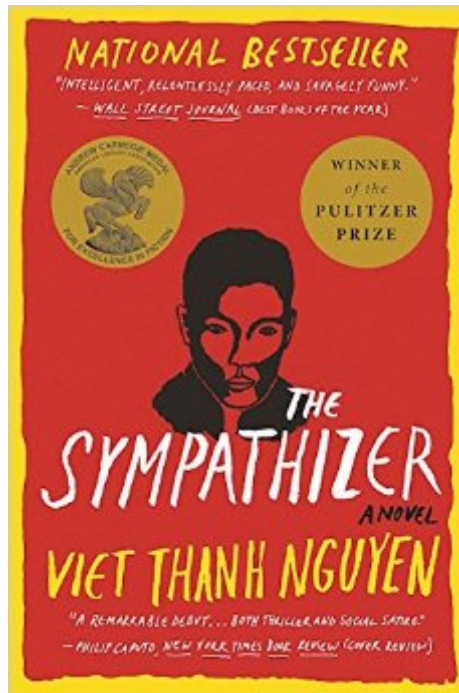


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The Sympathizer: A Novel (Pulitzer Prize For Fiction)



Synopsis

The winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as five other awards, *The Sympathizer* is the breakthrough novel of the year. With the pace and suspense of a thriller and prose that has been compared to Graham Greene and Saul Bellow, *The Sympathizer* is a sweeping epic of love and betrayal. The narrator, a communist double agent, is a "man of two minds," a half-French, half-Vietnamese army captain who arranges to come to America after the Fall of Saigon, and while building a new life with other Vietnamese refugees in Los Angeles is secretly reporting back to his communist superiors in Vietnam. *The Sympathizer* is a blistering exploration of identity and America, a gripping espionage novel, and a powerful story of love and friendship.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (815 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

"*The Sympathizer*" was published exactly 40 years after the fall of Saigon to Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces and the effective end of the 10-year old conflict. The impact of that war is still felt, to some degree, in the U.S. On the other hand, when Americans visit Vietnam (northern or southern regions), they only rarely hear any mention of the war and they see a country dramatically transformed physically, in many ways. While the form of national government there is still officially communist, there is abundant proof that the economy is solidly capitalist. As long as 15 years ago, I asked a ranking member of an official delegation visiting Washington about this and his comment was that while the North had won the "civil war", the South had won the soul of the whole country--meaning that the Vietnamese have always been independent-minded, small land holders and capitalists at heart throughout a history of at least 2000 years. I mention all of the above to point

out the irony that is inherent in this novel. "The Sympathizer" is blind to the present as it chronicles the stories of several members of the South Vietnamese forces at the very end of the war (1975) into the early 1980s. The central character among them is the right hand man of a powerful general--the acting head of the national police in the waning days of the Saigon government--whose personal history puts him at odds with all daily reality. He was born a Northerner--therefore existentially suspect by all Southerners; he is half-French--therefore someone to be disdained by the instinctively atavistic and/or racist Vietnamese; he is a mole for the Viet Cong in the midst of the Saigon power structure; he is U.S.

"The Sympathizer" is a brilliant novel, but it fell flat for me. Its hero -- or anti-hero -- isn't quite convincing in his role(s). The novel is presented as the memoir of a young officer in the South Vietnamese army and secret police during the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese Communist army. He is a traitor, a secret Communist operative, who routinely sends all of the confidential information he receives to his boyhood buddy, a Communist intelligence officer also hidden within the South Vietnamese army. In addition to his emotional confusion -- posing as an anti-communist while actually helping the Communists -- the anti-hero is also biracial -- his father was a French Roman Catholic priest who seduced his teenage Vietnamese mother. He has grown up being insulted by many Vietnamese as a "bastard." Allegedly, his dual ethnic identity makes him a better spy -- treated with suspicion by all, he is the last to be suspected of any crimes -- it's just assumed that a 'bastard' will be grateful for his employment and loyal. His friendly, non-judgmental manner and willingness to listen have made him the "sympathizer." The book is well-written, with vivid evocations of the weather, culture, people and atmosphere of wartime Saigon, and the Vietnamese refugee groups in America and Asia after the war. This is the material of a gripping psychological thriller, but the author chose to write the book as a black comedy. The problem with the book is that even with the greater latitude given by the black comedy genre, the protagonist does not come across as a real Communist operative or as a 1970's Vietnamese.

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