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The Enclave in Judy Fong Bates's Midnight at the Dragon Café: From Prison to Creation

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Judy Fong Bates (1949-), a first-generation Chinese Canadian author, underlined that "most of the writing that has come out of the Chinese community has dealt with the urban setting [of Chinatowns in Vancouver and Toronto]. [T]here hasn't been that much about the small time [*sic*] experience" ("In Conversation" 121). Unlike her peers, she draws inspiration from this experience as a Chinese-born woman growing up in Ontario small towns, which precisely makes for the originality of her work and further complexifies the enclave theme that permeates her writing. Not only are many of her characters enclaved within the dominant Anglo-Canadian mainstream society due to their ethnicity, they are also doubly isolated because of their living in remote small towns and being the only Chinese Canadians there—compared to protagonists in urban Chinatowns, who still benefit from a sense of connection to their immediate surroundings and community. Besides, this circumscription somewhat reflects the situation of Bates's writing in both the Chinese Canadian and the Anglo-Canadian literary worlds.

Her novel *Midnight at the Dragon Café* (2004) focuses on a Chinese immigrant family in Canada: the narrator, Su-Jen, a young girl who lives with her parents Hin-Wun and Lai-Jing, and her half-brother—and mother's stepson—Lee-Kung (whom Su-Jen first thinks to be her mother's son and her own full brother). They are stuck in the only Chinese restaurant of a small town in the late 1950s and 60s, while a love affair develops between the mother and her stepson in this highly claustrophobic environment. The enclave thus takes on alienating spatial, temporal, social and psychological meanings for them, in an interrelation of literal and metaphorical representations of enclosure. Yet, the dynamics specifically fostered by the enclave eventually turn it into a *topos* of regeneration and opening up as well. I will broach this ambivalence first by centering on the ethnic confinement of the protagonists, who have to deal with orientalist representations of their Chinese identity while at the same time resorting to their own essentialist codes. This leaves the hyphenated Chinese Canadian daughter Su-Jen in an uncomfortable in-between position. I will analyze the way this is superimposed with domestic secrets festering behind the public dining room and transpiring beneath the surface of the text, be they about the characters' traumatic past and migration—Su-Jen ignoring everything about her relatives' past and the real family ties between them—or about the consequent illicit affair between Lai-Jing and Lee-Kung. The unsaid then underlies the narrative mechanisms of Su-Jen's young voice. However, I will finally demonstrate how such enclave-related tensions are linked to renewal for the characters, the narrative, and ethnic and

literary norms. This is achieved thanks to the frictions induced by the younger protagonists who open up the circumscribed territory and introduce movement in the diegesis and the *Bildungsroman* narrative. The phenomenon is reinforced by the mingling of temporal, spatial and intertextual strata in the enclosed *locus*, which is itself a source of creation and enables the writer to draw literary attention to the minor margin.

The ethnic enclave: circumscribing the deviant Other

The novel delineates a complex web of physical enclaves that work like Chinese boxes and parallel the characters' alienating sense of ethnic entrapment. Thus, the protagonists first have to follow a complicated trajectory from China to Canada, which is itself represented as a carefully self-enclosed territory. The country is wary of Asian foreigners and its borders are difficult to cross due to strict immigration laws that Su-Jen's father explains (188). In order to be allowed to move to Canada before WWI, Hing-Wun and his friend Uncle Yat had to pay a $500 head-tax—implemented to discourage Chinese immigration (15). After WWII, he then had to sponsor Su-Jen and her mother so that they were allowed to come, and it took a few years for them to finally cross the ocean in 1957 (81-82)—among other examples.[1]

Upon arrival, the protagonists then find themselves in an alien environment and have to move further to an isolated small town, Irvine, eventually ending up in the confined space of the only Chinese restaurant in the place. Su-Jen emphasizes the peculiar status of the small ethnic business and the sense of social and ethnic disconnection by describing it as "typical of so many Chinese restaurants in small towns across Canada [...], every one of them a lonely family business isolated from the community it served" (5, underl. mine). This entrapment transpires when the narrator recalls her arrival in Canada, repeating the italicized term *lo fon*—"Westerner," "foreigner" in Siyi Cantonese dialect—that typographically stands out (8). It thereby refers both to the white Anglophones surrounding the child at the airport, and in parallel visually frames the other words of the narrative on the page. This enclaving process is underlined by the depiction of the gradual journey further into Canada, from Toronto to Irvine to the Dragon Café in chronological order while the characters are gradually "swallow[ed]" by "the empty darkness" (12).

[1] For more information about Canadian anti-Chinese (immigration) laws, see Peter S. Li's work, *The Chinese in Canada*. In 1885, a federal anti-Chinese bill implemented a head tax for Chinese migrants; and from 1923 to 1947, the Chinese Immigration Act established extremely restrictive categories for the Chinese migrants who were allowed to enter the country, while those who were already in Canada had to register with the government and their coming back to Canada after a stay in China was controlled. Until 1967, restrictive immigration conditions were still applied to Asians.

Such a geographical circumscribing reflects the characters' being ostracized as oriental Others in a predominantly White Anglo-Canadian environment, the members of which essentialize and reify them. They consider them as inferior and extrinsic to their superior culture and impose alienating identity constructs on them, as Said analyzed about Orientalism (*Orientalism* 3-23). This appears when Su-Jen is repeatedly bullied and called "chink" because of her ethnic origins (42-47, 90). This essentialization is best exemplified by the Northern American representations of Chinese people in popular culture: "Hop Sing, the Chinese houseboy in *Bonanza*" (245), the servant "Peter on *Bachelor Father*" or the actress Nancy Kwan (254). These representations perpetuate the orientalist portrayal of Asians as either servile, dominated and weak males, or hypersexualized, seductive and deceitful "Dragon Ladies".[2] Their identity ends up being as circumscribed by Anglo-oriented norms as the restaurant where they live.

The place therefore appears to be what Foucault called "hétérotopie de déviation." It is a territory delineated within society, both in and out of it, connected to all the spaces that surround it but at the same time completely "other." More specifically, in "heterotopias of deviation," the dominant system keeps people whose behavior is considered "deviant" as it departs from the prevalent rules (Foucault 12-19). Thus, in a complex dialectic of attraction/repulsion, the Dragon Café is part and parcel of Irvine's community, a central landmark that hardly ever closes and where all different kinds of Anglo-Canadian townspeople come throughout the novel; yet, as the only Chinese place of Irvine, it is also alien in the eyes of the inhabitants, an inverted mirror of their own culture and identity constructs. Bhabha argued that Westerners ambivalently see the Others as both fetishes and phobias. The ethnic subjects are considered as desirable—Whites want to know and dominate them, and try to find their way back to a primitive, pure and common origin through them—and as repulsive and frightening—because such extrinsic subjects pose the threat of racial, cultural and color differences. The Anglo-Canadian community therefore approves of the restaurateur family members only as colonized "Others" who are yet knowable and visible at the same time. They have to be different from them but only slightly so, and their ethnic identity has to be tamed by and integrated into the Canadian surroundings—in a process Bhabha called "colonial mimicry." It enables the white inhabitants to preserve a sense of their own selves and clear social and racial landmarks through the warped mirror image that the Café dwellers and their restaurant enclave send back to them (Bhabha 70-75, 86).

[2] For a complete analysis of the portrayals of Asian Americans and Asian Canadians in Anglo-American and Anglo-Canadian literature and culture, see notably Elaine H. Kim, Rachel C. Lee and Jinqi Ling's works.

Foucault demonstrated that heterotopias are thus part of a dynamic of both opening and closing, making them simultaneously isolated and permeable to the outside world, as is the case of the Chinese family's restaurant. Anglo-Canadian patrons come and go in the dining room, and the entrance door represents the porous border of this heterotopic territory that the father then locks every night. The Café thereupon becomes a mysterious and hermetic place again for the rest of Irvine's community who ignores everything about the family's life and domestic secrets. Yet, in some heterotopias, because of this openness, the "guests" are under the illusion that they can easily enter and know the place and its dwellers. In fact, they remain excluded from its very core (Foucault 12-19), like the patrons in the restaurant. They only know the dining room and are never given access to the kitchen and the upstairs rooms where the Chinese characters' lives and sense of identity unravel in their full complexity. The English Canadian customers still erroneously believe that they know these fetishized Others' identity. They think Su-Jen and her relatives have adapted to and processed the cultural constructs and representations that they wish to impose on them. Hence, Su-Jen remarks that "[t]o the people of Irvine, we [her family and she] must have seemed the perfect immigrant family. We were polite, hard-working, unthreatening and we kept to ourselves. [...] [W]e blended so seamlessly into their everyday life, we remained invisible" (112). The delusory and simplifying quality of this belief is underlined by the verb "seemed." The intercultural contact that is made possible in the public room of the Café's supposedly "open" heterotopia thus eventually proves to be dysfunctional. It instead reinforces the psychological enclaving and alienation of the characters.

Besides, the family's restaurant is not a thriving business and their poor background alienates them from a part of the other Chinese Canadians who have better positions. For instance, Lee-Kung's marriage prospect with the daughter of another small-town restaurateur Chinese couple fails because of the gap between their social statuses. The family has to undergo the humiliation of being looked down upon again, but not by Anglo-Canadians this time. They also suffer from their being geographically far from the larger Chinese community of Toronto's Chinatown, thereby missing a sense of collective identity and articulation. The Chinatown is itself an ethnic enclave; yet, unlike the restaurant enclave, it is a comforting space for the ethnic subjects who are surrounded by their community and feel protected by it. The only link the characters entertain with it consists in the few trips they occasionally take throughout the novel to visit Lai-Jing's family there, and Pock Mark's visits to Irvine with his truck to sell products from Chinatown to the remote families (34, 63-64, 145-150).

This leads them to identity closure: they adopt essentialist anti-White positions in the same way Whites behave towards them. They metaphorically enclave Anglo-Canadians back (so to write) and simultaneously bolster their own situation as separate from mainstream society. They resort to the opposition us/they from the very beginning, with expressions such as "We

Chinese" (9), against the omnipresent derogative term "*lo fon*," to pit one community against the other. For instance, Lai-Jing uses reifying insults in reaction to some Whites' abuse, notably calling them "dead ghost kids," "dead ghost hag," or "dead drunken ghosts" in Chinese (43, 46, 245). She complains about their different smell, hairiness, diet, and sweatiness (91), reducing them to only a few physical, unpleasant characteristics. The Chinese characters consequently enclose themselves in their own "garrison mentality" (Frye 225-231)[3] in their fort-like ethnic enclave. They seek the reassuring circumscription of Chinatown, the only place where the mother feels that "She belong[s]" (193).

Su-Jen accordingly falls victim to her being Chinese Canadian, in an uneasy position between her Chinese family and the white English Canadian world. She has what William Du Bois called a "double self" made of two conflicting identity stances (Du Bois 16-17).[4] She is indeed torn, for instance, between her mother's traditional Chinese interpretations of how the world works and what she learns in science at school (41-42, 116-117, 212), or between the Chinese myths her father tells her and the Christian biblical stories she discovers at church (62-63). She ends up feeling utterly lost, amid unsolvable cultural antitheses that are emphasized through syntactic parallels: "It didn't seem to matter whether I was spoken to in English or in Chinese. The more I was told, it seemed the less I understood" (41-42, underl. mine). Her school represents the Western double of the Chinese confined territory. It is also depicted as an enclave of a sort—albeit a peaceful, desirable one. It is on top of a hill surrounded by water, and is made of a succession of imbricated rooms to cross before eventually reaching one's final destination—the principal's office or the classroom (22-24, 27). Thus, Su-Jen herself is in turn enclaved between the two cultural blocks, fully mastering the rules of neither one at first. The paradox is reinforced by her parents who proudly stress the fact that she is "Westernized" and able to assimilate and succeed in the Anglophone world (71, 99, 130, 149, 239, 313); while they then reproach her with "becoming too much like the *lo fons*" (120).

Conversely, she is often reminded of her alien oriental status by her schoolmates, who underline the fact that she cannot star in the school musical because of her Asian origins, for example (210). In addition to her "double self," she therefore develops a "double consciousness" (Du Bois 16-17), as dominant identity constructs are superimposed on her own sense of identity. She accordingly looks at herself through the orientalist vision that Westerners have of her,

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[3] Northrop Frye coined the phrase "garrison mentality" to depict the enclave culture that developed in Canada in white fort towns. Such towns turned into psychological enclaves and are omnipresent in Canadian literature. He used the concept to analyze the complex psychological dialectics that appear when individuals in small towns are confronted to the hostile natural world outside. I am applying it to analyze ethnic literature, as the enclaving process and feeling prove to be similar here.

[4] Du Bois used this concept to describe the African-American experience. However, it has then commonly been used in ethnic studies to describe what other minorities are going through in Northern America, as identity and power dynamics between mainstream society and different ethnic subjects are similar.

which leads to self-alienation and rejection. She is ashamed of her family's restaurant and way of life, while longing to live in her classmates' Western environment and to be a typical blond-haired and blue-eyed white girl "like everyone else" (60). The Anglo-Canadian norms thus represent what Said described as a desirable "affiliative order", which in fact end up reinforcing hegemony essentialist constructs that already existed in the Chinese "filiative order" (*The World* 16-20).[5] As a result, she psychologically enclaves her ethnicity, just as her Chinese name disappears beneath her English one—she is ironically named "Annie," after the character of *Annie Get Your Gun* played by the white and blond actress Betty Hutton in a Wild West story (22). Her memories of China "bec[o]me distant, almost forgotten" (13), and her level in Chinese stagnates while she turns fluent in English (48, 61).

Yet, the ethnic self-articulation of the characters—already made difficult because of orientalist issues in the public territories out of the restaurant and in the dining room—is further complexified by personal issues transpiring in the domestic space of the Dragon Café.

The enclosure of domestic tragedies: past traumas, familial taboos and self-alienation

Behind the circumscribed public area of the restaurant's dining room, the family's hidden private territory is itself made of interrelated enclaved rooms which reflect the characters' mental maps and traumas, and alienation from each other. The readers discover the Dragon Café as Su-Jen's detailed description takes them deeper and deeper through a series of interconnected rooms (17-18)—each one encompassing another one, each one full of secrets in the image of the mysterious "buckets and jars" and "boxes" cluttering the stairs and landing (17). The passageways between each enclosed space are all depicted as well and the notion of crossing borders is highlighted through prepositions (underlined in the following quotes), still in an opening/closing dialectic. In parallel, the progression in this succession of rooms gets more and more complicated because of obstacles or recalcitrant doors as we get closer to the domestic nerve center of the heterotopia, farther away from the part open to the outside world. It starts with the dining room, then goes "through a swinging door to the kitchen" (16). It evolves with a "door [that] opened off the kitchen into a cramped hall" (17) and carries on in the same mode through all the rooms. The description ends with a landing and a "windowless foyer" also full of boxes, opening onto three small bedrooms—while the walls enclosing them are mentioned repeatedly (18). This stifling spatial organization both participates in, and is a

[5] Affiliation relies on culture and society instead of family. It has come to refer to the links immigrants make with the new society in which they have immigrated, unlike the filiative link with their country of origin.

metaphor of, the characters' own alienated feeling of mental confinement. This is made worse by all the repressed traumas and secrets that they have tried to repress in mental enclaves, but which they have not managed to suppress—and which thus rise up to the surface through the subconscious antechambers.

The adult protagonists have notably locked away their traumatic memories of Communist China. However, it proves impossible for them to erase this past and the historical events linked to the Chinese Revolution that have precisely driven them to move to Canada. There are several references to that pre-Canadian time, which are certainly brief, never explained in detail, but repeated, and which thus pervade the diegesis: Su-Jen and her mother fleeing China (7), the Chinese star Hung Sing Nu being prevented from returning to Hong Kong by the Communists and "forced to make propaganda movies" (50)… Beside this historical past, there are hints to personal tragedies that further participate in the characters' alienating attempts to keep the past at bay, as both Lai-Jing and Hin-Wun have lost their former spouses and first-born sons (238-240, 246). These dead relatives still "ha[ve] a grip on [Su-Jen's] family, the shadow of their presence always felt" (238). As the ghostly term "shadow" suggests, the repressed eventually recurs in an "uncanny" way, through haunting processes (Freud 217-256). For instance, Su-Jen and her mother think they see strangely familiar—and exceedingly frightening—"underwater ghosts" (56, 117) and "demons" (211, 212) coming back to the surface of the stygian river in front of the school. This signals the presence of the dead they have left behind in China but also the recurrence of the traumatic historical past which always threatens to reemerge to "drag [them] in and pull [them] down" (56).

The characters have even locked away the contrapuntal happy memories they have, deprived as they are of any possibility to relive them or to create new ones in the mortiferous lives they lead. They let them out only during moments that are carefully circumscribed in time, for instance when they listen to Chinese opera on Sundays (50-52). This protective enclaving is symbolized by Lai-Jing's precious Chinese cloth which she keeps hidden in her Hong Kong suitcase, and which she only seldom takes out (49). Su-Jen consequently feels excluded as she cannot have direct access to her family's past, and intergenerational transmission fails. There are gaps in her own self-articulation since she becomes alienated from her own relatives. They turn into "strangers" for her when she catches glimpses of this exclusive past which "fe[els] unfathomable," making her "feel small and insignificant" (89).

The lexical field of entrapment throughout the novel best illustrates the resulting alienation that they feel—because of both public ethnic isolation and personal traumas. Su-Jen's mother keeps complaining that she is notably "stuck in this town life" (51), "in prison for the rest of [her] life" (106). She and her relatives therefore seem to be in a suspended state. Because of their heterotopic ethnic and personal in-betweenness and the consequent repetitive, toiling life

they lead, not only are they out of mainstream space, they are also out of time in a reifying and petrifying process. This temporal and psychological fixity even seems to prevent them from ageing over the years. Su-Jen underlines that her "parents' appearances didn't change" (47), while her mother reflects that "Nothing ever changes. You begin to feel like the walking dead" (237). They experience a heterochronic form of temporality—corresponding to the spatial heterotopia of the Café—which Foucault described as "a kind of absolute break with their traditional time" (17, transl. mine).[6]

This death-in-life withdrawal is also related to the parents' alienation from each other, while they yet have to put up with each other in a stifling environment. Their disconnection and enclaving is best represented through closing gestures, for example when they respectively "clos[e] the door" and "shut the door" after a quarrel, in a parallel isolating process emphasized by the repetition of "door" (109). Su-Jen is thus literally and metaphorically caught between her parents just as she is caught between two cultures, serving as a separation and go-between element: she notably remarks that "[she] was like a wall in the middle of the double bed" (18).

When Lee-Kung, Hin-Wun's son and Su-Jen's half-brother, settles in the Dragon Café and starts an affair with his stepmother, this relationship gives an outlet to their unvoiced desires, loneliness and frustration. The illicit couple's complicity starts in the public dining room and on the street (69-70, 72-73) and gradually develops in the kitchen (80-81). It eventually reaches its climax and sexual release in the most private and confined areas of the restaurant, at the very end of the succession of rooms: namely, on the fire-exit and in Lee-Kung's upstairs bedroom (100-111). This spatial circumscription is paralleled by linguistic circumscription—Lai-Jing and Lee-Kung talk in "a private language" (101)—and temporal circumscription. The relationship always unfolds in the middle of the night, a moment enclosed both within and out of the daily toiling routine—just like the secrets it fosters—echoing the title *Midnight at the Dragon Café* (underl. mine).

Thus, the pseudo-secret of their affair is left encased, festering and muffled even though it is known by everyone. It threatens to bring dishonor to the whole family—all the more so when Su-Jen's mother gets pregnant, and when Lee-Kung gets married—and increases the pre-existing tensions. This silencing stems from Confucian traditional family and honor values, as explained by Judy Fong Bates herself. Hin-Wun never mentions the issue "because it's an affair between his wife and his son, and if this affair were to be declared, the loss of face would be much greater than bearing the secret," while "it's the [Chinese] notion of family happiness that allows this family to keep that secret" ("In Conversation" 123). This echoes the narrator's words: "In good Chinese families certain things were never said. To do so was to violate the face of the

[6] "une sorte de rupture absolue avec leur temps traditionnel" in the original version.

family, a sin of the gravest order" (138). This system proves too oppressive, as metaphorically highlighted by Su-Jen, who refers to "the iron yoke of [their] family code, weighing [them] down and locking [them] in [their] places" (139, underl mine). The family thus seems to function as a self-sufficient group with its own rules attuned to the heterotopic environment where the characters live, which further isolate them on a psychological level. The lexical field of secrecy, of "the unspeakable" (215), is therefore to be found everywhere in the novel: Su-Jen "carried a terrible secret that [she] could never tell anyone" (111), "something never to be given voice" (215), sharing it with her father. She is consequently alienated by this mental enclaving—"I no longer felt the same, haunted by the secret that I kept" (113)—and further isolates herself from her roots—"I began to withdraw slowly from my family" (112).

This secrecy conditions the narrative, in which nothing is revealed in a straightforward way, but is rather obliquely suggested. The secret affair gradually transpires between the lines. For instance, it appears when Lee-Kung cooks Lai-Jing's favorite dishes (138, 252, 304), and when songs parallel their mood—notably Elvis's "Can't Help Falling in Love" on the jukebox (215-216). Yet, the best illustration of this narrative enclaving/revealing process is the way the weather mirrors the emotional evolution of Lee-Kung and Lai-Jing's sulfurous relationship, and the consequent strain on the family. For example, the unbearable heat wave hitting Irvine one summer is the metaphor of the rising sexual tension between the two characters, as well as the increasing tensions between Lai-Jing and her husband, and Lee-Kung and his father. It is all the more so as the latter has managed to find a mail-order bride for his son (91-94, 98, 100-102, 105, 108-109). The heat revealingly reaches the second floor—the most private part of the restaurant, where the liaison will mature at the same time—and leads Su-Jen's father to leave the bed he used to share with his wife (94). The sexual and emotional tension eventually breaks out during a violent thunderstorm when Su-Jen discovers her mother and half-brother making love (110). In the same way, Lai-Jing's consequent abortion, and her pregnancy later on, are only suggested at first. The truth is eventually clearly revealed and the word "pregnant" is explicitly used only towards the end of the novel (284).

Su-Jen's narration "(en)circles" the topic in such a way also because of her internal focalization as a child gradually entering teenagehood, and therefore herself enclaved in an in-between position in terms of age and emotional maturity. Her "narrated I" thus only gradually understands what is happening between her mother and half-brother, first sensing—only "suspecting and dreading" (284)—that something is awry beneath the surface but not being able to put it into words. Her emotional immaturity transpires when she does not understand the sexual innuendoes and jokes her friends Charlotte and Wendy regularly exchange, feeling excluded from their more mature conversations (206, 208). She consequently "fe[els] uncomfortable, but [...] c[a]n't explain why" when she observes her mother's and Lee-Kung's

behavior toward one another (73), hence her recording the events in a suggestive but never explicit way until she discovers the truth about their real family ties and affair.

As a result, Su-Jen has to come of age metaphorically, while the enclave-state of her family has to be overcome to unlock the alienating stasis of the characters and of the narrative itself.

Creativity out of imprisonment: re-centering the margin, opening up the enclave

The enclave of the Dragon Café eventually becomes the stage for a heterotopic opening-closing dialectic that precisely turns it into a space of (re)creation and subversion. Thanks to it, new dynamics are hatched in the diegesis and in the Anglo-Canadian literary world.

Within the diegesis, the younger and freer newcomers who join the family to help in the restaurant mirror and strengthen this dialectic by bringing in new ideas. They introduce movement and change into the rigid structure of the family, irremediably altering its rules. The resulting friction specifically induced by this contact between evolutionary trends and the imprisoning environment paradoxically turns the latter into a place of disclosure, crisis and consequent renewal. The young and modern Lee-Kung best illustrates this tendency. After his arrival to replace Uncle Yat, he first manages to make his father change the menu to adapt to the outside customers' demands, only after an extensive argument between the two, which foreshadows the deeper changing process to come within the Café (78-81). The eruption of this character from the parents' past in China leads to the revelation of the family's dark secrets for Su-Jen, the only one who ignored everything about it. The young narrator thus learns that her parents had been married to other spouses and got widowed before getting married together, having her and migrating. She discovers that they had respective first-born sons from their previous marriages and that each died in China, Hin-Wun even being responsible for the drowning of Lai-Jing's first child—accounting for her subsiding resentment. Eventually, Su-Jen understands that Lee-Kung was born from Hin-Wun's first wife, and is thus only her half-brother and Lai-Jing's stepson (and not her full-brother and Lai-Jing's son) (87-89, 298-240).

Moreover, in chain reactions, it is precisely the claustrophobic heterotopian situation which leads to his affair with Lai-Jing, and it is the consequent illegitimate pregnancy which will eventually lead Lai-Jing to leave Irvine first. Hin-Wun then indirectly agrees to move his family out to Toronto's Chinatown, after first acknowledging Lai-Jing's and Lee-Kung's baby as his own. This is a first step out of the social and ethnic enclave that is at the root of such a liberation at the same time (308, 313-314). This building up of tension fostered by the restaurant's enclosed environment triggers Su-Jen's gradual speaking up about the affair until she eventually reveals everything, unlocking it (237, 302). Although it does not change the

situation immediately, it cuts Lee-Kung's string of lies towards his wife Mai-Yee (303)—a liberating process of a sort. In conclusion, the enclave atmosphere ambivalently serves as a cradle and a catalyst for the characters' refreshing reactions and evolution. Yet, there is no denying that this is much more noticeable for the younger generation than for the older adults who, despite their evolution, cannot entirely escape their stifling lives and the codes ascribed to/by their ethnic community.

Unlike her parents, the young Su-Jen is thus the central element in the interplay of tension and liberation. Her focalization from an enclaved minority position is the trigger for her acute narrative about both the Café's territory and the dominant society. Bates uses her and her situation as a tool to depict and challenge both worlds. Thus, as to the common experience of children whose parents do not master the dominant language, the writer highlighted that "what it makes you do as an immigrant child is, you examine other households and it makes you envious. It may be very unhealthy, but it sharpens out the observer's eye" ("In Conversation" 122, underl. mine). Then, Su-Jen has to learn how to navigate worlds as she gradually grows up, undergoing a process of "development of character from early adolescence to young adulthood" that is typical of *Bildungsromans* (Kleinbord Labovitz 2). She is increasingly depicted as going out and farther away from the restaurant with her friend Charlotte, riding her bike (184, 193-196). At the same time, she opens up to Western art—Emily Dickinson (181-182), Tolstoy (230), Michelangelo (232), among others—which enriches her familiarity with the Chinese artistic tradition. Most importantly, she becomes a translator between English and Chinese for her relatives (37, 244, 275). She becomes the perfect embodiment of a hyphen with the outside world, gradually turning into an active plural subject.

Asian American *Bildungsromans* thus combine both Northern American and Asian frameworks in the identity-formation process of the protagonists, in order to reshape conventional narratives and portray a new form of all-inclusive "Americanness" (Chu 6-7), which is equally valid for "Canadianness" and Asian Canadian literature.[7] This is the functioning of the enclave territory of the restaurant, which delineates frontiers to be traversed both ways, that forces Su-Jen to cross such borders. She follows her drive to leave the stifling environment; and yet, she comes back to it to find her roots and digest what she has learned

[7] Here, "American" can be understood in the larger sense of the term, to refer to "Northern American" elements in general, and not only to the United States, while "Americanness" is to be seen as "Northern Americanness," which includes (Asian) Canadians. The point is not to overlook the cultural, historical and literary differences between Canada and the United States, of which I am aware. However, in Asian American and Asian Canadian studies, Asian American criticism is often applied to Asian Canadian literature, as anti-Chinese legislation and orientalist representations were at work in both countries. The same logic underlies the relevance of my resorting to Boelhower's analysis of American ethnic literature (pp. 13 and 16 of this article).

outside. The enclosed Café ambivalently becomes the *locus* of her self-creation as a hybrid subject who transcends essentialist constructs. Charlotte's mother therefore underlines: "you *are* a Canadian girl, Annie" (183). This emphasizes the insertion of her ethnic identity within the white Anglo-Canadian environment, thereby forcing the mainstream to include her and her complex, moving identity while deconstructing the marginal position of the enclave. As Boelhower argued, ethnic subjects thus achieve the subversion of the norm from within the norm because they master and mix the rules of both worlds (Boelhower 31, 93, 104, 135-139). In the end, she has managed to find some harmony between the different threads of her identity that never stop intersecting in new ways—performing ethno- and autogenesis in the heterotopia itself. Su-Jen's narration moves forward and backward through time thanks to prolepses and analepses—to take up Genette's narrative concepts—which is evidence of her mastering heterotopic creativity and identity-formation.

In female *Bildungsromans*, according to Pin-chia Feng, the ethnic heroine "needs to conquer the terrors of the ghostly return of the past into her present and to exorcise the repressed memories so that her 'growth' can continue" (22-23), which Su-Jen has achieved. Her past is still enclaved in her memories, but she is now able to go back to it whenever she wishes, in a more peaceful way. Whether she "sometimes choose[s] to go there", or whether "the journeys are [...] unexpected," this is an open enclosing, a "distant" yet accessible "place" (315). The narrative stages the retrieving of this heterotopic past: it becomes "a textual space to exorcise the ghost of the past" at work before the readers (Feng 8). The enclave consequently turns into a creative trope, if only because it is the main material on which the narrative relies.

More specifically, Su-Jen's analeptic adult voice mingles with her child's voice. This is proof that she has eventually mastered the navigation between temporal and ethnic strata, hence multiple interventions of the "narrating I" that comments on the story and adds hints from its encased position in the main narrative. It thereby toys with the readers' expectations, hiding and revealing elements at the same time. The adult narrator starts the novel with the description of the "three possessions from [her] childhood" (1). Thanks to the mention of these possessions, she proleptically alludes to what would happen to her as a child and would make her grow up (migration, the drowning of her friend...) (1-3). She then lets the child's voice take over in the long analeptic narrative starting in "1957" (5). She resurfaces in this narrative to comment upon Lee-Kung's arrival and hint at future turning-points in the story: "As I look back I understand how much our lives changed the day Lee-Kung walked into the Dragon Café" (66, underl. mine). She reflects that "the faith [she] once had in him now feels like a stone in [her] chest" and analyzes the "foolish innocence" of the "narrated I" of the time (74, underl. mine). The double-voiced narrative works the same way about Charlotte's future death, mentioning it beforehand while highlighting Su-Jen's ignorance as a child: "What I didn't know

was how cruel the gods could be and how they would entwine her fate with mine" (234, underl. mine). This gradual disclosure of developing secrets, while never directly giving them away, enjoyably heightens suspense. Most importantly, it parallels the unraveling of the story—itself based on the opening/closing enclave *topos*—in metatextual mises en abyme, and adds creative impetus to the novel.

Besides, the Foucauldian heterotopic and heterochronic nature of the restaurant also enables the juxtaposition of different spaces and periods of time within its physical and narrative enclosed territory, turning it into a dynamic trigger of hybridity. The Dragon Café thus offers both Anglo-American and Chinese food, and is the *locus* where the multiple references to the historical events in Communist China mingle with mentions of the Cuban Missile Crisis and President Kennedy's political stance (267-268), for example. Meanwhile, the characters' past, present and future—embodied by the new generation, Su-Jen and her baby brother Daniel—intersect. It thereby defies the dominant clear-cut temporal and spatial distinctions (Foucault 17), and also deconstructs the frontier between the private and the public, the personal and the political, home and world. This is what Bhabha defined as "the unhomely", the moment when "[t]he recesses of the domestic space become site for history's most intricate invasions" (9). This unhomeliness gives a new disorienting vision in the essentialist dominant culture, and renegotiates the power of cultural difference. This feature is characteristic of heterotopias like the Dragon Café, which reflect, challenge and reverse the relationships and norms of the dominant society that circumscribes them, and denounce as a sham the outside places in which life is compartmentalized into different categories (Foucault 14, 15, 19). In the novel, the restaurant does so through the superimposition of these seemingly incompatible layers.

This opening up of essentialist assumptions in the ambivalent enclosed Café is strengthened by intertextuality—to take up Genette's terminology again. The restaurant is the place where different elements merge from (literary) canons and popular culture, China and Western countries, oral and written sources. This happens when the characters tell or read Shao Kun's traditional myth and Biblical stories (62-63), Chinese newspapers and magazines (73, 81, 84, 146, 256, 281-282, 303) and American comic books (84), or even *Gone with the Wind* (264)... It echoes what the novel itself achieves, since Su-Jen's narrative includes references to Western tales to describe her surroundings and other characters, such as "Hansel and Gretel" (178-179) or "The Shoemaker and the Elves" (204). She, an ethnic young girl, even identifies with the Biblical male and white figure of Jonah, while comparing the circumscribed upstairs part of the restaurant to the mouth of the whale (242). It consequently turns the Chinese enclaved domestic area of the novel into a Western Biblical *topos* and undermines generic and ethnic boundaries. This leads to a rewriting and an inversion of ethno-centered traditional references. It occurs on two levels: it integrates Chinese works in the English narrative so as to open up

the Western codes, and introduces Western metanarratives in the novel in a way that sheds new light on them. In addition, this enclave-based merging of different intertextual and historical references (as developed above) is typical of what Linda Hutcheon referred to as "historiographic metafiction." It highlights the fact that history is necessarily a construct, like fiction, and thereby undermines the illusion of the pseudo-truthful white-centered and centralizing vision of historical events (Hutcheon 3-32). The novel thus re-centers the ex-centric Chinese Canadian disadvantaged margin by specifically focusing on such enclave-related phenomena.

The novel itself consequently works as a heterotopic literary unit. It is framed within the white Anglo-Canadian literary world and its literary and identity assumptions, written in English but by an ethnic female writer and focusing on ethnic characters evolving in a minor territory. Besides, it is also enclaved by Asian Canadians' essentialist expectations about the representation of their own community—as appears in Maria N. Ng's criticism of the novel.[8] Like many minority writers, Judy Fong Bates therefore doubly "bear[s] the burden of representation," as Pilar Cuder Domínguez remarked during her interview of the writer ("In Conversation" 124). Yet, by choosing to write about the small-town experience of Chinese Canadian subjects, the author explained that she aimed at depicting a reality that is underrepresented by Chinese Canadians—a reality hidden under a "cloak of invisibility" ("In Conversation" 121)—while also transforming it into something more universal ("In Conversation" 125). She used the enclave motif to re-center it in turn, in parallel transmuting it into the very root of her writerly inspiration and literary creation. She thus pointed out that her own and her characters' in-between enclave-related situation is "a curse" but "a blessing" as well since "it is out of that hyphenated situation that someone like [her] writes" ("In Conversation" 124). Likewise, the circumscribed position of the resulting novel in the Canadian literary landscape in fact becomes the very element that shapes its creativity and revisiting power. It precisely makes it part and parcel of Asian Canadian literature while reconsidering the norms of this literature. It is indeed precisely the Canadian product of the very boundaries imposed by the Canadian cultural framework on it and on the ethnic subjects Judy Fong Bates chose to depict. This dynamics is typical of ethnic literature, which Boelhower analyzed in the U.S. and which proves to be working in the same way in Bates's Chinese Canadian situation (Boelhower 9-10).

It follows that, at the end of the novel, some of the characters and of the canonic rules have evolved from circumscribed stasis to creative impetus, prying codes open from within the

[8] In her article "Chop Suey Writing: Sui Sin Far, Wayson Choy, and Judy Fong Bates," she notably asserted that the novel misrepresents the Chinese Canadian community by giving only a reified, incomplete and static portrayal of the ethnic group and thus fails to account for the dynamics and variety of the community.

excentric, in order to both challenge and celebrate the enclave *topos*. The adult characters, most notably the parents, remain marked by dark undertones, and the novel is permeated with a somber atmosphere. However, Su-Jen's voice and the ending are open and brighter for the younger generation, embodied by the hyphenated and creative daughter and her newborn baby brother. Through the rewriting and interweaving of diverse cultural, temporal, spatial, narrative and literary threads, the novel manages to question the marginality of the enclave. In parallel, it also reveals and underlines the powerful ambivalence of its destructive yet protective and inventive power. As Judy Fong Bates quite optimistically wrote to conclude her novel, linking the enclave of the past (symbolized by the ice isolated beneath the surface) with soothing and comforting characteristics, through Su-Jen's voice pondering over her childhood memories: "the ice underneath is thick. We are safe" (315, underl. mine).

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