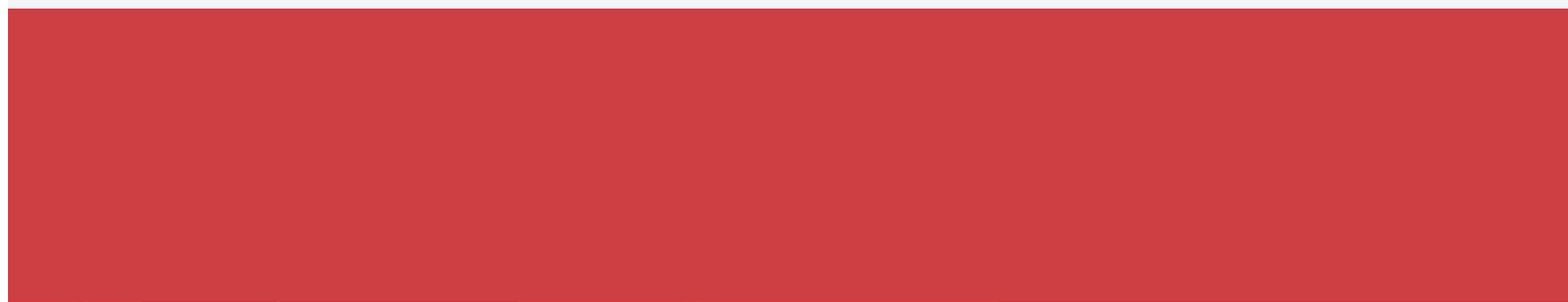
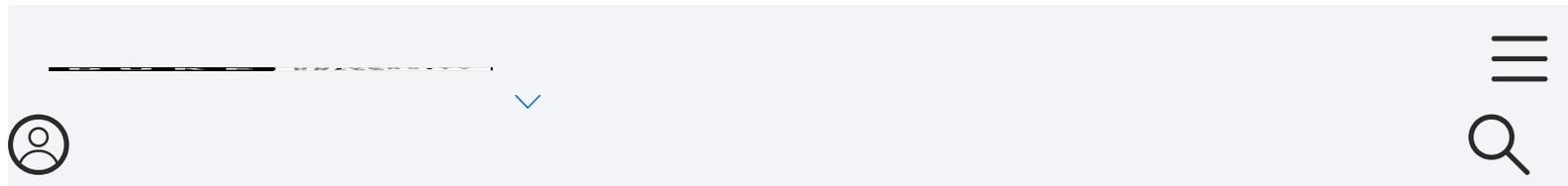


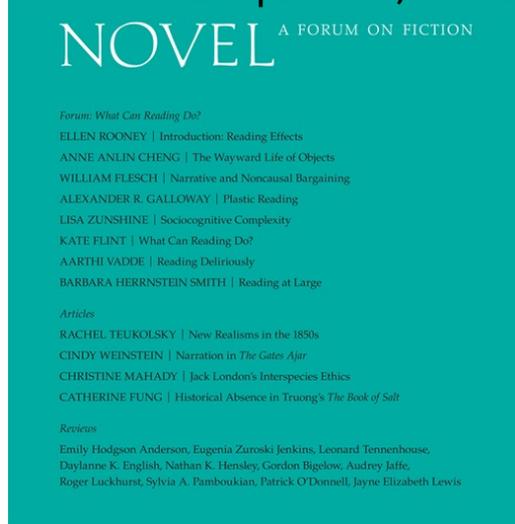
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Monique Truong's 2003 novel *The Book of Salt* is a fictionalized story of a gay Vietnamese chef who, while working in the household of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, briefly meets Paul Robeson and Ho Chi Minh. Rather than assume that the inclusion of historical persons constitutes markers of a story that can be categorized as historical fiction, this essay reads Truong's treatment of these figures as the vehicle through which she problematizes the act of giving a particular experience or subject historical presence. The essay explores how Truong uses Stein's modernist experimentation with referentiality toward her own critique of how events get represented, arguing that *The Book of Salt* plays with Steinian aesthetics in order to offer a critique of the structures of power that grant the racialized subject visibility. Paul Robeson and Ho Chi Minh become subjects of history not through presence but, contradictorily, through how they are made into "absent referents."

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