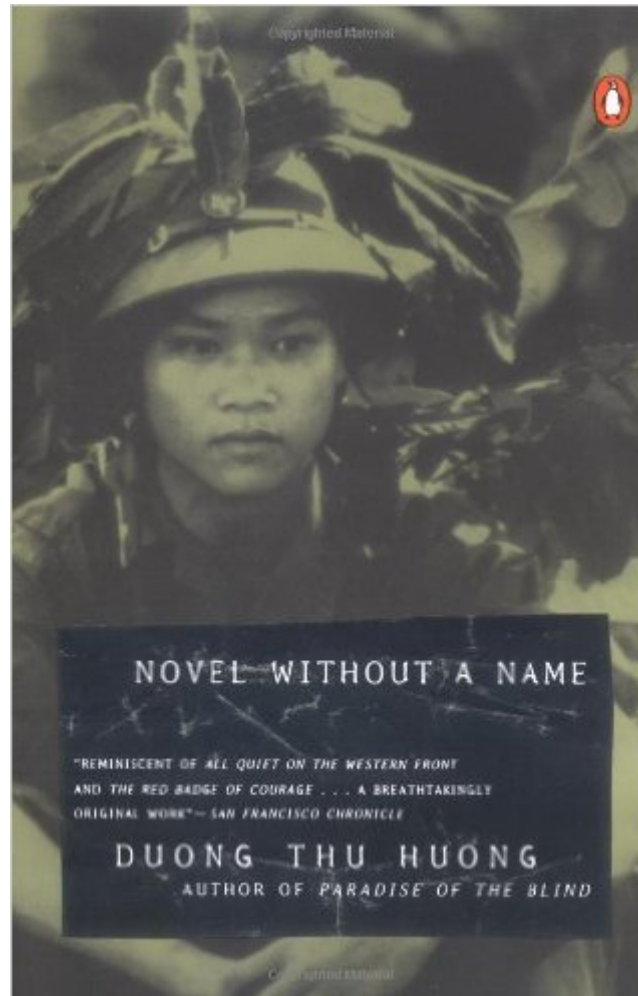


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Novel Without A Name



Synopsis

A piercing, unforgettable tale of the horror and spiritual weariness of war, *Novel Without a Name* will shatter every preconception Americans have about what happened in the jungles of Vietnam. With Duong Thu Huong, whose *Paradise of the Blind* was published to high critical acclaim in 1993, Vietnam has found a voice both lyrical and stark, powerful enough to capture the conflict that left millions dead and spiritually destroyed her generation. Banned in the author's native country for its scathing dissection of the day-to-day realities of life for the Vietnamese during the final years of the "Vietnam War," *Novel Without a Name* invites comparison with *All Quiet on the Western Front* and other classic works of war fiction. The war is seen through the eyes of Quan, a North Vietnamese *bo doi* (soldier of the people) who joined the army at eighteen, full of idealism and love for the Communist party and its cause of national liberation. But ten years later, after leading his platoon through almost a decade of unimaginable horror and deprivation, Quan is disillusioned by his odyssey of loss and struggle. Furloughed back to his village in search of a fellow soldier, Quan undertakes a harrowing, solitary journey through the tortuous jungles of central Vietnam and his own unspeakable memories.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is narrated by Quan, a twenty-eight year-old soldier of the North Vietnamese Army who, after spending ten years in the jungles of central Vietnam, is thoroughly disillusioned by the horrible and absurd realities of war. The narrator's tone is one of disenchantment, of wistful longing for all

that has been lost--youth, life, love, family. As also shown in *Paradise of the Blind*, Duong Thu Huong has a skill for detailed descriptions of everyday objects and scenes, which are often made grotesquely surreal by her minute, harsh, objective observations. For example, in describing the decrepit mental and physical state of Quan's childhood friend Bien, she writes, "He sat in a pile of filth and excrement, surrounded by pools of milky, rancid urine. A torn calendar. An old tin can filled with water." Everything touched upon by the war--the natural environment, the people--is made ugly, thus adding to the war's horror. Even her flowers are drenched in red colors of blood. In such an environment of degradation and death, people struggle to retain the smallest hint human decency. This struggle is movingly portrayed in the episode when Quan spends a night in a field station, the sole personnel of which is a homely girl who heroically goes about burying her dead comrades. Though forced by duty to spend the best years of her life in a bleak environment, she tries to retain some of her youthful feminine idealism by decorating her cave-room with pictures of French singers and a paper flower, and washing and combing her hair to get rid of the stench of human corpses which never goes away. Her futile effort in trying to get Quan to make love to her expresses a tragic desperation.

Novel *Without A Name* by Duong Thu Huong is a terrific novel that lets the reader into the head of a Vietnamese soldier fighting for the North Vietnam side during the Vietnam War. A twenty-eight year old man, Quan, is the narrator of *Without A Name*. Quan's view of life is much different from what it was when he was a naive 18-year-old, enlisting in the army with his childhood friends. Back then, Quan had thought of war as a glorious time; a time when heroes and legends were made. At this point, Quan has begun to see the Vietnam War for what it really was; a brutal massacre needlessly killing his fellow Vietnamese people. Luong, once Quan's childhood friend, and now his commander who's life has become the Communist Party, sends Quan on a mission to find Bien, their childhood friend. The other task that Quan is given is one that Luong does not report to the officials, he asks Quan to go to their home village. Luong wants Quan to do this for a variety of reasons. First, he knows that the war will be going on much longer than was ever intended, and he knows that Quan misses his home. Second, Luong wants Quan to reassure all the families back home that they are doing well, even if this is partially a lie. Quan sets out on his long journey, and unfortunately is met with bad news. The war has driven Bien to insanity. This insanity was caused by the fact that Bien has a life threatening form of malaria, which he got from a mosquito; a very common occurrence during the Vietnam War. The cell that holds Bien was on par with others during the War, but was nonetheless despicable. The crazy man eats, lives, and sleeps in his own waste,

and is malnourished. After seeing Bien, Quan returns home to his village. He finds that it is not only he who has changed during the 10 years that he has been absent.

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