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Monique Truong: The TNB Self-Interview

If you were not a writer, what would you be?

A bartender.

Thought you would say “a chef” because you so often write about food in your novels.

I think cooking for total strangers would be a nightmare. Cooking is very personal to me. I only want to share the dishes that I make with people who mean something to me.

And, my novels are not about food.

What are your novels about then?

I often don't know until I'm done writing them.

I think my third novel will be about hunger though.

You didn't answer the above question.

Astute of you to point this out.

If you could be fluent in another language, which one would it be?

I think about this all the time! Vietnamese is my first language; French my second (basic vocabulary words); English my third. All acquired before the age of eight. Now at forty-two, I can only claim fluency in English (and only after my first cup of coffee).

I would have to go with Spanish. I want to read Lorca and Neruda in the original. I want to have dinner with Marquez and tell him a funny story and vice versa.

You mentioned Lorca and Neruda, do you ever write poetry?

Nope. Never. Nada. Maybe.

What have you been reading recently?

I've been reading a blog called the Infinite Garage Project, www.infinitegarage.com. It chronicles a young Taiwanese American woman's efforts to sort through a three-car garage filled with her family's junk and treasures. Smart, funny, poignant, and full of the mysteries that are the members of our own family. Immigrants to the U.S. are notorious hoarders, as if we can make up for our lost places and languages with the stuff of the material world.

What do you hoard?

I belong to the small minority of immigrants/refugees who react to their displacement by aspiring to minimalism. I would love it if I only had one small suitcase worth of personal possessions. The key word here is "aspire." I'm, in fact, mired in clothes (because I always think, stupidly, that these items will change me and bring me happiness; you know, like how Don Draper thinks that women will do this for him), and I own way too many small bowls.

What is your most prized possession?

Good God. I have no way of answering this. I could write a novel around this idea though.

OK, let's narrow it down then. What is your favorite item of clothing?

It changes, but usually it's a scarf. Right now, it's a deep green and lavender scarf that's very big and long and covers up all my flaws.

How about your favorite kitchen gadget or appliance?

A very sharp, weighty knife. You really don't need anything else.

What's the equivalent of that for a writer?

A dictionary.

There's always a point during the writing of my novels when I no longer know for sure what some very common, everyday words mean. Everything is not confused. The opposite. The words are fresh again. (Like Don Draper after he takes a swim in the Pacific ocean.)

OK, that's the second reference to *Mad Men*. Do you have something you want to share with the readers of *The Nervous Breakdown* about the show?

Yes, I want the character Salvatore Romano to be written back into the show.

That's it?

Yup.

Do you think Mathew Weiner will see this?

No.

Upcoming reading dates:

11/6/10, 6 pm, Kehler Liddell Gallery, New Haven, CT

11/8/10, 8 pm, Franklin Park, Brooklyn, NY

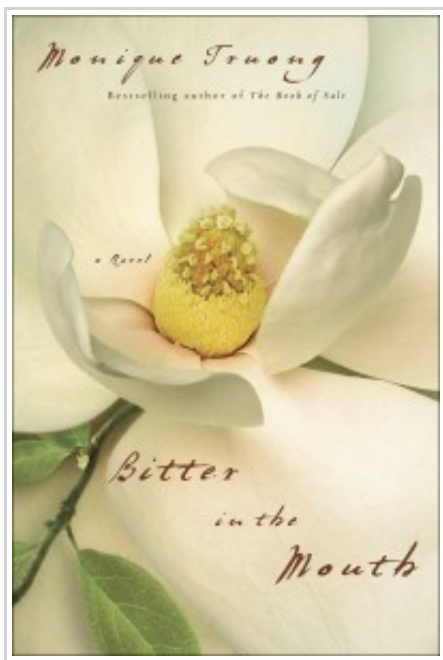
11/25/10, 8 pm, Literaturwerkstatt, Berlin, Germany

12/9/10, 7 pm, Behind the Book Reading Series (at KGB Bar), New York City

1/16/11, 7 pm, Sunday Salon Reading Series (at Jimmys No. 43), New York City

2/1/11, 7 pm, Villanova University, Villanova, PA

[Click here to learn more about Monique's much-anticipated second novel:](#)



TAGS: Bitter in the Mouth, Monique Truong, TNB Self-Interview

MONIQUE TRUONG was born in Saigon, South Vietnam and currently lives in New York City. She is the author of two novels, *Bitter in the Mouth* and *The Book of Salt*. Her first novel, *The Book of Salt*,

was a New York Times Notable Book and a recipient of the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, the Bard Fiction Prize, the Stonewall Book Award-Barbara Gittings Literature Award, and the 7th Annual Asian American Literary Award, among others. Truong was awarded a PEN/Robert Bingham Fellowship, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton, and is a 2010 Guggenheim Fellow.

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