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Judging the Book by Its Cover: Phantom Asian America in Monique Truong's Bitter in the Mouth

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Within the ongoing debate about what constitutes Asian America, recent "transracial adoption narratives" both act as a litmus test for "Asian Americanness" and introduce the ultimate Asian American phantom. Adoptees from Asia who find themselves in America, as new members of non-Asian families, may or may not feel Asian American, but they certainly "look the part." In literary texts too, such adoptee characters represent the phantasmatic other for "true" Asian Americans, since they openly defy biologist assumptions underlying racial categories. Among Asian American adoption stories, Monique Truong's recent novel "Bitter in the Mouth" (2010) is a case in point, in which its narrative complexity precisely highlights the issue of what constitutes Asian America. Truong's stance in the novel apparently wavers between the quest for the primordial "fixed origins," so common among adoption narratives, and a calculated elusiveness, translated in fictitious stories of origins. In this peculiar quest, the protagonist's racialized body is silenced for most of the novel. It may be argued that the narrative strategy chosen by Truong, by withholding, if not erasing, the "racial traces" in the text, actually foregrounds the very issue of "race." At the same time, Truong's avowed aim in writing this novel is to move from such one-dimensional understandings of human identity. For that purpose, she chooses to highlight synesthesia as the most defining feature in the protagonist. I will examine whether this strategy is successful and what consequences it has for our understanding of Asian America.

(43)

TOP

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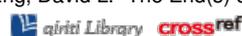
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From Monique Truong, the bestselling and award-winning author of *The Book of Salt*, comes a brilliant, mesmerizing, beautifully written novel about a young woman's search for identity and family, as she uncovers the secrets of her past and of history. Growing up in the small town of Boiling Springs, North Carolina, in the 70's and 80's, Linda believes that she is profoundly different from everyone else, including the members of her own family. 'What I know about you, little girl, would break you in two' are the cruel, mysterious last words that Linda's grandmother... Used availability for Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*. Hardback Editions. August 2010 : USA Hardback. Truong, Monique T. D. Edition Statement: 1st ed. Publication, Distribution, etc.: New York . Random House, (c)2010. Physical Description: 282 p. ;, 25 cm. Download *Bitter in the mouth* : a novel Monique Truong. leave here couple of words about this book: Tags: Essays. Games. Industrial psychiatry. Machine-readable bibliographic data. Portuguese Americans. Submarine disasters. *Bitter in the Mouth* is a brilliant, virtuosic novel about a young woman's search for identity and the true meaning of family. "What I know about you, little girl, would break you in two" are the prophetic last words that Linda Hammerick's grandmother says to her. Growing up in small-town North Carolina in the 1970s and '80s, Linda already knows that she is profoundly different from everyone else, including the members of her own family. Monique Truong's acclaimed novel questions our assumptions about what it means to be a family and to be a friend, to be foreign and to be familiar, to be connected to and disconnected from our bodies, our histories, ourselves. Look for special features inside. *Bitter in the mouth*. By the same author. *The Book of Salt*.

The latest Tweets from Monique Truong (@Monique_Truong). A refugee to the U.S. in '75, I'm a novelist: THE SWEETEST FRUITS (Viking, Sept. 3, 2019), bitter in the mouth (2010) & the book of salt (2003). New York, NY. Your intro is so moving, Eric! I cannot wait to read your fiction in progress. Happy to know that I had some part in tilling the soil for it to flourish.

<https://twitter.com/antericefigths/status/1189936556557111296> Monique Truong added, (a—j—)ãÉ ðŸ¥© Eric ðŸ¥© @antericefigths. i got to talk with @Monique_Truong about her new novel THE SWEETEST FRUITS <https://diacritics.org/2019/10/the-sweetest-fruits-a-conversation-with-monique-truong/> 1 reply 0 retweets 4 likes. Reply. Allen Iverson, an African American, is considered by America's dominant culture, white and middle-classed, to be a "thug." The media prefers to use the term "hip-hop icon" to describe the 6'1 guard of the Philadelphia 76ers. Brown explains how white America perceives Iverson as the epitome of everything they are not. Brown even attempts to answer the question as to why Iverson dresses and acts the way that he does saying, "Therefore, the unique stylizing, posing, clothing, and dialect that signify a hip-hop black masculinity is a way for young people to exercise power" (Brown 78). He also states that "in a patriarchy culture, black men's own bodies are the only aspect they have control over" (Brown 78).