
Aporetic Origins in Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*: (Dis)orientation Across Borders

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Abstract

The Chinese-American novel *Bone* (1993) by Fae Myenne Ng focuses on a Chinese-American family after the suicide of the second daughter. Through analepses, the narrator and oldest sister steps across timelines to unearth their pasts. I will resort to postcolonial and postmodern criticism to study how the novel toys with the notion of borders and origins, presenting various interpretations and stories, so as to renegotiate identity boundaries and possibilities. I will highlight the characters' attempts to dodge and silence the sources of their traumas. The narrative is thus based on ellipses, and Ona's suicide leads to the gradual unveiling of the characters' hardships, as they had to enter (illegally) in the US and/or survive in the stifling environment of San Francisco's Chinatown and of family taboos. Using historians' works and Chinese-American criticism, I will underline how/why the stories are intertwined with (silenced) history about Chinese migration to Northern America. Their secrets and their oppressive environment-and their attempts to leave these behind-consequently lead the protagonists to alienation. I will accordingly investigate their need to retrieve the past-embodied by the search for the bones of their "paper" (grand)father-and to pinpoint the cause of the family's unhappiness. The narrative therefore consists in filling gaps in a complex quest in which gender and cultural codes, the personal and the political, the past and the present, intersect and "revisit" clear identity boundaries and historical assumptions. Yet, this hunt for origins actually blurs borders and underscores the impossibility of finding one single beginning or fixed answers. I will examine the endless creativity and mobility that it triggers for the characters, who have to redefine their (hi)stories and eventually accept and "re-member" the plurality of their identities. This reflects how the heteroglossic narrative questions rigid dominant expectations and American literary norms by offering multiple digressions and viewpoints.

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