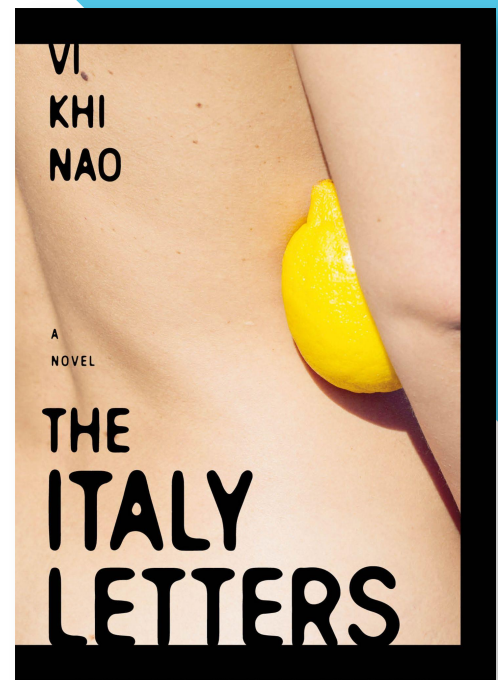


THE ITALY LETTERS

Vi Khi Nao

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“A magisterial and fearless force. *The Italy Letters* is a great current of longing that pulls the reader into the greater depths. Every page is suffused with the ache of longing. I absolutely loved it.”

— Christian Kiefer, author of *The Heart of It All*

“For years, Vi Khi Nao has been one of the most interesting and bewitching writers of an English sentence. With this book she expresses all the loneliness and longing and absurdity of what it's been like to live out this past decade in America, in sentences you want to lift off the page, put in your mouth, and swallow down whole.”

— Madeleine Watts, author of *The Inland Sea*

NOTE TO THE READER

A cult-favorite writer weaves a mesmerizing epistolary tale of a sensual queer love affair set against the backdrop of Las Vegas' gritty underbelly.

The Italy Letters is a slim, powerful shot of literary fantasia from one of America's best-kept secrets. Long an underground sensation, visionary writer Vi Khi Nao weaves an unforgettable and highly distinctive story of a love affair suffused with longing, erotic passion, and heartbreak—all while painting a picture of the gritty underside of Las Vegas.

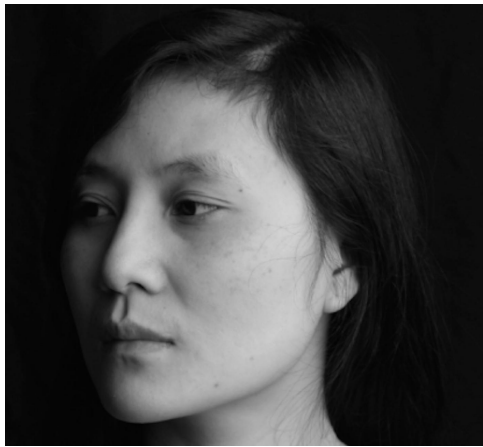
This beautiful and mesmerizing novel by a queer Vietnamese American writer is a brilliant and unclassifiable work of fiction that takes the form of a series of letters written by the unnamed narrator to her lover in Italy ... part of a stream-of-consciousness narrative that is by turns poignant, bawdy, funny, and disturbing—and often beautifully poetic.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is food's role in this novel? What does the narrator's connection with food tell you about her? How does food feature in the narrator's relation with her mother?
2. What is the role of money in this novel? How does money play into the journey of the narrator? How does it play into the relationship between the narrator and her lover? What do you think the author is trying to convey about capitalism?
3. Death and sex are juxtaposed constantly throughout the novel. What type of effect does this have on the reader?
4. What is the significance of this text being written in letters, and written in the second person? How does this impact the reading experience?
5. How does the narrator cultivate her identity? What is important to her? How do you think she would define herself?

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6. What is the role of art in this novel? How are the short stories, videos, and other media the narrator evokes vital to understanding these characters, their connection to the world, and this novel?
7. What is the effect of only having the narrator's perspective? How would the novel be different if each of the letters had responses?
8. What does the relationship between the narrator and her mother tell a reader about motherhood? Care? Love?
9. This novel is grounded in specific locations, but also has a sense of placelessness and wandering. How does this mirror the narrator's experiences? What does this convey about immigrant identities?
10. What role does yearning play in the narrator's life? Where is this yearning expressed within the text? What do each of the characters yearn for?
11. How does queerness play a role in the novel, and how does it relate to the theme of yearning? Has your perception of queerness changed throughout? Why or why not?
12. Passion and love are central themes throughout the novel. What is the difference between passion and love? Where are these emotions infused in the text? How do they enhance the reader's connection to the narrator?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vi Khi Nao was born in Long Khánh, Vietnam, and immigrated to the United States at a young age. Her work includes poetry, fiction, film, and cross-genre collaboration, and has been featured in periodicals such as *Conjunctions*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Chicago Review*, *Glimmer Train*, the *Baffler*, and *McSweeney's*, and in *The Best American Nonrequired Reading* anthology. A former Black Mountain Institute fellow, she lives in Iowa City.

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