



# Vi

*Kim Thúy*

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Mon prénom, Bào Vi, illustre l'intention de mes parents de «protéger la plus petite».

Si l'on traduit littéralement, je suis «Précieuse minuscule microscopique».

Comme dans la plupart des cas au Vietnam, je n'ai pas su être à l'image de mon nom. Souvent, les filles qui s'appellent «Blanche» ou «Neige» ont le teint très foncé, et les garçons nommés «Puissance» ou «Fort» craignent les grandes épreuves.

Quant à moi, je grandissais sans cesse, dépassant de loin la moyenne et, du même élan, me projetant en dehors des normes.

## Vi Details

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Author : Kim Thúy

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## From Reader Review Vi for online ebook

### Johanna says

En bok som sjunger långsamhetens lov, var språk är lika poetiskt utmålande som det är sparsmakat. Boken är dessutom oerhört vackert formgiven. Tunn men tjock av berättade.

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### Jessica says

Won in the First Reads giveaway, review to come.

More of a 3.5

There were moments where I was really engaged with the book, and others where the writing kind of fell flat for me. I don't know if it's from style or the translation. There were also some sentences that seemed kind of wonky, like they were the literal translations that weren't edited to make sense in English. Like "At first, I found very bland the pho made by the restaurant owner-cook on the sidewalk in front of my hotel". Then again, my copy is an ARC and the book was published on the 10th. Maybe that has been dealt with.

Overall, I liked following Vi on her journey, and wished we would have seen a bit more than the ambiguous ending showed us.

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### Briar's Reviews says

Kim Thúy's beautiful short story, Vi, is a must read for fiction lovers!

I won't lie, the fact that this book is so short was what drew me to it. I needed a quick read to keep me occupied while I was in a waiting room and this book was short enough to devour in one sitting. While this book might lack in quantity, it hits a real punch on the quality. I'm honestly surprised Kim is not a bigger author, because this book was mind-blowingly awesome. And yes, I am making mind-blowingly a word.

The cultural impact is probably the best part of this novel. Often, you can see silly cultural stereotypes in novels but this one did it right. You could tell Kim knew what she was talking about with the depth and nature of her words. It didn't feel cheap or obnoxious, it felt oddly satisfying to read about another culture that was not my own. Watching Vi's story take place over these pages was a fantastic adventure, since Kim wove her words so beautifully and made this story dance in my mind. I absolutely loved it!

I would have liked a better ending, I found it kind of "blah" compared to the rest of the novel. This book had me hooked and obsessed with Vi's journey and then the end just fell...well, flat. I would have liked something more. That was my only real issue with this novel. It is a translation (and my copy was an ARC) so there were some weird sentences with the translation but that wasn't a con for me. I moved passed those issues really easily when reading it.

Overall, this charming read is a great option if you want a story that will move you and impact your

understanding of culture. I 100% recommend this book!

Four out of five stars.

I received an ARC of this book through Goodreads First Reads.

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### **Izza says**

4 stars | Once again, Kim Thúy gifts us with a beautiful, well-crafted novel.

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### **Christina says**

It's more a 2.5 stars for me because I'm a bit torn. I'm not sure whether I liked this book or not. I thought Vi's family history was charming, how her grandfather fell in love with her grandmother or the way her parents met. When it comes to what was supposed to be the main story (Vi's), I felt indifferent though I could relate to certain aspects such as growing up in Quebec and following a more occidental lifestyle. When I turned the last page, I asked myself "What was the whole point to this story?" Beautifully written but needs a meaningful storyline for the main character.

Read my complete review here: <http://wp.me/s6kPpI-vi>

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### **Brooke says**

I have always enjoyed Kim Thúy's work, and *Vi* is no exception. Thúy manages to put so much into short chapters and short sentences, and I'm always astounded by her beautiful writing. This book is about culture, family, being a refugee and finding your place in the world. It is at once delicate and strong, heartbreaking and comforting. I would have liked a more conclusive ending, but overall, I really enjoyed this!

Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for providing me with a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Anna (lion\_reads) says**

Kim Thúy is a master of stripped-down, elegant prose and *Vi* is no exception. Compared to her other novellas *Vi* is less a study of a feeling and of the texture of a relationship, rather it's more expansive and more global. Here the emigré Vietnamese experience takes place all over the world alongside many other characters. It is a novel of leaving one's home and family behind, of redefining history and tradition in your own terms, and of finding the self that exists outside your parents. The novella also speaks more clearly on the marks war and repression have left on the Vietnamese consciousness. My only complaint is that because of the faster pacing some of Thúy's beautiful sentences got lost. They're still there, but they don't have the same impact as they did in *Ru* or *Mãn*.

"While I lived in a space as empty as the echo that circulated there in response to a rare noise, in Vincent's home every object spoke and told its story. They came from different places, different times, different cultures, but were melded, woven together like a nest."

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### **MissBecka says**

[I do wish she had revealed what happened to Vincent and his Grandmother or whether or not Vi goes to meet her father and what happened if she did. It doesn't ruin the story that I never find these things out, I just hate loose ends. (hide spoiler)]

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### **Krista says**

My first name, B?o Vi, showed my parents' determination to "protect the smallest one." In a literal translation, I am "Tiny precious microscopic." As is often the case in Vietnam, I did not match the image of my own name.

I loved Kim Thúy's words the first time I encountered them in Ru; her poetic and touching Canada Reads-winning novella about the Vietnamese refugee experience. And I admired Thúy's maturing voice in 2014's Mãn that sensually explored the expression of a woman's love through the food she prepares. Naturally, I was excited to pick up her new book Vi, but I have to admit I'm a bit disappointed in this one – it has neither the gorgeous writing of Thúy's first book or the clear plotting of her second; it feels rather pointless overall (but noting that the main character, Vi, is a "graduate in translation and law", as is Thúy herself as noted in her author bio, she may have been reaching for something even more autobiographical here; perhaps making this less universal.) Still happy to have reconnected with Thúy here and will continue to pick up anything she writes.

Told from the first-person, Vi begins by sharing her ancestors stories – particularly focussing on the love stories of her grandparents and parents. A happy and well-off Vietnamese childhood is soon interrupted by war, and her mother is able to leave with her and her brothers on a smuggler's boat out of the country. Eventually landing in a Malaysian refugee camp (as did Thúy's own family), this slim book only briefly covers that refugee experience:

Quite soon, dragging one's empty pail for three hours to reach the well became as banal as the pains from chronic dysentery. The discomfort of physical and mental proximity diminished, to the rhythm of spontaneous laughter and miraculous reunions. In this isolated world, friendships were born of the simplest bond. Two classmates became two sisters, two natives of the same town helped each other out as if they were cousins, two orphans formed a family.

Vi's mother is fluent in French and her family is soon accepted by the Canadian government and settled in Montreal (as did Thúy's own family). Although Vi's oldest brother plans for her to become a surgeon, a puppy love compels Vi to follow a young man to Ottawa, where she has middling success studying translation; followed by law school and the social tutelage of her mother's old friend, Hà. It is this education, and the failed love affair, that launch Vi on some international NGO work, and she travels extensively through Asia and Europe to her mother's disapproval; and as always, Thúy is lush in her descriptions of exotic food and settings. The following long passage, from when she has finally found a settled love and place, is quoted in full because it seemed to me to be the heart of Vi's story:

Whispering Hà's words into the hollow of Vincent's collarbone, I realized that my mother had taught me above all to become as invisible as possible, or at least to transform myself into a shadow so that no one would attack me, to pass through walls and melt into my surroundings. She insisted that in the art of war, the first lesson consisted of mastering one's disappearance, which was at the same time the best attack and the best defence. Until I saw the light shining like crystals in Vincent's beads of perspiration, I had always thought that my mother preferred her boys out of habit, out of love for my father. My voice echoing in the circle of Vincent's arms finally led me to understand my mother's desire to have me grow up differently, to launch myself elsewhere, to offer myself a fate different from her own. It took me two continents and an ocean to grasp that she had had to go against her nature to entrust the education of her own daughter to Hà, another woman, far away from her, and her exact opposite.

Ah, but we can't so easily escape our fates, and Vi's echoes her mother's in many ways; ending on a similar note of uncertainty. And just because I liked the writing and the resonance of these passages, I'm including the description of when Vi's grandfather fell in love with her grandmother at first sight:

Some believed that he was in love with her long-lashed almond eyes, others, with her fleshy lips, while still others were convinced that he'd been seduced by her full hips. No one had noticed the slender fingers holding a notebook against her bosom except my grandfather, who went on describing them for decades. He continued to evoke them long after age had transformed those smooth, tapering fingers into a fabulous myth or, at the very most, a lovers' tale.

And when the ecologist-ornithologist Vincent fell in love with Vi, as she braided the hair of a street food hawker:

In the forest, amid dozens of animals of all sorts that appeared and disappeared around him, the colour of a feather, the length of a beak, the form of a nest, would catch his eye, and reveal to him the features of a species. As for what had captivated him about me, it was my ability to bend my legs, to curve my back, and to hunch my shoulders to match the fragility of the young merchant who was preparing portions of ant eggs with the help of small green leaves.

At 130 pages, *Vi* is a very quick read. Unfortunately, unlike Thúy's first two slim books, I found this one lacking depth and heft; I liked what there was, I just wanted more.

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### **Trang Tran (Bookidote) says**

This is such a great book, Kim Thuy strikes again with her beautiful short but oh so meaningful sentences <3 Fell in love with the French language all over again ! As a girl born and raised in Vietnam myself, I can relate so much and I also discovered so much on my parents generations lives during war and misery. But what I liked the most is how Kim Thuy depicts the cultural differences between Vietnam and those who traveled to Canada and United States.

Un super gros merci à l'auteur pour ce beau cadeau de littérature à tous les lecteurs pour se rappeler encore une fois de ce Vietnam en beauté mais jamais gravée dans l'histoire, souvent oubliée de nos racines.

Trang- Book Blogger and Book Reviewer  
<http://bookidote.wordpress.com>

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### **Cristina - Athenae Noctua says**

In questo piccolo libriccino, Kim Thúy ha raccolto pagine vibranti di emozioni e colori differenti, tratteggiando vividi ritratti del bellissimo padre di Vi e di Xuân, decisiva nella salvezza della famiglia e tenacemente impegnata nella conservazione dell'onore familiare e delle tradizioni che, pur lontana da Saigon, non vuole perdere. Fra le pagine scritte da Kim Thúy e tradotte da Cinia Poli si sente l'odore del caffè preparato a ?à L?t e si può camminare per il mercato di Ch? L?n a Saigon, ma si avverte anche il palpito doloroso dei fuggiaschi che corrono nelle foreste vietnamite e si ode il pianto delle madri che hanno perduto i figli. Non per questo la bella storia di Vi passa in secondo piano, anzi, emerge in tutta la sua vitalità.  
<http://athenaenocua2013.blogspot.it/...>

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### **sofia says**

Den är så delikat och samtidigt mustig. Älskar att läsa Thúys böcker! De är så lätta i sin tyngd, tunga i sin lättvikt? Läsning som berör.

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### **Penny (Literary Hoarders) says**

3.5 stars.

Kim Thuy is a beautiful writer. She's like Sarah Winman - beautiful use of words and not one extra one unnecessarily used. Sheila Fischman always translates from the French to English with just as much beauty as Thuy writes. She makes it just as lyrical and lovely as I'm sure it sounds in French.

I loved the style of how this was written - short vignettes of stories and I love how each short chapter was

printed - the chapter "titles" were printed on the side with the English meaning of the Vietnamese word (if it was required).

The only thing that had me giving this 3.5 stars and not the full 4, is that the character of Vi was very flat and dry. There wasn't a lot of depth to her, and not as much to the other characters as well. While the stories told within the book were very good to read, there was just something flat and dry about Vi?

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### ❁ Susan G says

<https://ayearofbooksblog.com/2018/05/...>

Life has been busy and although I have been reading, I have been slow to finish my blog posts. As fan of Kim Thuy, since devouring her debut book, *Ru*, I pre-ordered her latest book, *Vi* in preparation for meeting her at the FOLD festival in Brampton. The name *Vi* means "precious tiny one" and the character was lovingly protected by her three brothers during their journey and as they built their lives in Quebec. Although *Vi* is a fictional character, there are glimpses of Thuy's strength, resilience and experiences shared within the novel.

Like Thuy, *Vi* escaped Vietnam as one of the "boat people". *Vi*'s mother formed a plan to flee leaving her husband behind, to keep her brother's alive by avoiding their conscription to war or the mine fields. They were lucky to escape with their lives despite the probable risks of drowning or being killed by pirates.

Since they spoke French, *Vi* and her family took refuge in Quebec, connecting with other relatives who had escaped Vietnam and rebuilding their lives. There were high expectations for success and *Vi* struggled to study linguistics. This is similar to Thuy's experience and both the character and the author ended up becoming a lawyer.

After meeting Kim Thuy, it is difficult to differentiate the tales she told at the event from the stories she has written in *Vi*. The author and the book are both powerhouses of strength and resilience. Both the book and the author are full of stories that are condensed into a dainty package which is vibrant, generous and determined.

Reading *Vi* makes me want to reread my signed, copy of *Ru* and savour it again after making connections with the author's experience. All her books are stories that you can read in one sitting. Please enjoy them but also read my post about meeting this remarkable woman who shares the stories that are difficult to tell and goes out of her way to meet people to hear their experiences.

*Ru*, *Man* and *Vi* are remarkable books but I hope that Kim Thuy will write her own story in the form of a memoir. The world needs to hear more about the experience of refugees, to understand and to be inspired to help others!

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### Petra says

I won this book in a GR Giveaway. Here is my honest review:



I loved this story. It's touching and felt real. A life of leaving one's home and fitting into a new home, mistakes made, stories left untold or unfinished made for a touching story. Vi's search for self, confidence and place made for terrific reading.

I really liked Kim Thuy's writing style. I haven't read her other book and plan to. Her sentences are short and yet state so much. The story is short, yet has a depth and span that goes beyond it's pages.

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