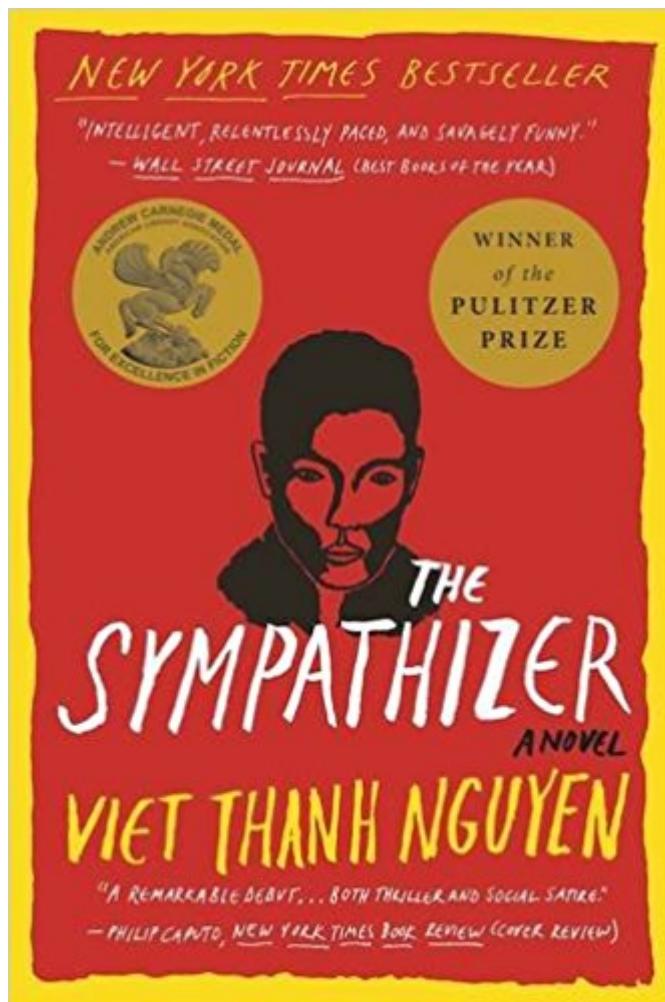


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# The Sympathizer: A Novel (Pulitzer Prize For Fiction)



## Synopsis

The winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as six 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

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; Reprint edition (April 12, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802124941

ISBN-13: 978-0802124944

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 1.2 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 1,704 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,061 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in Books > Literature & Fiction > United States > Asian American #42 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Thrillers & Suspense > Spies & Politics > Espionage #264 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Literary

## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of April 2015: Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* brilliantly draws you in with the opening line: "I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces." It's thrilling, rhythmic, and astonishing, as is the rest of Nguyen's enthralling portrayal of the Vietnam War. The narrator is an undercover communist agent posing as a captain in the Southern Vietnamese Army. Set during the fall of Saigon and the years after in America, the captain spies on the general and the men he escaped with, sharing his information with his communist blood brothers in coded letters. But when his allegiance is called into question, he must act in a way that will haunt him forever. Political, historical, romantic and comic, *The Sympathizer* is a rich and hugely gratifying story that captures the complexity of the war and what it means to be of

two minds. --Al Woodworth --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for *The Sympathizer*:  
Winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction  
Winner of the 2016 Edgar Award for Best First Novel  
Winner of the 2016 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction  
Winner of the 2016 Dayton Literary Peace Prize for Fiction  
Winner of the 2015 Center for Fiction First Novel Prize  
Winner of the 2015-2016 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature (Adult Fiction)  
Winner of the 2016 California Book Award for First Fiction  
Winner of the 2017 Association for Asian American Studies Award for Best Book in Creative Writing (Prose)  
Finalist for the 2016 PEN/Faulkner Award  
Finalist for the 2016 PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Fiction  
Finalist for the 2016 Medici Book Club Prize  
Finalist for the 2015 Los Angeles Times Book Prize (Mystery/Thriller)  
Finalist for the 2016 ABA Indies Choice/E.B. White Read-Aloud Award (Book of the Year, Adult Fiction)  
Shortlisted for the 2017 International Dublin Literary Award  
Named a Best Book of the Year on more than twenty lists, including the New York Times Book Review, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post; A layered immigrant tale told in the wry, confessional voice of a "man of two minds" — and two countries, Vietnam and the United States.  
Pulitzer Prize Citation: "[A] remarkable debut novel . . . [Nguyen] brings a distinctive perspective to the war and its aftermath. His book fills a void in the literature, giving voice to the previously voiceless . . . The nameless protagonist-narrator, a memorable character despite his anonymity, is an Americanized Vietnamese with a divided heart and mind. Nguyen's skill in portraying this sort of ambivalent personality compares favorably with masters like Conrad, Greene, and le Carré. . . . Both thriller and social satire. . . . In its final chapters, *The Sympathizer* becomes an absurdist tour de force that might have been written by a Kafka or Genet." Philip Caputo, *New York Times Book Review* (cover review)  
This is more than a fresh perspective on a familiar subject. *[The Sympathizer]* is intelligent, relentlessly paced and savagely funny . . . The voice of the double-agent narrator, caustic yet disarmingly honest, etches itself on the memory.  
Wall Street Journal (WSJ)'s Best Books of 2015: Extraordinary . . . Surely a new classic of war fiction. . . . [Nguyen] has wrapped a cerebral thriller around a desperate expat story that confronts the existential dilemmas of our age. . . . Laced with insight on the ways nonwhite people are rendered invisible in the propaganda that passes for our pop culture. . . . I haven't read anything since Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that illustrates so palpably how a patient tyrant, unmoored from all humane constraint, can reduce a man's mind to liquid.  
Washington Post: The great achievement of *The Sympathizer* is that it

gives the Vietnamese a voice and demands that we pay attention. Until now, it's been largely a one-sided conversation; or at least that's how it seems in American popular culture . . . We've never had a story quite like this one before. . . . [Nguyen] has a great deal to say and a knowing, playful, deeply intelligent voice . . . There are so many passages to admire. Mr. Nguyen is a master of the telling ironic phrase and the biting detail, and the book pulses with Catch-22-style absurdities.

New York Times: Beautifully written and meaty . . . really compelling. I had that kid-like feeling of being inside the book.

Claire Messud, Boston Globe: Thrilling in its virtuosity, as in its masterly exploitation of the espionage-thriller genre, *The Sympathizer* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and has come to be considered one of the greatest of Vietnam War novels . . . The book's (unnamed) narrator speaks in an audaciously postmodernist voice, echoing not only Vladimir Nabokov and Ralph Ellison but the Dostoyevsky of *Notes from the Underground*.

New Yorker: Gleaming and uproarious, a dark comedy of confession filled with charlatans, delusionists and shameless opportunists . . . The *Sympathizer*, like Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, examines American intentions, often mixed with hubris, benevolence and ineptitude, that lead the country into conflict.

Los Angeles Times: Both a riveting spy novel and a study in identity.

Entertainment Weekly: This debut is a page-turner (read: everybody will finish) that makes you reconsider the Vietnam War (read: everyone will have an opinion) . . . Nguyen's darkly comic novel offers a point of view about American culture that we've rarely seen.

Oprah.com (Oprah's Book Club Suggestions): The novel's best parts are painful, hilarious exposures of white tone-deafness . . . [the] satire is delicious.

New Yorker: The *Sympathizer* reads as part literary historical fiction, part espionage thriller and part satire. American perceptions of Asians serve as some of the book's most deliciously tart commentary . . . Nguyen knows of what he writes.

Los Angeles Times: Sparkling and audacious . . . Unique and startling . . . Nguyen's prose is often like a feverish, frenzied dream, a profuse and lively stream of images sparking off the page. . . .

Nguyen can be wickedly funny. . . . [His] narrator has an incisive take on Asian-American history and what it means to be a nonwhite American. . . . this remarkable, rollicking read by a Vietnamese immigrant heralds an exciting new voice in American literature.

Seattle Times: Stunned, amazed, impressed. [The *Sympathizer* is] so skillfully and brilliantly executed that I cannot believe this is a first novel. (I should add jealous to my emotions.) Upends our notions of the Vietnam novel.

Chicago Tribune: A very special, important, brilliant novel

... Amazing . . . I don't say brilliant about a lot of books, but this is a brilliant book . . . A fabulous book . . . that everyone should read. —Nancy Pearl, KUOW.org

Dazzling . . . I've read scads of Vietnam War books, but *The Sympathizer* has an exciting quality I haven't encountered . . . A fascinating exploration of personal identity, cultural identity, and what it means to sympathize with two sides at once. —John Powers, Fresh Air, NPR (Books I Wish I'd Reviewed)

Powerful and evocative . . . Gripping. —San Francisco Chronicle

Welcome a unique new voice to the literary chorus. . . . [The Sympathizer] is, among other things, a character-driven thriller, a political satire, and a biting historical account of colonization and revolution. It dazzles on all fronts. —Cleveland Plain Dealer

[Nguyen's] books perform an optic tilt about Vietnam and what America did there as profound as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* were to the legacy of racism and slavery. —John Freeman, Literary Hub

For those who have been waiting for the great Vietnamese American Vietnam War novel, this is it. More to the point: This is a great American Vietnam War novel. . . . It is the last word (I hope) on the horrors of the Vietnamese re-education camps that our allies were sentenced to when we left them swinging in the wind. —Vietnam Veterans of America

“What a story . . . [An] absorbing, elegantly written book . . . If you are an American, of any culture or color, you will benefit from reading this book which offers, in exquisite thought and phrase, the multi-layered experience of a war most Americans have blotted out of consciousness, suppressed, or willfully ignored.

I've been waiting to read this book for decades. —Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*

Magisterial. A disturbing, fascinating and darkly comic take on the fall of Saigon and its aftermath, and a powerful examination of guilt and betrayal. *The Sympathizer* is destined to become a classic and redefine the way we think about the Vietnam War and what it means to win and to lose. —T.C. Boyle

Trapped in endless civil war, the man who has two minds tortures and is tortured as he tries to meld the halves of his country and of himself. Viet Thanh Nguyen accomplishes this integration in a magnificent feat of storytelling. *The Sympathizer* is a novel of literary, historical, and political importance. —Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *The Fifth Book of Peace*

It is a strong, strange and liberating joy to read this book, feeling with each page that a broken world is being knitted back together, once again whole and complete. As far as I am concerned, Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*; both a great American novel and a great Vietnamese novel will close the shelf on the literature of the Vietnam War. —Bob Shacochis,

author of *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul*;<sup>1</sup> Read this novel with care; it is easy to read, wry, ironic, wise, and captivating, but it could change not only your outlook on the Vietnam War, but your outlook on what you believe about politics and ideology in general. It does what the best of literature does, expands your consciousness beyond the limitations of your body and individual circumstances.<sup>2</sup> Karl Marlantes, author of *Matterhorn* and *What It Is Like to Go to War*;<sup>3</sup> Not only does Viet Thanh Nguyen bring a rare and authentic voice to the body of American literature generated by the Vietnam War, he has created a book that transcends history and politics and nationality and speaks to the enduring theme of literature: the universal quest for self, for identity. *The Sympathizer* is a stellar debut by a writer of depth and skill.<sup>4</sup> Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*;<sup>5</sup> *The Sympathizer* is a remarkable and brilliant book. By turns harrowing, and cut through by shards of unexpected and telling humor, this novel gives us the conflict in Vietnam, and its aftermath, in a way that is deeply truthful, and vitally important.<sup>6</sup> Vincent Lam, author of *Bloodletting and Miraculous Cures* and *The Headmaster*<sup>7</sup> Wager;<sup>8</sup> I think I'd have to go all the way back to Nabokov<sup>9</sup> Humbert to find the last narrative voice that so completely conked me over the head and took me prisoner. Nguyen and his unnamed protagonist certainly have made a name for themselves with one of the smartest, darkest, funniest books you'll read this year.<sup>10</sup> David Abrams, author of *Fobbit*;<sup>11</sup> Audaciously and vividly imagined. A compelling read.<sup>12</sup> Andrew X. Pham, author of *Catfish* and *Mandala*;<sup>13</sup> Nguyen's cross-grained protagonist exposes the hidden costs in both countries of America<sup>14</sup> tragic Asian misadventure. Nguyen's probing literary art illuminates how Americans failed in their political and military attempt to remake Vietnam;<sup>15</sup> but then succeeded spectacularly in shrouding their failure in Hollywood distortions. Compelling<sup>16</sup> and profoundly unsettling.<sup>17</sup> Booklist (starred review);<sup>18</sup> A closely written novel of after-the-war Vietnam, when all that was solid melted into air. As Graham Greene and Robert Stone have taught us, on the streets of Saigon, nothing is as it seems. . . . Think Alan Furst meets Elmore Leonard, and you'll capture Nguyen at his most surreal . . . Both chilling and funny, and a worthy addition to the library of first-rate novels about the Vietnam War.<sup>19</sup> Kirkus Reviews (starred review);<sup>20</sup> [An] astonishing first novel . . . Nguyen's novel enlivens debate about history and human nature, and his narrator has a poignant often mindful voice.<sup>21</sup> Publishers Weekly (starred, boxed review);<sup>22</sup> Breathtakingly cynical, the novel has its hilarious moments . . . Ultimately a meditation on war, political movements, America's imperialist role, the CIA, torture, loyalty, and one's personal

identity, this is a powerful, thought-provoking work. It's hard to believe this effort . . . is a debut. This is right up there with Denis Johnson's *Tree of Smoke*."<sup>1</sup> Library Journal (starred review)<sup>2</sup> I cannot remember the last time I read a novel whose protagonist I liked so much. Smart, funny, and self-critical, with a keen sense of when to let a story speak for itself (and when to gloss it with commentary). He <sup>3</sup> is someone I would like to have a beer with, despite the fact that his life <sup>4</sup> is the betrayal of his friends. . . . [Nguyen] proves a gifted and bold satirist.<sup>5</sup> Barnes & Noble Review<sup>6</sup> Riveting . . . The *Sympathizer* is not only a masterly espionage novel, but also a seminal work of 21st century American fiction. Giving voice to the Vietnamese experience in the United States, Nguyen offers profound insights into the legacy of war and the politically and racially charged atmosphere of the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> Book Reporter<sup>8</sup> [A] shimmering debut novel . . . Leaping with lyrical verve, each page turns to a unique and hauntingly familiar voice that refuses to let us forget what people are capable of doing to each other.<sup>9</sup> Asian American Writers<sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> Workshop<sup>12</sup> Arresting . . . One of the best pieces of fiction about the Vietnam war<sup>13</sup> and by a Vietnamese. . . . Stunning . . . Could it be that Nguyen has captured the shape of the devolution of war itself, from grand ambition to human ruin? . . . One of the finest novels of the Vietnam War published in recent years.<sup>14</sup> The Daily Beast<sup>15</sup> [An] intriguing confessional . . . [a] tour de force . . . So taken was I by the first quarter of the book that I believed myself to be reading an actual confession . . . The character himself . . . and the quality of the narration seized me, leaving me almost breathless in my pursuit of an ending.<sup>16</sup> Sewanee Review<sup>17</sup> Tremendously funny, with a demanding verbal texture . . . Both tender and a bit of a romp, the book reminded me of how big books can be.<sup>18</sup> Guardian (Best Books of 2015)<sup>19</sup> Astounding . . . [The unnamed narrator] will be compared to the morally exhausted spies, intelligence officers and double agents of Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene, and John le Carré.<sup>20</sup> Toronto Star

The *Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen is simply superb. Written with an unflinching eye and great humor, it is a brilliant and chilling look into the hearts and minds of men and the cruelty we inflict upon each other. The first 50 or so pages are devoted to the introduction of the Captain; a mole in South Vietnam's special forces. He is also a bastard, and half-breed, with a Vietnamese mother he adores and a French father (who also happens to be a Roman Catholic priest) he despises. He is a microcosm of a homeland divided in half—with a dual nature and opposites that seem to only attract loathing or disdain. This is the fall of Saigon, the Vietnam war and the dislocation to America told

from an Asian perspective, and a story non-Asian Americans should read if only for that viewpoint. But there is so much more: brilliant writing and beautiful prose that is often hilarious, and always thought-provoking. "I calmed the tremor in my gut. I was in close quarters with some representative of the most dangerous creature in the history of the world, the white man in a suit." Or, "you must claim America, she said. America will not give itself to you. If you do not claim America, if America is not in your heart, America will throw you into a concentration camp, or a reservation or a plantation." This is not an easy book to read--and no, not because there aren't quotation marks. God help some of these reviewers if they ever pick up Virginia Woolf or James Joyce. At times though the scenes of torture and rape are sickening and the author's pov about American hegemony (cultural and political) is going to disturb many. But it is challenging in the very best way. The Sympathizer does what great literature is supposed to do--force us out of our comfort zone to rethink assumptions. This wonderful, disturbing, challenging novel will do more than that--it will affirm something indomitable and essential about us all--a desire to carry on, and to live.

The narrator of "The Sympathizer," by Viet Thanh Nguyen is the son of a Vietnamese woman and a French priest. Sent as a young man to Occidental College in Los Angeles, he is also an expert in American Studies and speaks flawless English. After returning to Vietnam, he becomes a captain in the army serving as aide de camp to a General. Secretly he is a spy for the communist revolution. As he tells his story, from narrowly escaping Saigon with the General in 1975 to life as a refugee in Los Angeles to working as a consultant to "The Auteur" on a film about Vietnam shot in the Philippines and finally to Thailand, we discover he is actually writing his "confession" to a commandant in a prison camp back in Vietnam. The captain's otherness allows him to see Vietnam and America with a clarity that enlightens us as readers. While much of his story is devoted to how badly Americans understood the Vietnamese people, he also skewers partisans on both sides of the divide within his home country. His encounters with military, political and academic experts of all sorts reveal the ideological blinders that shaped their beliefs and horrific violence of the war. In the end, though, the story is about his struggle to come to terms with his own participation in that violence. What he did and did not do weigh heavily on his conscience. Though his story is a serious one, Nguyen writes with a comic touch that belies the tragedy all around. "The Sympathizer" deserves comparisons with "Catch 22" as a classic dark comedy about war.

Brings to vivid and eye-popping life the fall of Saigon and its aftermath I loved the narrator because he was willing to share himself totally in confessing, as the format of the book is his written

confession to a Vietnamese authority. He is a razor sharp observer of human nature, of Vietnamese and American culture , and he was well aware of his own base nature as well as his own strengths. He made me laugh as he made his way, whether he was describing the wonders a woman's cleavage, the stunning purity of vodka on ice or through scenes of the grimmest horror. He knows that what appears to be good and worthy is likely also the opposite. I appreciated the political aspects of the book, but as an English major, psychologically oriented type, I was more tuned into the grand writing and the authentic characters. I felt the narrator became symbolic rather than human at the very very end of the book I lost my connection with him . It felt like a terrible loss as we had had a profound, intimate, mind-bending journey together. I don't know if the author intended this loss to occur. I found myself skimming the last pages. Nonetheless, this is a brilliant book. Five stars.

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