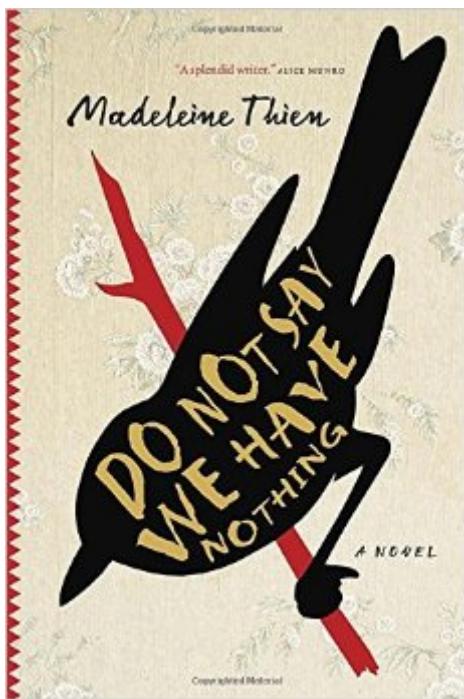


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Do Not Say We Have Nothing



Synopsis

An extraordinary novel set in China before, during and after the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989--the breakout book we've been waiting for from a bestselling, .ca First Novel Award winner. Madeleine Thien's new novel is breathtaking in scope and ambition even as it is hauntingly intimate. With the ease and skill of a master storyteller, Thien takes us inside an extended family in China, showing us the lives of two successive generations--those who lived through Mao's Cultural Revolution in the mid-twentieth century; and the children of the survivors, who became the students protesting in Tiananmen Square in 1989, in one of the most important political moments of the past century. With exquisite writing sharpened by a surprising vein of wit and sly humour, Thien has crafted unforgettable characters who are by turns flinty and headstrong, dreamy and tender, foolish and wise. At the centre of this epic tale, as capacious and mysterious as life itself, are enigmatic Sparrow, a genius composer who wishes desperately to create music yet can find truth only in silence; his mother and aunt, Big Mother Knife and Swirl, survivors with captivating singing voices and an unbreakable bond; Sparrow's ethereal cousin Zhuli, daughter of Swirl and storyteller Wen the Dreamer, who as a child witnesses the denunciation of her parents and as a young woman becomes the target of denunciations herself; and headstrong, talented Kai, best friend of Sparrow and Zhuli, and a determinedly successful musician who is a virtuoso at masking his true self until the day he can hide no longer. Here, too, is Kai's daughter, the ever-questioning mathematician Marie, who pieces together the tale of her fractured family in present-day Vancouver, seeking a fragile meaning in the layers of their collective story. With maturity and sophistication, humour and beauty, a huge heart and impressive understanding, Thien has crafted a novel that is at once beautifully intimate and grandly political, rooted in the details of daily life inside China, yet transcendent in its universality.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Most marvelous insight into the mind states of a society going through an imposed attempt to remake itself in very short order. The whole red guard phenomenon which attempted to recreate an ancient civilization overnight has long been puzzling to me. In this age of the rapid overturning of all values this book could perhaps serve us as a straw to cling to. From the very beginning one finds oneself among characters one can identify with and also share their confusion in a sea of rapidly changing orthodoxy which could be lethal if absorbed instantly and daily?

This novel, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, follows some residents of Shanghai, several of whom are music students, as they live through Mao's "Great Leap Forward," the Cultural Revolution, and the Tiananmen Square Massacre. We also learn about some of their descendants who have migrated to Vancouver. This ultimately is a sweeping novel in scope, and it provides intense insight into life during this period in China. Many are denounced, murdered, and harassed in situations reminiscent of Stalin's purges in the USSR; a quote which really resonated with me was this one, underscoring the powerlessness of people who were supposed to be empowered by the revolution: "The so-called 'enemies of the People' are the ones whose luck has run out, nothing more. If they want to come for you, they will come, and it doesn't matter what you read or what you failed to read. The books on your shelves, the music you cherish, the past lives you've lived, all these details are just an excuse. In the old days, spite and jealousy drove the eunuchs in all their power struggles. Perhaps we live in a new age, but people don't change overnight."

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