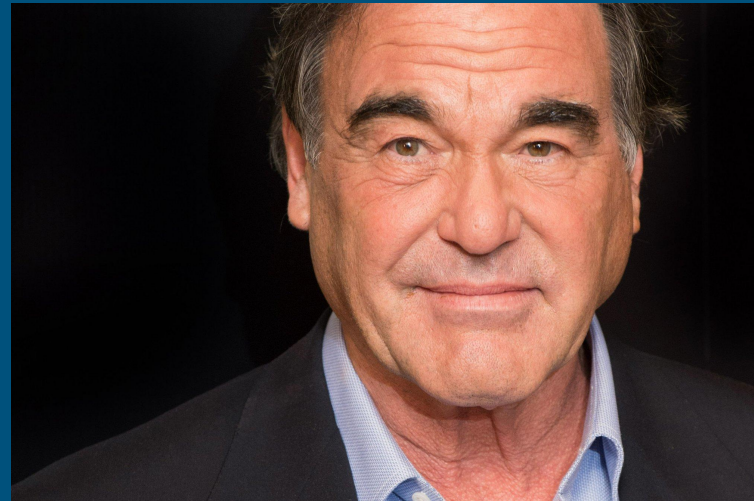


Heaven and Earth

Tyler Costa, Susan Webb, Tyrus Torres, John Bays, Jeena Tanks

About the Director: Oliver Stone

- Stone was born on September 15th, 1946 in New York City as an only child to a fairly wealthy family.
- He briefly attended college at Yale, but dropped out in 1965 to teach at the Free Pacific Institute, which was a Catholic high school in Saigon. At the same time, the first US troops were arriving in Vietnam.
- In 1966, he signed on to the US Merchant Marines and wrote a novel (released 30 years later as “A Child’s Night Dream”), then enlisted in the US Army’s 25th Infantry Division in 1967. He received a Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his valiant services.



About the Director Continued

- Once he returned from Vietnam, Stone enrolled at New York University where he studied filmmaking alongside other (soon to be famous) aspiring directors like Martin Scorsese. While there, he made three short films focusing on the Vietnam war and soldiers' experiences. He graduated in 1971.
- In the years following his graduation, Stone struggled to achieve fame through the release of small budget films, like 1974's *Seizure*. He achieved his first breakthrough with the film *Midnight Express*, which was released in 1978 and received five Academy Award nominations and a Golden Globe.
- In the following years, Stone achieved worldwide recognition for *Scarface* (1983), *Platoon* (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *Heaven and Earth* (1993).
- More recently, Stone also worked on films like *The People v. Larry Flynt* (1996), *Alexander* (2004), *W.* (2008), *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), and *Savages* (2012).

Le Ly Hayslip- About the Writer of *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*

- Hayslip was born on December 19th, 1949 in Ky La, Central Vietnam as the youngest of six children.
- When she was 12, American soldiers first arrived in her village, and at 14, she was tortured in a government prison for suspicion of being a revolutionary. Just after being released, she was sentenced to death by the Viet Cong, but was raped instead.
- She later fled to Saigon with her mother, but was forced to leave after having an affair with her employer. Her lowest point was when she lived in Da Nang, where she supported her mother and son by working in the Black Market.
- Finally, in 1969, she worked as a nurse in Da Nang where she met an American named Ed Munro and moved to San Diego with him. After his untimely death in 1973, she married Dennis Hayslip. Though he was abusive towards Hayslip and died unexpectedly, he had set up a trust fund for her that left her some money to support herself temporarily.

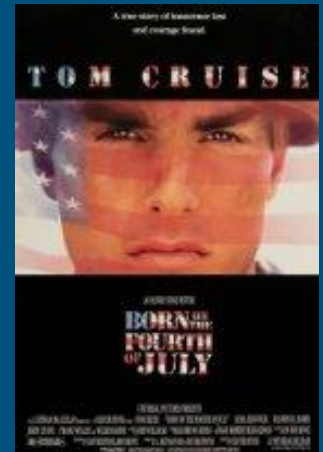


Le Ly Hayslip Continued

- Hayslip's first novel *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* was released in 1989, and her second novel, *Child of War, Woman of Peace* was released in 1993. Both stories are memoirs of her own experiences and struggles, in both her time in Vietnam and in America.
- In 1993, the film *Heaven and Earth* was released. Though the film doesn't follow Hayslip's life word-for-word, it does accurately reflect the experiences that she faced in Vietnam and America.
- Hayslip has also founded two charitable organizations, which include the "East Meets West Foundation" and the "Global Village Foundation" to support the needy in Vietnam and East Asia.

Oliver Stone's War Trilogy

- **Platoon (1986)**- The first movie in Oliver Stone's trilogy tells the story of a young man who drops out of college and enrolls in active combat duty in Vietnam as part of the 25th Infantry Division (based on Stone's own experiences). Initially excited to be participating in the war effort, he quickly begins to experience the horrific and negative side of the Vietnam War. Released to rave reviews in 1986, this film earned Stone an Academy Award and Golden Globe among other accolades.
- **Born on the Fourth of July (1989)**- Stone's second film tells the true story of Ron Kovic, a Vietnam veteran who becomes paralyzed during the war and turns to anti-military and anti-war protesting to cope with his PTSD and tell his story. The film was another box-office success, and won two Academy Awards and one Golden Globe Award.
- **Of Heaven and Earth (1993)**-Stone's final film in the trilogy and adaptation of *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*. Depicts the life of an Vietnamese woman named Le Ly Hayslip as her life is completely changed by the war going on around her.



Character Summary

Le Ly Hayslip - The narrator and main character of the story. She is a peasant in central coast Vietnam during the midst of the Vietnam war and is the youngest of 6 children. The story revolves around her childhood experiences in Vietnam during the war and her encounters after she returns.

Phong Trong- Le Ly's father, who Le Ly shares a special bond with out of all her family members. He is guided by the Buddhist philosophies he practices in his life and passes them on to his children as well. Trong tends to the family village by himself after his wife and children are forced to leave, and falls into a deep depression because of the loneliness and commits suicide.

Anh- A wealthy businessman in Saigon who employs Le Ly and her mother to work for him. Le Ly and Anh start an affair and fall in love with one another, which results in them having a child and Le Ly moving to the United States.

Hai- The eldest of Le Ly's sisters, Hai's husband leaves to fight in the Vietnam war. She lives with her daughter Tinh in Saigon before moving back to her family's home after her father's death.

Character Summary- continued

Tran Thi Huyen- Mother of six children including Le Ly, and wife of Trong. Strong and resilient, Huyen teaches Le Ly her duties as a woman in Vietnamese society.

Ba- Huyen and Trong's second daughter. After Ba's husband left for the north she is bullied into marriage by his cousin Chin, a public official.

Bon Nghe- The eldest brother and Huyen's favorite child. He fights on the side of the Viet Cong and later settles back in Danang with his wife and child.

Lan- The third daughter, Lan lives in Danang where she works as a tea girl in a bar and has many American boyfriends. She is saved by Le Ly from a drunken attack from one of her boyfriends while pregnant, and later follows after Le Ly to immigrate to the United States.

Sau Ban- The youngest child and also the closest to Le Ly in their adolescence. He is drafted into the Republic forces after failed attempts of trying to join the Viet Cong, and is presumed dead by his family members after years of no contact. Le Ly, however, still holds hope that he is alive.

Character Analysis

Le Ly Hayslip - Undergoing a variety of stress, Le Ly is found constantly changing her loyalties based on what can help her survive. This can be seen when she is socially exiled after being tortured, as well as when she becomes attracted to Steve after he seeks love and marriage. Eventually realizing her mixed identity between Vietnam and The US, and that all that matters is that she is a survivor and shows her sons what she endured.

Huyen (Mama) - Is the embodiment of the traditional peasant of Vietnam, she favors the Viet Cong and older ideologies. She is reluctant to see from her daughter's perspective, yet is eager to accept western benefits.

Character Analysis Continued

Trong (Papa) - Follows a dying spiritual culture during the harsh times of Vietnam, a practicing buddhist priest. He attempting to guide his daughter to become a strong, peaceful, and forgiving women, in hopes to preserve the devout spirituality his daughter is capable of.

Ahn - At first is pompous and unaffected by the war surrounding him, but eventually grows to become a fellow peer to Le Ly. Not only do they share the troubles of the war, they also share the connection of a son.

Ba - Affected by the war goes into flight or fight mode, where she learns to take what she can get and hold onto it. This mindset however leads to family troubles where she eventually learns forgiveness.

Character Analysis Continued...

Bon Nghe - Struggles with family ties and political ties, but soon accepts Le Ly after understanding/respecting the differing view of things.

Lan - Sister to Le Ly, somewhat resents the mistakes the her sisters made, but soon grows to be fond of her after making a relationship mistaken which could have left her in a dangerous relationship.

San Ban - Compares to Vietnam's previous simplicity and peace, San Ban is taken away and leaves his family constantly searching for him as well as a better time.

Film Summary

The movie begins with Le Ly being caught between the interrogation of the Southern Vietnam Government, and labeled a traitor from the Viet Cong. This issue makes her and her family ostracized from the local village, they soon move to Saigon. While at Saigon Le Ly becomes deceived into thinking the Master of the house loves her, and gets her pregnant. Le Ly's new pregnancy infuriates the master's wife, which results in Le Ly's family moving back to their previous home. At first uninterested she meets an American soldier, Steve Butler, but soon falls in love. The two soon leave Vietnam to stay in the States to raise a family, however Steve is unable to adjust to average daily life, after serving in the war. Steve becomes agitated and eventually commits suicide. Years later Le Ly returns to Vietnam with her sons to reveal where she grew up.

How is Le Ly Hayslip's Growth Portrayed?

Her growth is portrayed by meeting an American soldier and moving to America. However, she maintains her spiritual beliefs through her Buddhist religion, and grows from that too. We see her buddhist mentor advise her that to resist is to suffer, and to accept is to be happy. Le Ly then realizes this as a truth for herself. By going back to her family and village in Vietnam, she completes the past, or completes a full circle. This establishes her personal growth as a human being, establishing her purpose in her own generation and re-connecting to the past generation of her ancestors. She becomes from "poor to rich", from a "beggar to a fine woman" (as her mother acknowledges), and experiences full circles of "sadness to happiness". She realizes a state of being "in between", and acknowledges that she can exist fully between Vietnam and America, which to her, is to live between heaven and Earth.

Discuss Reconciliation as a Central Theme

The film portrays reconciliation of the human being and different culture through East versus West, especially through Le Ly and Steve's relationship. It also displays the power of forgiveness, as Le Ly is freed from shame and negativity when her Mother forgives her, and acknowledges that she is proud of her. Her Buddhist priest also presents the power of reconciliation, as he brings up the notion of "soul debt", and helps guide Le Ly further to reconciliation by saying, "A child without a father is like a house without a roof." Le Ley realizes that she can forgive Steve and love him unconditionally, and tries to reconcile with him. He is moved, but unfortunately Steve is so disturbed by what he has been through, that he seeks to reconcile himself and his soul, only through self inflicted death.

What is Heaven and What is Earth according to Hayslip?

Hayslip acknowledges a sense of being “in between” Vietnam and America, and relates it to heaven and Earth. We see her manifest this idea when her character says, “Heaven and Earth changed places many times.” The significance of this statement is representative of the circle of life and death, as we see scenes with her brother in between it, and she as well, through being raped and tortured by both Viet-cong and Americans. Hayslip comes to the conclusion, especially with the guidance of buddhism and her own personal journey, that Heaven and Earth are what you make them, it is where your heart is.

Bonus- Apply Orientalism to the Analysis of *Heaven and Earth*

The quote, “My first wife taught me a good lesson that I need a good Oriental woman” quintessentially encapsulates the notion that Europeans have created unfactual imagery and fantasies based on escapist ideas and Eurocentric notions of what the “Far East”-- Asia, (and the Middle East) really are. As Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism challenges such neat distinctions or stereotypes such as the West is civilized and active, and the East is primitive and submissive, so does the film show, through the failed relationship between America and Vietnam as well as Steve and Le Ley, that this sort of stereotyping and false assumptionry does not work.

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