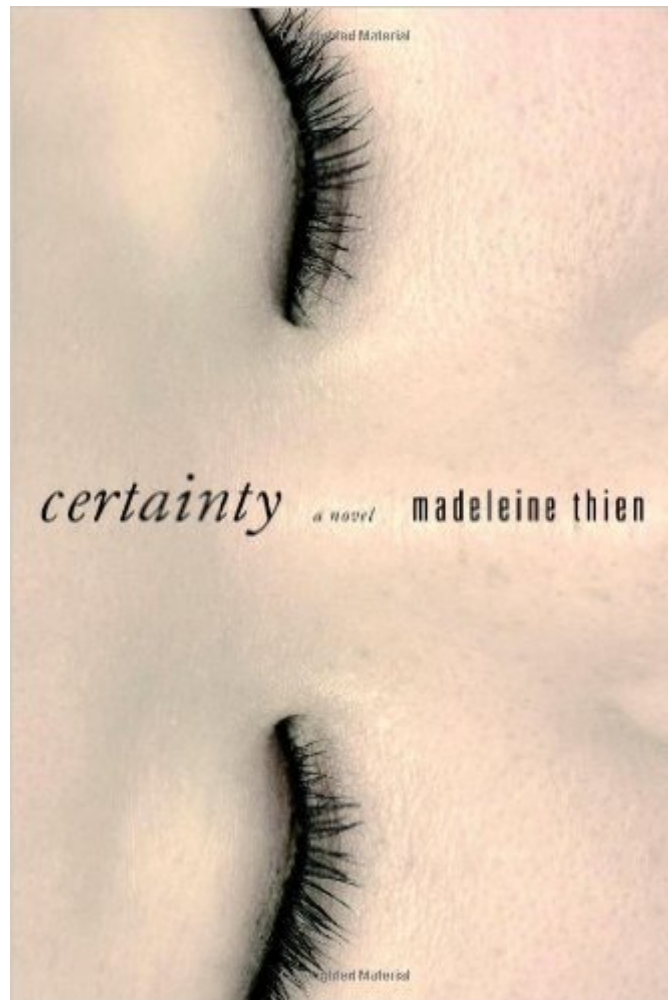


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Certainty: A Novel



Synopsis

Madeleine Thien's stunning debut novel hauntingly retells a crucial moment in history, through two unforgettable love stories. Gail Lim, a producer of radio documentaries, is haunted by the mystery of her father's Asian past. As a child, Gail's father, Matthew Lim, lived in a Malaysian village occupied by the Japanese. He and his beloved Ani wandered the jungle fringe under the terrifying shadow of war. The war shattered their families, splitting the two apart until a brief reunion years later.

Matthew's profound connection to Ani and the life-changing secrets they shared cast a shadow that, later still, Matthew's wife, Clara, desperately sought to understand. Gail's journey to unravel the mystery of her parents' lives takes her to Amsterdam, where she unearths more about this mysterious other woman. But as Gail approaches the truth, Ani's story will bring Gail face-to-face, with the untold mysteries of her own life. Vivid, poignant, and written in understated yet powerful prose, CERTAINTY is a novel about the legacies of loss, the dislocations of war, and the timeless redemption afforded by love.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Vancouver, its rains, its peoples from so many places, carrying their histories, their losses, and their hopes is beautifully captured in this book. The book is set in Strathcona, the old residential district east of Chinatown that was at the center of a cultural renaissance in Vancouver in the 1980s and 1990s. The characters Gail and Ansel are in a way typical of the writers, artists, activists and their friends who have made the area a center for cultural nomads. Certainty is about the difficulty we all have, when being honest, of being certain of ourselves, our loves, our parents and our (un)shared

pasts. It weaves together the stories of lovers (Gail and Ansel) with parents and children (Mathew and Ani) and the troubled history of Eastern Borneo and the city of Sandakan - a name that invokes the horror of its death camps under the Japanese, the brutality of its British commercial masters, and the cultural fusion of the Chinese (many Hakka), Japanese (Japanese have been living and trading in Sandakan since before the Edo period), Malays, Dutch and British. Madeleine Thien adds depth to the novel by informed discussions of sound (the protagonist Gail is producer of radio documentaries), image (her mother's husband and her half brother are photographers) and fractal math. These threads provide deep links back into the memories and relationships of the people. This book helped me remember Vancouver, its cultures and people, and see its links back into the Asian diaspora. My thanks to the writer. I look forward to her next book.

Reviewed by Debra Gaynor for Reader Views (3/07) It's been a year since Gail died. Ansel still remembers the warmth of her body next to his and cherishes the sound of her voice on tape. Gail had begun a documentary. It was important to her and it's unfinished. It is the story of her father Matthew Lim and an investigation of her grandfather's death. The story line begins in the future and travels to the past in a unique writing style. Matthew's father had once own a rubber plantation in Malaysia but the Japanese army now controlled it. Before the war they had lived in a nice house. But the war had changed many things. The Japanese had taken over the school and now the students had to learn to sing Japanese songs. Matthew and his best friend, Ani, were only ten-years old, but they roamed the jungles. Years later Matthew and Ani meet again, and their love reawakens, but cannot overcome politics and the suspicions that Matthew's father assisted the Japanese. They quietly go their separate ways; Ani does not tell him that she is pregnant. Matthew goes on with his life moving to Vancouver. He marries Clara and cherishes their daughter Gail. Each character in "Certainty" weaves in his, or her, own thread of the past. Each recounts their individual history in such a way that the story becomes a tapestry of many lives. The story flows smoothly. The characters jump off the pages and come to life. Gail is driven to find the truth. This is not a novel that I could pick up and read in one sitting. The words must be pondered. The truth behind the words must be sought. Madeleine Thien is a talented writer and I believe we will be reading more of her books. I highly recommend this book. Received book free of charge.

I bought this book with much anticipation from the previous reviews I read. Boy, was I let down. It was an unfilling read, and very confusing. The time period jumps were not clear, and the book was just idle words without any meaning. If you asked me what the book was about, I would falter in

giving you a clear description. There was no depth. Don't waste your money, more importantly don't waste your time.

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