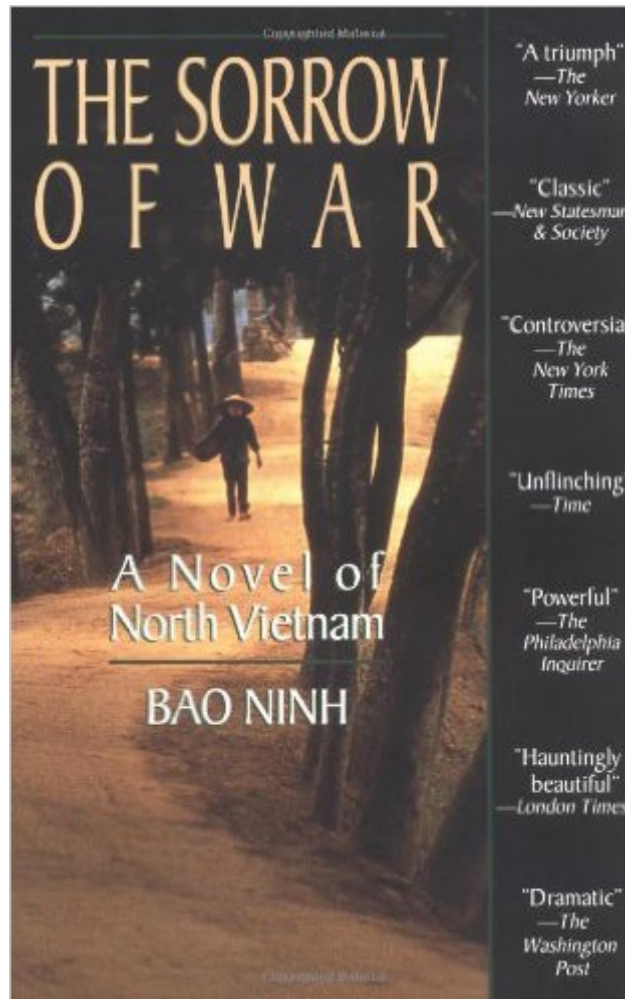


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The Sorrow Of War: A Novel Of North Vietnam



Synopsis

The daring and controversial novel that took the world by storm-- a story of politics, selfhood, survival, and war. Bao Ninh, a former North Vietnamese soldier, provides a strikingly honest look at how the Vietnam War forever changed his life, his country, and the people who live there. Originally published against government wishes in Vietnam because of its nonheroic, non-ideological tone, *The Sorrow of War* has won worldwide acclaim and become an international bestseller.

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Customer Reviews

To say nothing else, this is an interesting book. From a humanitarian standpoint, it is on par with Frank Elkin's diary, "The Heart of a Man," that his widow published after his A-4 was shot down off Oriskany in 1966. That novel is the only other work I have read that compares in what it may accomplish for the reader from an emotional understanding of the immense toll of the Vietnam War. Yet, *The Sorrow of War* is different. First published in 1991, the book was a best seller in Vietnam - even though the communist party banned it. In reading the novel, the reason eventually becomes subtly obvious as the glorious struggle is painted in more realistic colors. The author, Bao Ninh, was born in Hanoi in 1952, and he was one of only ten survivors of the 27th Youth Brigade during the conflict. In 1994, his work received the Independent Foreign fiction award. His fictional story unfolds in the Central Highlands where his main character, Kien, after years at war, is working in a Missing In Action Remains-Gathering Team. After that opening, there are no chapters, there is no coherent timeline, and there is no reference to much of anything but the simplest of human emotions. At first, *The Sorrow of War* is strangely un-engaging. Honestly, I considered putting the book down several

times early on in my reading. However, Bao Ninh does have something worth saying that is not explicitly spelled out in any of the pages as we aimlessly follow Kien in his memory of the war. This book is not an easy read. The timeline shifts and changes without warning, and it is up to the reader to get into the head of a man who is severely damaged by the war and its apparent total destruction of his life. But, it is worth the effort.

The media has made sure that all of us are aware of the Vietnam conflict. Readers and movie goers the world over are now familiar with America's suffering in Vietnam and the problems American veterans have endured as they attempted to adjust to civilian life. Although all life is irreplaceable, the fact remains that the United States lost fewer than a million men in the Vietnam conflict and their social institutions and infrastructure remained relatively intact. The Vietnamese, however, lost two million men and their culture, society, landscape and tradition were literally obliterated. Despite this destruction, their side of this horrendous story has seldom been told. Worse yet, when it is told, they are often portrayed in the most unattractive of all light. Until only a few years ago, the Vietnamese were portrayed by the media as a faceless people with no identity; entities not worth caring about. The turning point came with the publication, in Dutch, of Duong Thu Huong's *Blind Paradise* in 1994. This landmark book was followed by Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*. War novels deal, superficially, with war. But underneath all the blood and horror and carnage lie far deeper social and human issues. The best novels of war, such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, as well as Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War*, also deal with the makeup and morality of a culture or a society gone wrong. The protagonist of these books, whether real or fictional, often endures a harrowing personal struggle through both a public and private hell and usually undergoes some sort of redemption, even if that redemption results in death. Born in 1952, Bao Ninh served in the Glorious 27th Youth Brigade during the Vietnam conflict.

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