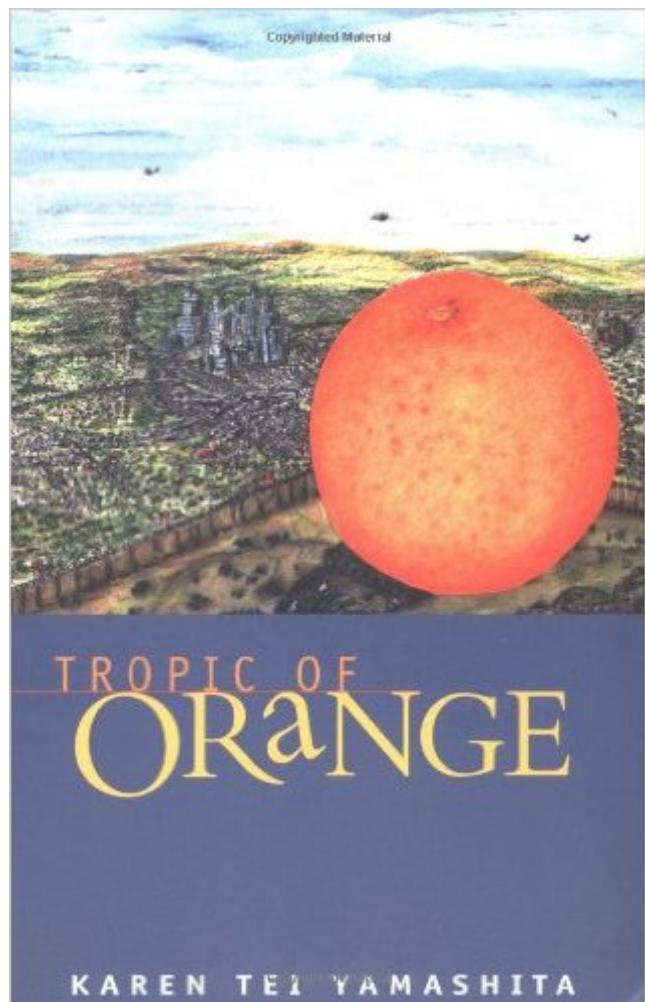


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Tropic Of Orange



Synopsis

This fiercely satirical, semifantastical novel ... features an Asian-American television news executive, Emi, and a Latino newspaper reporter, Gabriel, who are so focused on chasing stories they almost don't notice that the world is falling apart all around them. Karen Tei Yamashita's staccato prose works well to evoke the frenetic breeziness and monumental self-absorption that are central to their lives.-Janet Kaye, The New York Times Book Review

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I wrote my senior thesis on this book at UC Berkeley. The complexities of multiculturalism, borders and the constant movement of today are on display here. It also reminded me of the movie "Crash" but with more depth to the cast of characters. One line from the book sticks with me and appears in my thoughts from time to time: "...progress and other things in which they foolishly believed..." This concept of the "myth of progress" is a central theme of this novel, as it demonstrates how even though we're making strides in so many ways (technology, connecting across borders, knowledge/information), we're digressing in other ways (morals, human contact, wisdom). Although I loathed it while trying to articulate a thesis from it, I now look back with fondness and upon rereading it, have come to appreciate its depth.

Brilliant and beautiful! Definitely the best book about LA in the last ten years. Not your typical wannabe Hollywood drama or wild drug haze. This is the real Los Angeles. The structure is unlike anything I have ever seen in a book before. You can read it straight through, or follow the Hypertext

and follow each of the seven characters through their own experience. The plot is simply extraordinary, with touches of magical realism and noir fiction; an orange growing directly on the Tropic of Cancer makes its way north, completely disrupting everywhere between it and Los Angeles. Between the lines of the story is the complexities of culture and stereotypes in LA and the fragility of the town itself. Everyone should read this book!

I tried really hard to like this book. The topics addressed and style of writing should have been right up my alley. However, I found it to be without a doubt the dullest assigned reading of my college career, surpassed only by a statistics textbook. The plot as a whole sounds cartoonish, perfect (and not in a good way) for an over the top steroid-filled action movie. Oranges injected with heroine? Two trucks filled with different flammable fuels creating a diabolical fireball on the Los Angeles highway? A Mexican infant organ black market ring? If this is supposed to be satire, it failed horribly in delivery since the text also includes surreal scenes such as the shape-shifting fight and rape of Rafaela and the organ-stealer and pretty much any chapter with Arcangel. To her credit, Yamashita isn't a bad writer. Her descriptions are lovely and the buildup comes at a good pace. But I feel as though she tried too hard in this novel and ended up missing her point altogether. The ending especially feels as though she was trying for a big finish and came up short. But please take this review with a grain of salt. As you can see in the list of reviews, there were indeed people who enjoyed this book and it is worth reading, if only so you can say decisively that you don't like it.

I adore this book. I had to read this book for a writing class I was taking and I absolutely loved it. The plot is absolutely engrossing and the way Yamashita has used magic realism to address issues of our modern world is brilliant. I am considering writing a research paper (or senior thesis) on this book because there is just so much to analyze here. And on the plus side, it doesn't feel like work to read this book. If you're not interested in reading an academic, "literary" book, I think this book will still provide a lot of enjoyment for the casual reader.

Yamashita's book is an interesting study of the effects of technology on human interaction and emotion. She uses recent history to form her opinion: NAFTA is portrayed in a bad light as destroying tradition and spreading American materialism, and the Rodney King case makes the freeway assault seem not so much like fiction. The book is an easy read with a lot of thought-provoking symbolism, and it is also very pessimistic about 90's American culture. If it is seen purely as a worst-case scenario of the future of America, it is very effective. John Alexander

A brilliant novel about people and work in America, about immigrants and people whose families have been Americans for generations. About varieties of angels and how they rise. About what gets imported into the USA in addition to commodities and workers with their able, whole bodies. It's about the nature of homes, inhabiting, and keeping them--or not. This novel is very much about Los Angeles and very much about being American.

Tropic of Orange: The novel whisked me away to Los Angeles, Mexico, and San Diego. I jumped from place to place, traveling with an assortment of friends--black, white, Japanese, Vietnamese, Mexican--all good friends. Their flaws were glorious, their insanities loveable, their lives unforgettable. When they hurt, I cried. When they fought, I championed their battle, and when they vanished--the last page read--I returned to reality, unsettled and disoriented, requiring hours to regain my bearings. It's a rich, complex, and compelling story. It has a mixture of characters, a variety of locations, and a constantly shifting point of view--sometimes shifting on the same page. Physical and metaphysical, the story is reality-grounded with an ethereal thread knotting the characters together. But unlike other books, Tropic of Orange demands undivided attention. No skimming, no daydreaming, no hoping to get the gist of it...because you won't. If your focus strays, your mind wanders, or your eyes move ahead of your brain, glazing down the page without gleaning any meaning, then expect to be lost. "Wait. Who's talking? Where are we? What's going on?" For those with steadfast attention, the novel returns a profound, enveloping reward; a whirlwind trip with friends to southern California and Mexico.

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