

Seriously Questioning...Monique Truong

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House of SpeakEasy

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Monique Truong is the author of three novels—*The Book of Salt*, *Bitter in the Mouth*; and now, *The Sweetest Fruits*, and her work has been published in fifteen countries. Her awards and honors include the PEN/Robert Bingham Fellowship, the New York Public Library Young Lions Award, the Asian American Literary Award, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Rosenthal Family Foundation Award.

*On November 12th, she will be speaking at House of SpeakEasy's Seriously Entertaining show, **For Good Measure** alongside **Nina Burleigh, James Geary, and Maggie Paxson.***



What is your earliest memory involving reading or writing?

I remember reading thin paperbacks of Vietnamese legends and stories when I was growing up in S. Vietnam—so I would have been six or younger. I remember speeding through them, begging my mother to buy me more each week.

What is your favorite line from your current work?

First line of *The Sweetest Fruits*: "Patricio Lafcadio Hearn was born hungry."

It was also the first line that I wrote of this novel. To me, it's the key to understanding Hearn and how he behaved and interacted with the women, who in the TSF, narrate his life and theirs.

What is your favorite first line of a novel?

"You must not tell anyone," my mother said, "what I am about to tell you."

That's the first line of Maxine Hong Kingston's first novel *The Woman Warrior*. It entangles the reader in a secret, a pact, and the writer's violation of the same. It gives me chills each time I've read it.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Travel. It doesn't have to be very far. It could be to neighborhoods in your own city that you have little or limited knowledge of. No matter where, it's best if your dominant language is not the dominant or sole language of the locale. As writers, we should experience the day-to-day world without the privilege of our dominant language. It makes us think about language, appreciate the importance of it, and improvise. No better training to be a writer!

What writer past or present do you wish you could eat dinner with?

George Eliot

What writer do you wish you could share with the world?

The Vietnamese American poet Barbara Tran. I cannot wait for her first collection of poems! For now, the world can look for her prize-winning chapbook *In The Mynah Bird's Own Words* (Tupelo Press 2002), and her poems that have appeared in the *New Yorker* and elsewhere. She possesses what I aspire to: precision. Her words are the finest lines of ink; taken together they create a work so rich in detail, so saturated in possibilities, so fully imagined that it's breathtaking.

What are you reading right now?

The Unpassing, the impressive debut novel by Chia-Chia Lin. The narrative situates Asian American characters in Alaska with all of its vast emptiness and claustrophobic isolation.

