretted being unable to prevent her fate.

All of our names, from the lowest officer to the General, had been found on a list crammed into it's owner's mouth as we broke down her door three years ago. The warning I had sent to Man had not gotten to her in time. [...] Three years later, this communist agent was still in a cell. I kept her folder on my desk, a reminder of my failure to save her. It was my fault, too, Man had said. When the day of liberation comes, I'll be the one unlocking her cell.⁷⁹

Lastly, sleep deprivation influences the narrator in another way mentioned in one of the previous chapters concerning the point of view from which the story is told. While it may have been intended as a literary tool, as described earlier, it can also be interpreted as the result of the narrator suffering psychological trauma. To conclude the part concerning psychological warfare, it is necessary to state that it should not be interpreted in the same way as the kind of psychological warfare used by real-life agents or spies in popular spy fiction. This is because the warfare is mostly happening within the protagonists themselves.

As mentioned earlier, physical warfare is very present in the story of *The Sympathizer*, while completely absent from the story of *Native Speaker*. The physical warfare that the narrator claims to have endeavoured throughout the novel includes: being shot at during his escape from Saigon, perpetrating and helping to execute the murder of the crapulent major, murdering Sonny, getting tortured, surviving a large explosion during the shooting of the movie in Thailand, and being shot at once again during his return to Vietnam for their mission.

The last difference between the protagonists, which will be discussed, resides in the motivation of the main characters. *The Sympathizer's* narrator frequently calls himself a revolutionary because he considers himself a part of the Vietnam War and the revolution. It is important to note that the narrator is unreliable, as previously mentioned. He wants to persuade others to believe him, as it may help him in his predicament, being situated in a prison camp during the writing of his confession. On multiple occasions, he expresses his opinions and ideas on politics and differing cultures. His views are predominantly illustrated in the parts he spent in the United States, where he continued spying on the General and his people, as he did in South Vietnam. During this chapter of the story, the narrator especially criticizes American culture and politics. The narrator blames the Americans for exploiting his country, which is

⁷⁹ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 12.

something he denounces repeatedly throughout the book. One such instance can be seen in the following example:

The General's men, by preparing themselves to invade our now communist homeland, were in fact turning themselves into new Americans. After all, nothing was more American than wielding a gun and committing oneself to die for freedom and independence, unless it was wielding that gun to take away someone else's freedom and independence.⁸⁰

It can be then presumed that the narrator's motivation towards his job is tied to his personal beliefs, ideology, loyalty, and his want to be an influential part of the happenings regarding the overall political situation in his home country, Vietnam.

Henry's motivation towards his job is more complex than the one of the narrator. Firstly, in contrast to the narrator working for his government out of loyalty and receiving no payment, Henry receives wages for his services. Therefore, it can be assumed that his motivation is at least partly monetary. However, it is not the main reason for him to join the company to work as a spy. Henry elaborates on this in the following excerpt from the book:

I had always thought I could be anyone, perhaps several anyones at once. Dennis Hoagland and his private firm had conveniently appeared at the right time, offering the perfect vocation for the person I was, someone who could reside in his one place and take half-steps out whenever he wished. For that I felt indebted to him for life. I found sanction from our work, for I thought I had finally found my truest place in the culture.⁸¹

This leads to the conclusion that Henry's initial and main motivation for his job as a spy was to find his own place in society. This is crucial to the focus of the following chapter.

Henry was handpicked for his job by Dennis Hoagland. Hoagland's motivation for picking Henry, as well as for picking all of Henry's other colleagues is based largely on their ethnicity. "[Hoagland] bemoaned the fact that Americans generally made the worst spies. Mostly he meant whites. [...] They felt this subcutaneous aching to let everyone know they were a spook, they couldn't help it [...]"⁸² Henry states that the firm he works for is specifically focused on gathering information about particular ethnic groups. This is portrayed in the following example, where Henry speaks about how the company of his boss, Dennis Hoagland, came to be: "[Dennis Hoagland] said he knew a growth industry when he saw one; and there were no other firms with any ethnic coverage to speak of. [...] Hoagland oversaw the operation

⁸⁰ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 284–285.

⁸¹ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 127.

⁸² Lee, *Native Speaker*, 172.

from our modest offices in Westchester County. He was the cultural dispatcher.”⁸³ Finally, Henry describes the usual type of people he and his colleagues were sent to spy on: “Typically the subject was a well-to-do immigrant supporting some potential insurgency in his old land, or else funding a fledgling trade union or radical student organization. Sometimes [the subject] was simply an agitator.”⁸⁴

The information transferring between Henry and his company is very shortly described in the book when Henry’s colleague Jack Klantzakos visits him during his ongoing assignment focused on a Korean American politician John Kwang. Nearing the end of the chapter, there is a short mention from Henry, saying that he showed Jack how they sent the reports electronically and how they printed them out.⁸⁵ While Henry describes the method of handing in the data very scarcely, he focuses more on his reports themselves, mainly on expressing how well he is able to compile and write down the information. This is shown in the following example:

Hoagland had always let everyone there know how good I was at writing the daily register. [...] I simply wrote textbook examples of our workaday narrative, veritable style sheets that Hoagland used to remind the other analysts of how it ought to be done.⁸⁶

The method of delivering the information is, in comparison to *Native Speaker*, described in a far more elaborate way in *The Sympathizer*.

The narrator’s job description is to gain the trust of high-ranking military officials and spy on them in order to obtain classified information that would provide any kind of tactical or strategic advantage against the enemies of North Vietnam at the time of the Vietnam War. The narrator carries over the gathered information to his superiors through the use of a handler. Both the information transfer from the narrator to Man and the assigning of new orders from Man to the narrator are described to happen in two different ways as the story of the book unfolds. The first of the two ways is present during his time in Saigon when he and Man:

pretended to be devout officers for whom Mass once a week did not suffice, [and] [the narrator] would confess [his] political and personal failures to him [Man]. [Man], in turn, would play [the narrator’s] confessor, whispering to [him] absolutions in the shape of assignments rather than prayers.⁸⁷

The other way is used by the narrator throughout his entire stay in the United States, as well as during the shooting of the movie with Auteur. The narrator writes his information down

⁸³ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 18.

⁸⁴ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 18.

⁸⁵ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 171.

⁸⁶ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 170.

⁸⁷ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 35.

between the lines of letters with invisible ink. He sends these letters to Man's Parisian aunt, who he pretends is a relative of his own. The narrator in the following example provides a more specific description: "If I started a letter with a few tropes we had agreed on – the weather, my health, the aunt's health, French politics – then he [Man] would know that written in between the lines was another message in invisible ink."⁸⁸ Besides messages hidden by invisible ink, there is also one mention of the narrator using hollowed-out nine-volt batteries to hide and send photographs in.

This examination opens up the topic of the methodology used by the main characters of the novels, which is of the essence when discussing their spy roles from the professional point of view. Some of the methods used by the protagonists directly correspond to their respective abilities. Both Henry Park and *The Sympathizer's* narrator possess traits that help them in completing their tasks. Some of these traits are shared between the two and can be considered a prerequisite for the spy profession. These include blending well into the intended environment, as well as proceeding with their task cautiously and with utmost secrecy. While the last two are not necessarily connected to their personal traits, they are important in terms of the manner in which the two characters need to operate.

The methods and approach to gathering the needed information differ for each protagonist. Henry uses his exceptional memorization and keen observation skills to collect the necessary data, and reflect it in his reports. This is clearly visible to the reader in multiple instances:

When you got out on the fifth floor you faced a flat cream-colored wall broken only by a metal security door with the company logo in plain block lettering. Beside the door was a mirror and a wooden table on which was placed a bouquet of artificial flowers. Orchids.⁸⁹

Here is another example of such an occurrence, this time including a person:

Jack was himself a cold-blooded demigod in a previous life. He had maybe twenty years in the firm. Any nobility resided in his powerful brow; his other features necessarily surrendered to it. He had massive, soft hands, which he pressed flat against his temples when he spoke. It often looked as if he had witnessed something disastrous.⁹⁰

Lastly, for each assignment, it is customary for Henry and his colleagues to develop a so-called *legend*. Henry describes these as:

⁸⁸ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 73.

⁸⁹ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 29.

⁹⁰ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 15.

[...] [s]omething each of us wrote out in preparation for any assignment. [The legend] was an extraordinarily extensive ‘story’ of who we were, an autobiography as such, often evolving to develop even the minutiae of life experience, countless facts and figures, though it also required a truthful ontological bearing, a certain presence of character.⁹¹

Compared to Henry, the narrator uses a more opportunistic approach. In unguarded moments, he takes photos of strategically important confidential documents or events with his camera. He then either gives or sends these pictures to Man or his Parisian aunt, as mentioned in one of the previous paragraphs. One more thing that is relevant to the narrator’s approach resides in the way he talks to and convinces the subjects of his espionage. This is closely tied to the previously mentioned speech adaptability. The most fitting example of this is the manner in which the narrator was able to sway the General’s suspicion from himself and transfer this suspicion over to the crapulent major.

In a paranoid imagination, only spies denied the existence of spies. So I had to name a suspect, someone who would sidetrack him but who would not be an actual spy. The first person that came to mind was the crapulent major, whose name had the desired effect.⁹²

This example shows that the narrator can improvise under pressure and talk his way out of difficult situations. His improvisation, however successful in removing the General’s suspicion, does not have the effect the narrator planned or least of all desired. This is especially visible later in the book after the crapulent major’s demise haunts the narrator for the remainder of the story. To provide context, this is because the narrator is eventually tasked with perpetrating a murder of the crapulent major, which he and Bon carry out afterward.

⁹¹ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 22.

⁹² Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 76–77.

4 Alienation and Role of a Spy from the Immigrant Perspective

As defined by the *Oxford Dictionary*, in psychiatry, alienation means “a state of depersonalization or loss of identity in which the self seems unreal, thought to be caused by difficulties in relating to society and the resulting prolonged inhibition of emotion.”⁹³ Encyclopaedia Britannica includes in their definition of alienation the “cultural estrangement, the sense of removal from established values in society [...] social isolation, the sense of loneliness or exclusion in social relations, [...] and self-estrangement.”⁹⁴

While it is true that both Henry Park and the nameless narrator are spies in terms of their occupation, their stories also offer a different perspective on their espionage. Being a spy, as suggested by the nameless narrator, is to have two faces. Roberta Wolfson points this out using the example of the narrator of *The Sympathizer*:

In describing himself as a man of two faces and two minds, the narrator draws attention to both his occupation as a communist spy in the republican South Vietnamese army during the Vietnam War and his mixed-race heritage as the son of a Vietnamese peasant girl and French priest.⁹⁵

The narrator is constantly reminded of his mixed origin. These reminders come from not only strangers like his guard in the Commandant’s re-educational camp in North Vietnam or drunk marines on the streets of Saigon. People like the General, who is one of the narrator’s main subjects of espionage, and who is consequentially often in close proximity to the narrator, also makes these remarks towards him. This happens before the narrator leaves the United States for Vietnam. The General confronts the narrator to express disappointment in him for attempting to seduce his daughter during a dance that occurred earlier in the book. The narrator initially does not understand his disappointment, as he believed that the General thought highly of him or at least respected him. This meant that the General’s remarks especially surprised the narrator. Their exchange culminates in the General telling the narrator:

You should have known better, Captain. You are a soldier. Everything and everyone belongs in his proper place. How could you ever believe we would allow our daughter to be with someone of your kind?

My kind? I said. What do you mean by my kind?

⁹³ Soanes, and Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 40.

⁹⁴ “Alienation,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified June 12, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/alienation-society>.

⁹⁵ Wolfson “A Man of Two Faces and Two Minds,” 58.

Oh, Captain, said the General. You are a fine young man, but you are also, in case you have not noticed, a bastard.⁹⁶

The narrator confesses that he is of mixed origins after an encounter with drunken marines who had called him a bastard. He admits that he still has trouble getting used to being called that name.⁹⁷ During the encounter with the marines, it becomes obvious that the narrator's mixed origin can be recognized from his facial features, as one of the marines only points to the fact after examining the narrator's face.⁹⁸

At the very beginning, the narrator states that he is not only "a man of two faces" but also "a man of two minds," and that he can "see any issue from both sides."⁹⁹ This can signify that the narrator is not only mixed in terms of his race, being a son of a French priest and a Vietnamese peasant girl, but also in terms of his political views and affiliations. This is one of the reasons why he is tortured in a North Vietnamese re-education camp in the final chapters of the book. The Commandant, who is the narrator's captor, intended to re-educate the narrator, who according to him was "contaminated by the West"¹⁰⁰ – meaning the narrator does not fit in either of the ideologically separated societies. To clarify, the West is understood to be the capitalist society and the United States, and the East represents the communist society and the Soviet Union with its allied countries. To elaborate on why the narrator was considered contaminated, there is an excerpt from the book including Commandant's criticism towards the narrator: "Your destiny is being a bastard, while your talent, as you say, is seeing from two sides. You would be better off if you only saw things from one side. The only cure for being a bastard is to take a side."¹⁰¹ Commandant calls the narrator a bastard because of his mixed origin and suggests that because of that, the narrator's options are more limited, as he is not in the position to choose. This interpretation deals with the presumption that the Commandant sees the narrator as a person of lesser value because of his mixed origin.

To provide further explanation for the other side of the argument, the narrator devotes much of his confession to criticizing the culture and politics of the United States. This, combined with the fact that the narrator serves a side, which is communist in terms of ideology, and therefore opposed to the West and that he dedicated his whole life and career to help establish this ideology in his home country, signifies that the narrator simply would not fit in

⁹⁶ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 378.

⁹⁷ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 25.

⁹⁸ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 23.

⁹⁹ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 406.

¹⁰¹ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 408.

Western society. Moreover, this is also apparent in the following example: when interacting with Americans, the narrator describes that he “resented their expectation,” because they always “expected [him] to be like those millions who spoke no English, pidgin English, or accented English.”¹⁰² The narrator displays a noticeable disgruntlement at the stereotype-based assumptions of him.

A point made by Tina Chen for the case of Henry Park, which is similar to another point discussed earlier by Roberta Wolfson, concerning alienation, states that: “Henry Park is an invisible man. [...] [Henry’s] invisibility is both a matter of the refusal of others to see him and the logical effect of his occupation.”¹⁰³

To elaborate on Chen’s point, Henry’s struggle stems from the fact that he was essentially raised in two different cultures. First is the culture of his Korean parents, who try to teach Henry manners according to their Korean traditions and customs, and the other is the American culture that surrounds Henry growing up. Chen further explains that “[d]espite his ability to perform disappearing acts required of a spy, Henry discovers that the spy’s empowering positionality is confounded when the invisibility of the spy coincides with the in/visibilities of race.”¹⁰⁴

When Lelia, Henry’s American wife, is confronted with some of these customs, she expresses her bewilderment to Henry, but he is unable to provide sufficient answers that would explain the matters clearly, indicating his trouble with language and communication, as well as his insufficient knowledge of the culture of his parents. Some of the differences between their cultures leave her astonished and disconcerted and contribute to the estrangement that manifests between her and Henry even more. An example of this appears in the book when Henry recalls the time they visited his father and Ahjuhma – a house lady working for his father. During one conversation with Henry, Lelia finds out that Henry never learned Ahjuhma’s true name. Henry describes that:

Lelia had great trouble accepting this ignorance of mine. [...] I couldn’t blame her. Americans live on a first-name basis. She didn’t understand that there weren’t moments in our language—the rigorous regimental one of family and servants—when the woman’s name could have naturally come out. Or why it wasn’t important.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 23.

¹⁰³ Chen, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts,” 638.

¹⁰⁴ Chen, “Impersonation and Other Disappearing Acts,” 645.

¹⁰⁵ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 68-69.

One more example is shown when Henry scolds Ahjuhma after she retaliated at Lelia's failed attempt to socialize with her.

I scolded her then, telling her she couldn't speak to my wife that way if she wanted to keep living in our house. The woman bit her lip; she bent her head and bowed severely before me in a way that perhaps no one could anymore and then trundled out of the room between us, I suddenly felt as if I'd committed a great wrong.¹⁰⁶

This example shows once again Henry's struggle with language. Instead of trying to defuse the situation, he further escalates it by yelling and threatening. He does not realize he made a wrong choice until it is too late, and after he fails to provide a quick answer to Lelia, asking what happened, she walks away.

The part of Henry's estrangement from Korean culture is represented in the details. These include Henry mentioning that he could not read Korean well and Henry's shock at hearing Kwang call him his Korean name.

The American side of the influence shows mostly when Henry shares stories from his childhood and teenage years. When he was young, he frequently rebelled against his parents. This could stem from the fact that Henry grew up surrounded by his American peers bringing American culture closer to him than it ever could have been to parents.

It can be said that both characters are more than adequately equipped to perform espionage and yield the desired results. However, they both end up ignoring or, in some way, disobeying their orders and not performing their tasks accordingly. This makes them into renegades among their organizations, adding another layer of separation from the rest of society. It is their own morals, ideals, and affections that prevent them from properly completing their tasks.

It can be argued that Henry did, in fact, finalize his report and handed Dennis Hoagland a list of names for Kwang's illegal money club. However, throughout his task, Henry was hesitant as he sympathized with Kwang and his cause, seeing him as a role model and comparing him to his imaginary childhood hero.¹⁰⁷ Henry's hesitance and stance towards transferring compromising materials on Kwang is best shown in the following example:

With John Kwang I wrote exemplary reports but couldn't accept the idea that Hoagland would be combing through them. It seemed like an unbearable encroachment. An

¹⁰⁶ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 205–206.

exposure of a different order, as if I were offering a private fact about my father or mother to a complete stranger in one of our stores.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, this is not the only time Henry executes his assignment improperly. Prior to his assignment with John Kwang, Henry nearly compromised the operation when attending therapy sessions as a part of his espionage on a Filipino psychoanalyst called Dr. Luzan. Henry recalls that the assignment was going smoothly until for the first time during his time as a spy he began to “[run] short of [his] story, [his] chosen narrative.” Instead of going back to his company’s headquarters to revise and expand upon his *legend*, Henry says that he had instead “inexplicably [...] began stringing the legend back upon [himself].” He then became increasingly more open with Dr. Luzan, sharing his personal problems and traumas from the past, such as the tragic death of his son Mitt, or “breaching the confidences of [his] father and [his] mother and [his] wife.”¹⁰⁹ This had gone on until finally Henry was forcefully retrieved from a session by his colleagues, right before revealing everything about his true assignment to Dr. Luzan.¹¹⁰

The narrator is punctual and completes all his tasks to the degree required by his superiors. It is not until his friend’s life is in danger that he disobeys his orders to try and save him. After the narrator finds out that his friend and blood-brother Bon is tasked to go back to Vietnam, which is now under the control of Ho Chi Minh’s forces, on what appears to be a suicide mission. To add further context, the term blood-brother is used by the narrator to refer to his two friends, Man and Bon who, along with the narrator, slit their palms and mixed their blood in an act of loyalty to each other. “I looked at my hand, at the red scar engraved there. [...] What I think, I said, not allowing myself to deliberate any further, is that if Bon is going, I should go, too.”¹¹¹

It could be argued that Henry’s ultimate motivation is to discover his own true purpose and place in society while the narrator’s motivation is both idealistic and altruistic when it comes to helping people he truly cares about.

¹⁰⁸ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 147.

¹⁰⁹ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Lee, *Native Speaker*, 209–210.

¹¹¹ Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 258.

5 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to define the possible interpretations of the roles of a spy as presented in the novels *Native Speaker* and *The Sympathizer*. The analysis concluded that the characters' roles of a spy can be interpreted from two perspectives. These perspectives include the professional aspect concerning the point of view related to the characters' job and the way it is performed. The other perspective is concerned with the role of a spy from the immigrant perspective and focuses on the alienation and identity aspect of the protagonists.

This paper presented Asian American literature as a whole and then focused on two of its specific subcategories, Korean American literature, and Vietnamese American literature. The topics of the Vietnam War, the 1992 Los Angeles riots, and Asian American immigration are also covered in the thesis. These topics are mentioned because they are central to the stories of the novels. The Vietnam War is the most obvious influence on Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*, as his novel begins to near its end and bears a major influence on the novel's narrative. The 1992 Los Angeles riots are a more subtle influence, as Lee wanted to bring attention to the issue hinting at some of the African American violence when he shows Henry's father getting beaten in his own store by black robbers.

In terms of literary genre, this work classified both books as spy fiction novels with postmodern features. Focusing on the genre of spy fiction, this thesis defined that the main characters differ greatly from those in popular spy fiction. This paper suggested that the presumably most famous character of spy fiction, James Bond, is a highly exaggerated persona that does not have any other identity than that of being a spy and that his job is filled with much more action and danger than that of the agents gathering intelligence in today's time. It presented that the character of Henry Park is a very close representation of a modern-age spy since his assignments are more mundane, repetitive, and most of his work could be done on his computer. On the other hand, the nameless narrator is shown to be a lot closer to danger, with his life at risk on several occasions, as well as his usage of weapons, and as mentioned before, being tortured in the North Vietnamese prison camp near the end of the story. The main difference between the narrator and James Bond, as shown in the analysis, is that of identity and the narrator's constant struggle with his conscience.

The postmodern features identified in the novels include irony and parody, time distortion, unreliable narrator, discourse fragmentariness, paradoxicality, and metafiction. The analysis concluded that these narrative tools are mostly used to portray the ideological standpoints of the novels' authors through their characters' narratives, using metatextuality.

These standpoints include a critique of both capitalist and communist values from Nguyen's perspective and the racial issues and identity problems of immigrants, from Lee's perspective. Each of the authors uses a complex character that is well-written to allow their words to be viewed from multiple perspectives. The irony is described in the analysis to be included in both of the novels' titles, the narrator not being a good sympathizer as he cannot fully agree with either ideology to its full extent because of the duality of his mind as he describes it. Henry's obvious communication issues are then pointing to the irony of native speakers, who should be able to speak their language perfectly. Discourse fragmentariness in the novels is closely connected to the time fragmentation element, as both novels frequently shift between different timelines, using flashbacks and memories of the characters. The unreliable narration of the characters is associated with rooted in their stream-of-consciousness style of storytelling, and in the narrator's case specifically, it is connected to his predicament, as the novel is written in form of a confession during the time the narrator spent in the prison camp in North Vietnam.

The analysis of the professional perspective concerned the methods used by the main characters throughout the novels, including the way that the data is transferred, who they communicate with during their assignments, and what skills the characters possess that help them in completing their tasks. It further analyses the targets of the characters' espionage, their superiors, and their motivation towards their job, as well as the psychological effects that the job of a spy has on them. The analysis revealed that the psychological effects are severe, especially on the narrator, who is constantly troubled with his conscience, and whose torture near the end of the book leaves him psychologically scarred. Their motivation is shown to be related to either themselves, as seen in the case of Henry, or their ideology and friends, as shown in the case of the narrator. Both characters are shown to possess skills that are necessary to make them efficient at their work, with examples being Henry's keen sense of observation and memorization skills, and the narrator's ability to improvise.

The immigrant perspective reflects the characters' struggle with identity and their alienation from society. The narrator's trouble resides in his mixed origin, as well as his ability to see things from two sides, making him unable to pick one single ideology. This proves to be an issue mainly because of the contradiction between the two ideologies that the narrator finds himself between. Henry's identity and alienation trouble is rooted in growing up in two culturally different environments. Growing up this way influenced Henry's ability to fit in neither the American nor the Korean societies.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce má za cíl analyzovat téma rolí špióna v románech *Native Speaker* Chang-rae Leeho a *Sympatizant* Viet Thana Nguyena. Dále také analyzuje literární a žánrové zařazení románů a jejich kontext v rámci postmodernismu a špionážní fikce. Romány jsou rovněž zařazeny s ohledem na asijsko-americkou literaturu a historii. Zkoumané poznatky jsou rozděleny do čtyř kapitol, z čehož první kapitola je zaměřena na literární a historický kontext románů, druhá kapitola popisuje jejich žánrové zařazení, porovnání románů s populární špionážní fikcí a jaké postmoderní nástroje jsou v knihách použity. Třetí kapitola se pak soustředí na roli špióna z profesního hlediska a rozebírá metody použité hlavními postavami k jejich špionáži, psychologický vliv jejich práce, jejich motivace k práci špióna a také v jakém konkrétním prostředí špionáž protagonistů probíhá. Poslední kapitola se věnuje roli špióna z pohledu imigranta a tématu identity a odcizení ve společnosti.

Z pohledu literatury a literárního kontextu se práce věnuje historii asijsko-americké literatury s podrobnějším zaměřením na korejsko-americkou a vietnamsko-americkou literaturu. V tomto ohledu se rovněž zabývá autory zkoumaných románů, a také zmiňuje další autory významné pro asijsko-americkou literaturu. Tato práce definuje, že oba romány jsou zařazeny do kategorie špionážní fikce s postmoderními prvky. Autoři knih Viet Thanh Nguyen a Chang-rae Lee jsou oba uznávanými a oceňovanými představiteli asijsko-americké literatury. Za svůj první román *Native Speaker* získal Lee několik ocenění, včetně PEN/Hemingway award. Nguyen se za svůj první román *Sympatizant* může dokonce pyšnit Pulitzerovou cenou, kterou získal v roce 2016.

První kapitola probírá asijsko-americkou literaturu jako celek a následně se hlouběji zaměřuje na její dvě specifické podkategorie, a to korejsko-americkou a vietnamsko-americkou literaturu. Rovněž jsou vyjmenováni důležití autoři a významná díla. Práce se v této kapitole také věnuje historickému kontextu románů, konkrétně válce ve Vietnamu, nepokojům v Los Angeles roku 1992 a asijsko-americké imigraci. Kontext války ve Vietnamu je ze všech jmenovaných ve svém románu nejvýraznější a představuje ústřední téma *Sympatizanta*, od kterého se odvíjí celá dějová linie. Na nepokoje v roce 1992 se Chang-rae Lee snaží ve své knize upozornit jednou z Henryho vzpomínek, ve které popisuje, jak se jednoho večera jeho otec vrátil domů ze svého obchodu zmlácený a od krve, z čehož následně vyplynulo, že několik Afro-Američanů přepadlo jeho obchod. Imigraci se tato kapitola věnuje z pohledu jejího ústředního postavení v asijsko-americké historii. Taktéž jmenuje a popisuje několik amerických zákonů, které na ni měly v minulosti ve vztahu Asii vliv.

Ve druhé kapitole se práce zaměřuje na postmoderní prvky užívané v obou románech a zároveň porovnává způsob, jakým se romány řadí mezi populární špiónážní fikci. K tomuto porovnání je použita jedna z nejpopulárnějších postav špiónážní fikce James Bond. Hlavní postavy románů jsou také porovnány se současnými špióny a jejich náplní práce, a také mezi sebou. Závěrem vyplývá, že Henry se náplní svojí práce více přibližuje realitě, zatímco vypravěč je svým příběhem blíže Bondovi. Henryho práce se oproti Bondovi či *Sympatizantovu* vypravěči zdá nudná. Henry nečelí žádnému fyzickému nebezpečí a ke svojí práci používá pouze počítač, podobně jako reální špióni. Vypravěč se naopak často ocitá v nebezpečných situacích, používá zbraně a dokonce je mučen v severovietnamském zajateckém táboře. Oproti Bondovi se však liší svojí identitou a neustálým bojem se svým vlastním svědomím, které v příbězích Jamese Bonda často chybí.

Z hlediska postmodernismu bylo určeno, že v dílech je užito ironie a parodie, nesouvislého toku textu, časové členitosti, metafikce, paradoxů a nespolehlivého vypravěče. Nespolehlivý vypravěč je především zřejmý v *Sympatizantovi*, ve kterém je naznačeno, že vypravěč mění svoje přiznání takovým způsobem, aby odpovídalo očekáváním a požadavkům jeho vězňů. V *Native Speaker* se nespolehlivý vypravěč v Henrym projevuje jeho vyprávěním, které je psané ve stylu proudu vědomí. Metafikce je v textu přítomna v podobě názorů a myšlenek autorů, kterými komentují určité problematiky, jako například kapitalismus a komunismus v *Sympatizantovi* nebo problematika odcizení imigrantů v případě *Native Speakera*. Tyto myšlenky autoři sdělují za použití hlavních postav jejich románů. Časová členitost je úzce spojena s nesouvislým tokem textu. Tyto dva prvky se projevují ve stylu vypravování obou hlavních postav, které ve svých příbězích často odbočují od hlavní časové linie a popisují svoje vzpomínky, především za účelem objasnění kontextu. Ironie se v dílech projevuje například v samotných názvech. *Sympatizant* není přesným popisem vypravěče, neboť jelikož je schopen, dle vlastních slov, vidět jakoukoliv problematiku z obou perspektiv, pak není schopen plně sympatizovat se všemi aspekty daného argumentu. V jeho případě se jedná o spor mezi komunismem a kapitalismem. *Native Speaker*, neboli rodilý mluvčí je v Henryho případě také nepřesným označením. Rodilý mluvčí primárně označuje lidi s perfektní schopností ovládat jazyk a používat ho ke komunikaci, s níž se Henry potýká.

Třetí kapitola je zaměřena na roli špióna z profesního pohledu. Věnuje se metodám, které Henry a vypravěč používají k vykonávání špiónáže. Jak ukazuje analýza, obě postavy jsou dobře vybaveny dovednostmi, které jsou nezbytné, aby byli při své práci efektivní. U Henryho je nejvýraznější technikou jeho skvělá paměť a výjimečné pozorovací schopnosti. V případě vypravěče, je jeho předností dobrý smysl pro improvizaci. Dále pojednává kapitola o

psychologickém vlivu špionáže na protagonisty. Jak analýza ukazuje, psychologický vliv je zejména na vypravěče velmi závažný. Toto je úzce spojeno s jeho svědomím a také s již zmíněným mučením, které na vypravěčovi zanechá psychické následky. V případě Henryho je psychologický vliv spjat s jeho problémy s identitou a odcizením, které jsou hlouběji rozebrány v následující kapitole. Z pohledu motivace protagonistů k jejich práci se u vypravěče jedná o kombinaci jeho ideologického smýšlení a sebeobětavostí pro své přátele. V případě Henryho je jeho práce způsobem, kterým se snaží najít své místo ve společnosti.

Poslední kapitola pojednává o roli špióna z pohledu imigranta, a také o problematice identity a odcizení protagonistů od společnosti. Vypravěčův problém spočívá v jeho smíšeném původu a také v jeho schopnosti vidět jakoukoli problematiku z obou stran. To se ukazuje jako problém především kvůli rozporu mezi dvěma ideologiemi, komunismem a kapitalizmem, mezi nimiž se vypravěč nachází. Henryho problém s identitou a odcizením je ovlivněn jeho vyrůstáním ve dvou kulturně odlišných prostředích. Vyrůstání tímto způsobem negativně ovlivnilo Henryho schopnost zapadnout jak do americké, tak do korejské společnosti.

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