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Otherness and Assimilation: The Poetry of Double-consciousness in the Works of Charles Simic,
Marilyn Chin, and Susan Atefat-Peckham

A Thesis

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Master of Arts
In
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by

Katie Kidder

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother for always encouraging me to keep at it, to my husband James for taking care of the details when I couldn't, and to Pop for his unwavering belief in me. Thank you.

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Abstract

This paper examines assimilation and double-consciousness in the poetry of Charles Simic, Marilyn Chin, and Susan Atefat-Peckham. Each of these three poets writes in English in an American setting but has a different heritage. Simic is a native Yugoslavian (Serbia) who fled Europe during WWII. Chin arrived in the U.S. from Hong Kong as a child, and Atefat-Peckham is a first-generation American raised by Iranian parents. Each of these poets expresses some degree of assimilation and double-consciousness (as described by various theorists including W.E.B. Du Bois and Werner Sollors, among others) through the form and content of their poetry. This paper compares the three poets' work, attempting to draw inferences on how double-consciousness and assimilation is expressed in their poems and to what degree. This study argues that Simic is the least assimilated (as his poetry portrays the most severe double-consciousness), Chin is in-between and Atefat-Peckham the most assimilated.

Keywords

Susan Atefat-Peckham, American poetry, assimilation, double-consciousness, Marilyn Chin, multiculturalism, poetry, Charles Simic, W.E.B Du Bois, Werner Sollors,

Introduction

In Borderlands/La Frontera, Gloria Anzaldúa examines the duality (and plurality) of consciousness within the *mestiza*. She explains that individuals living outside the dominant culture must come to terms with the duality of their own consciousness. This way of identifying oneself as part other and part of the dominant culture is unavoidable according to Anzaldúa. However, compartmentalizing these two parts is a thankless, even personally violent task and one must resolve the conflict by finding a “new consciousness.” Anzaldúa theorizes, “We will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes” (100-101).

The concept of double-consciousness (a term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903 in The Souls of Black Folk) within peoples outside of the dominant culture is not a new one. Writers, poets, theorists, and politicians have struggled with the question of identity and ethnicity for centuries, and as our world becomes increasingly more homogenized through globalization, the lines of personal and social identity become increasingly blurred. In reference to the dynamics of insider/outsider relationships particularly to persons working within the dominant culture, theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, “Whether she turns the inside out or the outside in, she is, like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider. For there can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogenously represented by all insiders; an authentic insider in there, an absolute reality out there, or an incorrupted representative who cannot be questioned by another incorrupted representative” (Ashcroft, et al 198). It follows then that the poetry of ethnic writers oftentimes exemplifies a dual consciousness.

It is beyond question that the ethnic identities of poets Charles Simic, Marilyn Chin and Susan Atefat-Peckham are complex amalgamations of both inside and outside groups. Their work represents a synthesis of their native cultures and their American ones. However, even within the rubrics of “new” or “double-consciousness” there are infinite possibilities of how that consciousness is expressed and to what degree their native and American cultural understanding bleed into their poetry, intentionally or not.

Ethnic writers Charles Simic, Marilyn Chin and Susan Atefat-Peckham each write in English and in an American context about their native cultures. Through content and form they express, in varying degrees, their own struggles with identity and assimilation. Simic, Chin, and Atefat-Peckham each write from different places along a continuum that is described by Werner Sollors as involving total homogenization at one end and “old-world orientation” (190) at the other. At first blush, the content of Simic’s work seems to be the least deliberately preoccupied with assimilation, and the content of Atefat-Peckham’s work appears to bear the most prominent perspective of otherness because it is so pronounced in its focus on Iranian customs. Chin’s work seems to lie somewhere in between the two. However, the language and perspective of each poet implies the opposite, making Atefat-Peckham’s viewpoint the most “American,” placing Chin again in the middle, and Simic’s as the most “other.”

According to Sollors, “Many American intellectuals and ethnic writers have explicitly or implicitly adhered to variants of an ‘Aristotelian Table for Ethics of Wholesome Provincialism’ and defined a good ethnic attitude as a ‘new,’ an acquired, or an achieved identity, located between the ancient narrowness of a hierarchical old-world orientation... and the dangers of homogenization by total assimilation (symbolized by

American popular culture)” (190-91). In the chapter “The Ethics of Wholesome Provincialism,” Sollors explores ideas of “ethnic and regional conceptualizations” (176), and how these ideas are often made surprisingly simplistic. Simplifying the concept of ethnicity and regionalism into categories such as American or un-American forces homogenization, not only of varying ethnic groups but also of the varied facets of American groups. Either explicitly or implicitly Simic, Chin, and Atefat-Peckham explore the complex nature of their ethnicity and its effect on their world views and their poetry. By expressing their double-consciousness and investigating the degree of assimilation they have experienced and the implications of assimilation, these poets contribute to the social discourse that speaks against stereotypes and homogenization while also acknowledging their existence.

In The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. Du Bois defines what he considers the “double-consciousness” of African-Americans: African Americans are born into a culture in which they can never perceive themselves as one authentic self. Rather, African Americans identify themselves both the way in which the dominant culture defines them and the way they define themselves. In the words of Du Bois: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others ... One ever feels his twoness,— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (3). This theory can also be applied to the American immigrant poet, albeit not in the strictest sense that DuBois means it. As Sollors explains, “Whether they write in other languages or in English, ethnic writers have an acute sense of doubleness” (249).

For many ethnic writers, in America, who struggle with identity and assimilation, whether the effect of double-consciousness is purposeful or not, it is present. These writers are apt to incorporate into their work elements of their cultural heritage as well as their American one. While not all ethnic writers choose to write on topics of ethnicity or assimilation, to varying degrees the poets Charles Simic (b.1938), Marilyn Chin (b.1956) and Susan Atefat-Peckham (1970-2004) do. According to Sollors, “The underlying theme of many studies in regionalism and ethnicity is the search for a viable middle course of virtuous loyalties as an integrative force— expressive again, of the yearning for structure that is neither hierarchy nor mobocracy and an individualized concept of group life that is neither rigidly polarized nor colorlessly monotonous” (190). If we think of them in Sollors’ terms, all three poets express an undeniable sense of double-consciousness in their poetry that appears less prominent in proportion to how assimilated the poet or the poet’s work appears.

In Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism, for instance, author Trinh T. Minh-ha elucidates the particular situation that ethnic writers and female ethnic writers in particular, find themselves in, in regards to their identities as writers. According to Trinh: “*Authenticity* as a need to rely on an ‘undisputed origin,’ is prey to an obsessive *fear*: that of *losing connection*... Thus, a clear origin will give me [the female Third World writer] a connection back through time, and I shall, by all means search for that genuine layer of myself to which I can always cling ” (94). This statement rings particularly true in the works of Chin and Atefat-Peckham and, to a lesser degree, Simic. While not every poem by these poets deals directly with issues of identity, many of them do. All three poets reach through time in their poems to touch upon the

differences that separate them from American culture and link them to their native heritage. It is that search for “connection,” that exploration of identity as other in comparison to the perceived American character that makes their poetry so layered and complex.

Obviously, immigrants such as Simic and Chin and first generation Americans such as Atefat-Peckham have similar yet unique circumstances in regards to their self-perception (as observed in their poetry) in the American context. To African Americans, Du Bois explains there is always “this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge this double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.” This statement also applies to the way in which these immigrant poets struggle to find a balance between their selves as “other” and their selves as “American.” It is important to note, however, that the political context in which Du Bois was writing about double-consciousness was very different from that of Simic, Chin, and Atefat-Peckham. None of these poets was brought to the U.S. by force, and none of them has a heritage of slavery in the U.S. However, in the case of Simic, (whose double-consciousness, I argue, is the most pronounced of the three), he did come to America for political reasons; he escaped Yugoslavia during World War II. Likewise, Atefat-Peckham’s poetry indicates that the oppression of women in Iran may have been a cause of her parents’ immigration, and Chin’s poetry suggests that her father emigrated from Hong Kong to establish a better life for his family and to escape economic oppression.

Although double-consciousness exists in the works of all three poets, each of them appears assimilated in different degrees; therefore, their hyphenate qualities are expressed differently. Simic, a native of Yugoslavia, immigrated to the United States

when he was sixteen. Because his formative years were spent in Yugoslavia, in my view, his poetry reflects the most deep-seated form of otherness. In particular, the experiences Simic survived in Europe during World War II so color his present American life that it is as if the past and the present are constantly vying for center stage in the consciousness of his poetry. Usually the past wins. The way Simic's poetry reads, despite his idiomatic use of American English in his work, he identifies himself more as a European and a war survivor living in America, than as an American with an ethnic background. In comparison to Simic and Atefat-Peckham, Hong Kong native Chin, who was raised in the U.S. from early childhood, explicitly expresses in her poetry the most concern over her speakers' ethnic identities. Although Chin immigrated to the United States at such an early age that she is likely to have forgotten most of her actual experience in Hong Kong, her poetry laments the gradual replacement of her native self with an American self. In contrast, Atefat-Peckham was a second generation American raised by Iranian parents. Although the content of her poetry deals with Iranian culture much more directly than Simic's does European culture or even than Chin's does in dealing with Asian culture, Atefat-Peckham's point of view appears most assimilated to American culture. Atefat-Peckham's poems have a clear and unwavering message that riles against the unjust treatment of women in Iran, while simultaneously revering Iranian female relationships. And although her position on oppression may be valid, it reveals a perspective that appears more intrinsically American, despite its culturally rich content.

In order to explore themes of assimilation and double-consciousness in the works of Simic, Chin and Atefat-Peckham, I have selected three poems by each to explicate. The poems chosen each came from one source to provide some consistency for comparison;

however, the book containing Simic's poems is a compilation of several works. The poems examined herein include: "Two Dogs," "Paradise Motel," and "Cameo Appearance," by Simic, which are all included in The Voice at 3:00 A.M., as well as the following poems by Chin, which are all included in The Phoenix Gone, the Terrace Empty: "How I Got that Name," "Turtle Soup," and "Autumn Leaves." All of the poems discussed here by Atefat-Peckham are included in That Kind of Sleep: "To The House," "Farbria's Daughters," and "Avenue Vali Asr."

Simic, Chin and Atefat-Peckham

Born in 1938, in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, Simic spent much of his childhood enduring the horrors of the Second World War before he immigrated to the United States with his mother and brother in 1954 and did not learn to speak English until he was 15 years old according to the Academy of American Poets (www.poets.org). Much of his writing and thinking is colored by this earlier period. In interview after interview, Simic refers to the war as in the often-quoted interview with J.M. Spalding in which upon being asked, “How did being born into a war-torn Europe affect your writings later on,” Simic responds, “My travel agents were Hitler and Stalin. Being one of the millions of displaced persons made an impression on me. In addition to my own little story of bad luck, I heard plenty of others. I'm still amazed by all the vileness and stupidity I witnessed in my life” (www.cortlandreview.com).

Simic’s upbringing plays out in a way that places the speakers from his poems in a constant state of flux between the past (Europe in wartime) and the present (American life). However, Simic’s history does not only inform his present circumstance but rather becomes a part of it in a way that sometimes makes the two periods indistinguishable for his speakers. As opposed to Chin and Atefat-Peckham who directly explore ethnicity in their poetry, the division (and simultaneous unison) of consciousness in Simic’s poetry is more directly affected by his WWII experiences compared to his post-war American experiences than between a Yugoslavian who had not survived a war and an American. However, the fact that he was a citizen of Yugoslavia at the time of the war and that his poetry is colored by images of the war makes his exploration of it necessarily from a European perspective, not an American one.

Simic's "Two Dogs," from The Book of Gods and Devils (1990), is a poem of parallels, which emphasizes the double-consciousness prevalent throughout his work. It intertwines the speaker's present American life with his European past by juxtaposing a memory set in America with one set in Europe. The relatively benign story of the "worried dog" in stanza one provokes the speaker to recall another dog from another, more malevolent time and place—Europe during the Second World War. In "Two Dogs" the speaker moves linearly through the memories he imagines to get to a final, most painful memory. In the first stanza, the speaker recalls "The story told me by a woman going blind/ One fine summer evening" (42). That recollection then leads the speaker to another memory—this time from 1944 of "the Germans marching."

Through his form in particular, in this poem, Simic points out that the past and the present are inextricably linked in the speaker's consciousness. The poem is filled with doublings, the first in the title, creating parallel stories of dogs. It is also composed in two stanzas, each ten lines long. Lines four and five of the first stanza introduce the first instances of rhyme (albeit slant rhyme) into the poem: "evening"/ "creeping." Likewise, the fourth and fifth lines of the second stanza rhyme "eye"/ "by." In addition there is syntactic parallelism, with each stanza beginning with a two-line sentence followed by a longer sentence.

The speaker recalls two streets where two dogs from two different points in time walk. In both stanzas, the word "dog" appears twice as does the word that describes the dog. In the first stanza, the speaker repeats "shadow": "afraid of his own shadow"/ "shadows were creeping." In the second stanza the word "wings" repeats: "as if he has wings"/ "A dog with wings." The two dogs are described differently although they are

both on a street. In the first stanza there is, “A long street with just a worried dog.” In the second, the street is one in which “a little white dog” runs.

The difference in the descriptions of each dog is important because it makes explicit the effect that the past has had on the present. The dog in the second stanza is small, white and fearless, suggesting the innocence of youth. It even has an angelic quality when it is described as having white wings until it runs literally into the brutal foot of war and is kicked. This vision recalled by the speaker is perhaps the moment innocence is lost. Because the dog of the first stanza is in the present and as the past by implication impacts the present, this “old dog” is now “afraid of his own shadow.” When the older dog walks along the street, it is worried, even among nothing more menacing than “dusty old chickens.”

Simic also makes comparisons between the past and the present by naming specific times and places. In the first stanza, the “shadows [are] creeping” and the old woman telling the story is going blind (the oncoming darkness) but the sun is still “beating down.” In the second stanza, he recalls, “Night was coming down.” The phrasing is similar and so are the times of day. Simic makes a comparison between the speaker’s American present and his wartime European past. He makes the location explicit by naming the place in which he was told the first dog story, which is in New Hampshire. He also names, although somewhat less precisely, where the story took place as the old woman tells it, and that too is obviously in an American setting, “That nameless Southern town.” In the second stanza, the speaker envisions, “...the Germans marching/ Past our house in 1944,” clearly in Europe.

Simic's formal repetition (with regards to stanza length, rhymes and rhyme placement, and word choice) reinforces the parallel he draws between these two times. His memory of a more recent incident recalls another similar yet unique (and in Simic's character's world) darker recollection. The past for this speaker always colors the present. The two dogs exemplify the double-consciousness in this poem. They exemplify how Simic's European wartime experience influences his American experience. An old dog in America is just another reason to remember a young dog in Europe.

"Paradise Motel," which was originally published in A Wedding in Hell (1994), also plays with the idea of simultaneous meaning. Much of this poem juxtaposes, if not directly opposes ideas, certainly those that conflict in meaning, beginning with the title. The word "paradise" conjures utopian images of lush tropical landscapes, as well as the obvious biblical reference to the Eden of Adam and Eve, a place of innocence. The word "motel" conjures distinctly different imagery. One might think of a dingy room populated by seedy or downtrodden characters. When the two words combine, particularly in the title, they set an acerbic tone for the rest of the poem, which continues in a vein that speaks bitterly of the degradation of humanity, the loss of innocence, and finally, the impossibility of redemption.

"Paradise Motel" is filled with dichotomies. The speaker watches TV in his room. He flips between watching the war and watching pornography. Instead of living within the visceral action, he lives vicariously through the television. This speaks to Simic's deep sense of otherness. He is alone in a motel room watching the war in Europe on TV in America. He feels like a "twice-canceled postage stamp," (75) because he cannot go back to Europe and is not really at home in America (as evidenced, for instance, by the

fact that he is living in a motel, among other things). The speaker parallels millions dead with millions innocent, the speaker with the president, living well with awful living, soldiers with refugees, and sex with war. All of these things are both opposing one another and part of one another.

The first line picks up on the notion of innocence lost implied in the title: “Millions were dead; everybody was innocent.” Here, Simic clearly compares ideas. As the poem develops, it becomes clear that it concerns war, so the millions dead have to be the result of people killing one another. Simic reinforces his intention to make this comparison implicit through his form. Both phrases contain three words, so they mirror one another. They are also separated by a semicolon instead of a period and are without a conjunction to indicate the relativity between the two clauses, creating a line in which two contradictory ideas are presented within the same sentence. These two ideas, Simic implies, are both contradictory and inseparable. The phrase, “everybody was innocent” speaks to the duality of a war in which all who have fought and died are both innocent and guilty.

In the next line, Simic pits the speaker against the President. This time he makes a clearer distinction between the two different, but in some way inseparable, people by placing them on the same line, yet separating them by a period. This use of punctuation reinforces the litany of dichotomies that Simic uses throughout this poem, yet this line can also imply that the title, “The President,” is attributed to the speaker. Read aloud, it can read: *I stayed in my room, The President*. These two possible readings make the speaker both vastly different from the President by virtue of his being an ordinary, powerless citizen sitting in a motel and very like the President, in that he must share some

of the responsibility of war or perhaps bear even as much responsibility as the President—much the way the innocents in the first line are also responsible for the deaths of millions.

This thought process continues into line three, where Simic describes the President as speaking “of war as a magic love potion.” Here Simic juxtaposes two classic opposites, love and war, or more precisely, sex and death. War is sexualized by the president; it is a way to turn the country on, the way a love potion is supposed to turn people on sexually. Line four finally comments on how the speaker feels about the simultaneous existence of all these contradictory ideas in his world. He says, “My eyes were opened in astonishment.” The speaker is clearly shocked by what is happening as well as by the government’s eroticization of war. The word “opened” here, as opposed to “open,” reveals the sense that the speaker was hitherto blind, innocent perhaps, to war’s atrocities and that now, metaphorically as well as literally, the horror has “opened” his eyes.

The next line returns to the speaker’s litany of inseparable doublings by evoking another classic pairing—a man’s face and his reflection. This is not an unusual motif for “hyphenate writers,” according to Sollors. In his words, “Double-consciousness characters may be attracted to mirrors, reflecting windows, or smooth-surfaced ponds” (249). Enthralled by their own new image (as opposed to the way they have seen themselves as native to their birthplace), immigrant characters are often trying to comprehend their dual selves through the mirror. Fittingly, Simic’s speaker sees his own reflection in line five: “In a mirror my face appeared to me” (75). Here, the speaker contemplates his own face. However, the line reads as though his face appeared

unexpectedly, the way an apparition might, underscoring how the person examining himself simultaneously feels separate from his own image. In line six, he describes his face as looking like a “twice-canceled postage stamp,” that is, a stamp on a letter that has tried twice to get somewhere but has failed--like a dead letter, regarding this doubleness between which the speaker feels caught. For him neither path, neither paradise nor hell, provides a route to travel.

The second stanza begins with yet another line of contradictory ideas. The speaker says, “I lived well, but life was awful.” This statement echoes the speaker’s comparison between himself and the President. He lives well because he is safe in a motel in America, but life is awful because of the guilt and responsibility he feels for the people who are still in Europe dying while he watches the war unfold on TV. The speaker goes on, “Naturally, they all vanished/ With the touch of a hand.” With a touch of his own hand he can change the channel, yet there seems nothing natural about the vanishing of throngs of people: Simic intertwines the visceral with the vicarious. The speaker can make them all vanish by the touch of his hand; the President (by ordering the bomb) can make them all vanish by the touch of his hand. Everyone is innocent; everyone is guilty.

The second stanza also contradicts itself in regards to the passage of time. Line seven implies that time is passing for the speaker in the motel room. This is a place where he has been living. But lines eight and nine refer to a specific day: “There were so many soldiers that day,/ So many refugees crowding the roads.” Then lines 10-12 refer back to a span of time. So here, instead of recalling different ideas simultaneously, he recalls different times simultaneously. Within the same stream of thought, the speaker brings to mind one day in particular, the time of the war, and its end. The lines, “Naturally, they all

vanished/ With a touch of a hand,/' refer both to the moment when he changed the channel and when the bombs were dropped. The second stanza ends with another comparison between sex and war: "History licked the corners of its bloody mouth." The blood-licking imagery is decidedly more vulgar than the "love potion" from the first stanza. As the violence in the poem increases so does the vulgarity of the sexual imagery.

By the third stanza he has changed the channel and the reader realizes the speaker has been watching history on the pay channel, as though it were pornography. This stanza describes the speaker now looking at pay pornography in a dark room. This image recalls again the loss of innocence, the antithesis of "paradise." By the end of the poem, the war has colored everything with nothing left to redeem humanity. The speaker sits in silence and in the dark; the only light comes from the pornographic imagery of "a man and a woman/ ...trading hungry kisses and tearing off/ Each other's clothes" on the television screen. The light "Had too much red in it" symbolizing the blood of war, and "too much pink" symbolizing the flesh of the figures. The violence in the two figures again aligns sex and war. While the preceding two stanzas refer to war as if it were a sex act ("a magic love potion"), this stanza refers to sex as though it were war.

Read from one perspective, "Paradise Motel" expresses Simic's profound alienation in the United States. The speaker sits alone in a motel and is in horror of the country that he has escaped to; "America, the Promised Land" is more like hell than paradise. In his view the country is turned on by violence and war, and he is disgusted, yet he is not completely unassimilated to the culture. He feels connected to the President, it seems, and feels particularly responsible, yet like other Americans, he merely watches the war on television. The speaker views the war in a disconnected, all-American

medium, television. But, he remains always aware of the real horror that the program portrays because of his “foreign” past. Simultaneously, Simic uses this medium as a mode to connect the speaker to the U.S. and to alienate him from human experience.

In “Cameo Appearance,” which originally appeared in Walking the Black Cat (1996), Simic uses many of the same devices that he uses in “Two Dogs” and “Paradise Motel” to emphasize double-consciousness. This emphasizes the poet’s pronounced “otherness” when compared to the other two poets, particularly in the context of the war’s impact. In this poem Simic juxtaposes the memory of World War II, through which the speaker actually lived in Europe, with the imagery of the speaker’s experience as an extra in a movie that is a “bloody epic” (97). Simic chooses Hollywood, an American icon, as the context into which he twists the speaker’s tragic memory. Within this poem, Simic’s double-consciousness reveals itself in two ways. The speaker moves back and forth between the memory of the war and the imagery of the movie so fluidly that they overlap. Because the movie represents the speaker’s current life in the U.S. and the memory of the war represents the speaker’s former life as a European, it could be said that as he intertwines the memories of the two events, he merges his American present with his European past.

“Cameo Appearance” also subtly reveals how the poet has never fully been assimilated into American culture. In spite of the fact that the poem appears to take place in a typical American home, and its characters partake in a typical American activity (watching a movie) —in fact by doing so— Simic amplifies the speaker’s otherness. No matter how many times he rewinds the tape, his American children can’t see him there, and despite the seemingly happy domestic setting, the speaker is accosted by the very

real, horrific memories of the war. Simic's theme of innocuous life bombarded by past horrors reaches beyond The Voice at 3:00A.M. In a write-up on Simic, New York State Writer's Institute observes: "In a review of Night Picnic: Poems (2001)...the Booklist reviewer calls the poet 'a powerful and funny chronicler of an individual world, one where pastry, omelets and queen-size beds offer their ambiguous pleasures, and where, inseparable, 'the butchery of the innocent/ Never stops'" (www.albany.edu). Likewise, total assimilation will never happen, as evidenced by Simic's ongoing preoccupation with his past which continues to play out as violence perpetuated against the innocent.

In "Cameo Appearance" the speaker moves in and out of the memory that may have actually taken place during the Second World War and the one that takes place during the filming of a movie about a war. This intermingling is shown in a variety of ways. He begins by describing a "nonspeaking part" (97) he has had in a bloody epic—WWII. The speaker maintains several ideas about the action at once. In the first stanza, he says, "In the distance our great leader/ Crowed like a rooster from a balcony,/ Or was it a great actor/ Impersonating a great leader?" The leader seems both the actual leader and the movie actor playing the role. Despite the uncertainty of the reference, the two memories (the American movie version and the European reality) overlap here. Simic uses the phrase "great leader" to string ideas together.

He also uses the word "great" ironically. Thus he implies a double meaning even at the level of the individual word. First, he describes the leader as "great" in line 4. Then in the next line he describes the leader as crowing "like a rooster from a balcony." The comparison between the "great" leader and a rooster squawking undermines the leader's "greatness." In line six he asks, "Or was it a great actor?" This line implies both that the

“great leader” was probably more actor than leader and that the speaker is a bit confused about the past and the present. The final line of the first stanza then brings the reader back into the epic movie, in which the actor is “Impersonating our great leader.” The experience of being an extra in a war movie is powerful enough to bring the memory of the war into the forefront of the speaker’s consciousness so vividly that he now has trouble distinguishing the difference between the actor who plays the great leader and the leader from his past.

The second stanza takes another turn by referring to the actual war more subtly and giving the primary emphasis to the movie. The speaker seems to be back in the present, referring solely to his “cameo appearance” in the film. Here, Simic uses certain words to lighten the poem from the melancholy tone of the first stanza which speaks of the “bombed and fleeing humanity.” In contrast, the first line in the second stanza evokes a wholesome image of a father pointing at the television screen to show his children the part he played. The comment, “That’s me there, I said to the kiddies,” is such a light-hearted phrase it belies the fact that the speaker was actually in the war. In line nine, the speaker says, “I’m squeezed between the man/ and the old woman” (97). This sentence also seems to maintain the light-hearted tone of line eight. But then the tone slowly begins to shift. The “man” has two bandaged hands, and the old woman from line 11 has her mouth open, “as if she were showing us a tooth.” As Simic exemplifies by transitioning seamlessly in tone between light and dramatic, and Sollors points out: “Double-consciousness, far from stifling American ethnic authors, alerts them to the possibilities of playfulness in establishing their voice. Raising and thwarting initiation expectations, feeding the gullibility of readers and then pulling the rug from under their

feet, or ironically undercutting the image of a presumably stable relationship between in-group and out-group are among the weapons in the rich arsenal of ethnic writers” (252). In this poem, Simic turns quickly between domestic life and epic tragedy and back again. This stanza only peeks at the magnitude of the actual war and the speaker’s experience there. For the most part, the speaker’s consciousness is of the man who played an extra in a film. The old woman showing her tooth is at first odd and humorous. But there are glimpses, as well, of the real “bombed and fleeing humanity (97)” in the description of the man, after an emphatic line break, “With two bandaged hands raised” and, later, the woman with “her mouth open.” The end lines portray a gruesome image of the people waving their bloodied limbs and screaming. While such an image could be portrayed on film, the speaker’s candid manner of referring to them strikes a more compelling tone, as though they derive from actual (not fictional) events.

In the third stanza, Simic completes the sentence that he began in line twelve. The phrase “As if she were showing us a tooth,” provides an amusing image. However, when followed by the line “That hurts badly” the image suddenly loses its sense of humor and becomes tragic. That phrase has added emphasis because it begins the next stanza, and thus, reads as though it is a sentence unto itself. The wool is pulled out from under the reader, as Sollors might say. In the third stanza, the speaker recounts rewinding the tape a hundred times to prove to his children that he was there “In that huge gray crowd,/ That was like any other gray crowd.” Here Simic seems again to hold the dual ideas of the film of the war and the actual war simultaneously, first by talking about the crowd as seen on video, then by repeating nearly the same line so that there are literally two crowds in the poem—the crowd from the film and the crowd from the speaker’s memory.

In the final stanza, the speaker juxtaposes the cheerful line, “Trot off to bed, I said finally,” with the poignant phrase that resonates with both layers of meaning, “I know I was there.” Finally, the speaker bookends the description of people running with the planes grazing their hair with a line that implies that this was a movie scene: “One take/ Is all they had time for,” while the last three lines imply that the scenes he describes were from the actual war: “As we stood dazed in the burning city,/ But of course, they didn’t film that.” They didn’t film that because it was not an American reenactment of a tragedy but the tragedy itself.

In each of these poems, as in others, what would be a piece of Americana, for better or worse (be it a story in the south, pornography, or a movie) for an American, inevitably becomes a vehicle to return to Europe for Simic’s characters. This speaks to his lack of assimilation to the culture. These moments are never revered as American moments but always as reminders that the characters feel alien in their surroundings, like a “twice-canceled postage stamp.” Simic’s point of view in “Cameo Appearance” as well as the other poems is that of a European who has survived the war and is now in America. Simic’s real-life past echoes through his present poetry as well as his present circumstances as he refers to the war’s impact on him in many interviews. In response to a question asked by Spalding about Simic’s life before he was a poet, Simic recalls how his own innocence was lost: “Germans and the Allies took turns dropping bombs on my head while I played with my collection of lead soldiers on the floor...Even after the war was over, I went on playing war” (www.cortlandreview.com). Clearly, Simic was reimagining this scene years later when he wrote, “The Big War,” (from The Book of Gods and Devils, 1990) and although he says that he “went on playing war” in reference

to being a teenager making machine gun sounds, one can extrapolate meaning and apply this comment to much of his life's work. Simic continues to reenact the scenes from war through his poetry. It is this deep unwavering connection to the past that makes his sense of double-consciousness as well as his haunting sense of otherness, so apparent.

Whether his speakers are in Hollywood, in front of the television set, a "nameless southern town," the northeast, or a rundown motel their otherness is ever apparent. He is not concerned with losing his native culture as a result of assimilation because European culture is so entrenched in his consciousness, as his poetry reveals.

This attitude toward assimilation stands in stark contrast to Chin's, for instance, who remains preoccupied with the idea that bit by bit her Chinese heritage is eroded away by American culture. She juxtaposes classic American literature and idioms with Asian customs, myths and stereotypes. The effect produces a wry, unique voice that struggles with and delights in the double-consciousness of itself. In an article from Contemporary Women Poets, Anne-Elizabeth Green writes, "Chin does indeed carry a double consciousness. She is able to articulate skillfully that interplay of, and tension between, cultures which constitutes her experience of the world. A critical part of this process of articulation includes establishing links and continuities between an ancestral past and cultural history, and an American present" (63). Chin also acknowledges that duality. In an interview with Bill Moyers, she states, "There's a doubleness to nearly all my work, to how I feel about things, and perhaps especially about assimilation" (73).

In "How I Got That Name: *an essay on assimilation*," (published in 1995, around the same time as "Paradise Motel" and "Cameo Appearance") Chin tackles the subject of double-consciousness and assimilation in no uncertain terms, and the subject of

assimilation is even made explicit by her title. The poem is broken into four stanzas, the first of which describes the speaker's actual birth and introduction into American culture; the second and third stanzas could be interpreted as childhood and adulthood, respectively. The last ends in her metaphorical death and final (middling) resting place of her assimilation into American culture.

The poem begins, "I am Marilyn Mei Ling Chin" (16). The poet then explains how she loves the "Mei Ling" of her name, bypassing her first, American name, Marilyn:

Oh, how I love the resoluteness
of that first person singular
followed by that stalwart indicative
of "be," without the uncertain i-n-g
of "becoming."...

Chin infuses her Asian name with meaning by attributing resolve and strength to it. However, she interprets the meanings by reading the names as if they were part of the English language. "Mei" becomes "me" and "Ling" becomes a form of "to be." So while she praises her Asian heritage, she does so through an American lens. Like Simic's, Chin's poetry works on two levels. However, unlike Simic's, it is not her actual past that colors the present circumstance but rather the tension between the Asian heritage that is a part of her consciousness and the American heritage within which she was raised.

The speaker goes on to explain how she got the name Marilyn. Also as Simic does in "Cameo Appearance," Chin invokes Hollywood cinema as a classic American symbol to illustrate the divide between cultures. Chin goes a step further, however, by naming an American icon from Hollywood, Marilyn Monroe, as opposed to American cinema in

general. The poet explains how her father, who was “obsessed with the bombshell blonde/ transliterated Mei Ling into Marilyn.” The fact that Chin describes Monroe as a “bombshell blonde” ironically reminds the reader of the distinct physical difference between the Asian speaker and Monroe. Asians, by nature, are not blondes; so from the moment her name is changed (while at sea between China and the U.S.), Chin’s Marilyn is burdened with a certain American ideal, namely the expectations of her (physical and otherwise) father that are impossible to achieve. Chin acknowledges both the absurdity of the father’s comparison and futility of his implicit expectation, when she states sardonically, “And there I was, a wayward pink baby,/ named after some tragic white woman/ swollen with gin and Nembutal.” “Her name itself,” says Green, “represents both the sudden shock and long-term process of assimilation—a name is violently transformed, and yet retains its connections to the prior name by that transliteration. In the new name lies the echo of the old” (62).

The name “Marilyn” was given to her both as way for her to assimilate into American culture when her parents arrived and as a way for her father to express his American fetishism. The name is also a pivot point between her father’s idealistic view of emigrating and his daughter’s more cynical viewpoint. Chin continues to expound on the absurdity of the idea that the speaker can slip into American culture via the name of a popular American actress by explaining that her own mother could not pronounce the name and therefore referred to her as, “‘Numba one female offshoot’/ for brevity...”

Whereas the speaker’s concept of her own identity lies somewhere in between her American upbringing and her Asian one, it is apparent that the mother never assimilates to American culture and lives “in sublime ignorance, flanked/ by loving children and the

‘kitchen deity’.” The mother cannot pronounce her ‘r’s’ and seems oblivious to, or at least incapable of, affecting her husband’s decisions. Her place is raising children with the “kitchen deity.” This phrase seems to be a bit tongue-in-cheek, (most American kitchens being devoid of deities) as in “numba one female offshoot,” exposing the degree to which the mother remains unassimilated. However, while Chin acknowledges her mother’s inability to assimilate, she demonstrates, through word choice, her own hyphenate nature.

On the other hand, the father as described by Chin, makes an effort to assimilate. He has learned enough at least to make a living by selling “bootlegged Gucci” and is described as a “tomcat,” “a gambler,” and “a petty thug.” But just as no one in the family questions him for naming the speaker after Marilyn Monroe, no one in American society “questions his integrity,” simply because his children are obedient and well-behaved. Everyone buys into the Asian stereotype of the all-knowing patriarch who is well-intentioned and upright. Indeed, this is part of the struggle of double-consciousness the speaker battles. There seems to be a willful blindness by society to the father’s poor behavior based on the clichéd idea of what he should be. So the speaker comprehends her father in a modified (because it is not a consciousness of herself but of her father) Du Boisian sense of double-consciousness. She does not see her father the way the dominant, American culture sees him, as a Chinese stereotype (as it does her, which becomes apparent in the next stanza), but she understands that it occurs and that there is some injustice in that. She also understands him to be her father—a deeply flawed man. The dichotomy between her unassimilated mother and her somewhat assimilated, stereotyped father creates the foundation for a lifetime of ever feeling her “twoness” (Du Bois 3).

While the first stanza represents the speaker's introduction to American culture (Chin makes this point by referring to her voyage "between Angel Island and the sea," her naming, and her mother and father's places in American society), the second stanza moves away from the specificity of family life to explore her assimilation as an Asian-American through adolescence. Chin scrutinizes the superficial perception of Asians by Americans and how that perception is reinforced throughout the speaker's life:

Oh, how trustworthy our daughters,
how thrifty our sons!
How we've managed to fool the experts
in education, statistics and demography— (Phoenix 17)

Here, Chin refers not only to the stereotypes given to Asians as "trustworthy" and "thrifty," but proceeds to mock American stereotypical thought concerning scholastic achievement among Asians.

In "The Myth of Authenticity" Gareth Griffiths explains the pitfalls that befall the people (in this case Aborigines) when the stereotypes, even supposedly positive ones, become an entrenched way of thinking perpetuated by "experts," as Chin calls them. Griffiths observes, "There are real dangers in recent representations of indigenous peoples in popular discourse, and especially in the media, which stress claims to an 'authentic' voice. For these claims by overwriting the actual complexity of difference may write out that voice as effectively as earlier oppressive discourses of reportage" (166). Griffiths' sentiment about the media usurping the Aboriginal voice, even for what can be interpreted as benevolent reasons, seems to echo Chin's attitude towards "the experts." While some of the stereotypes attributed to Asian-Americans might be

flattering, ultimately they are short-sighted and limited. In case the reader questions what is wrong with being lumped into a stereotype of seemingly positive traits, even if it means sacrificing some individuality, Chin notes satirically: “We’re not very creative but not adverse to rote-learning” (17). For one, poetry demands creativity and the poet herself is Asian. Second, the statement implies that this supposedly positive stereotype is actually insulting, in that it insinuates that Asians are more like machines than people: They work industriously, but not creatively, to get the job done. Third, Chin plays with the language, allowing the form to inform meaning, much the way Simic does in “Two Dogs” with his emphatic doublings. Here, Chin makes her point by writing a particularly prose-ish line which both ironically concedes that this is true because of the sentence’s non-poetic form and simultaneously rejects the idea because the act of intentionally creating a prose line for the sake of argument is an expression of creativity. Chin reinforces this idea in the following line, “Indeed, they can *use* us.” The word “use” is emphasized by italics and implies multiple meanings. The “experts” can “use” Asians the same way they might use machines; because of their educational skills. But, of course, by italicizing the word, she essentially demonstrates its usual meaning, rendering it more or less “useless.”

In this stanza, the speaker’s expression of double-consciousness evolves from childhood and home and extends to young adulthood and society. It begins by referring to daughters and sons in terms of education—in other words, at school age. The speaker, who knows she is creative and is an individual, feels the pressure of the “experts” pushing her to be the “Model Minority.” She puns on the word “minority” here, meaning both a minority in the sense that she is in the ethnic minority, as well as being underage.

Lines 42-44 reinforce the voice that resonates with adolescence, when Chin depicts an image of an obstinate child who is being asked to perform but refuses. These lines also connote a sexuality that echoes the way the speaker is sexualized in the first stanza when she is named after a “blonde bombshell.” However, in the second stanza the speaker has more control over how she allows herself to be perceived: “the ‘Model Minority’ is a tease/ ...we refuse to give you any!” Then in lines 45-47 she recalls adolescent phrases that speak both to her life as an adolescent and to the process of assimilation. She states, “The further west we go, we’ll hit east;/ the deeper down we dig, we’ll find China.” Immersed in this American culture, the speaker uses American phraseology to mirror her actual desire to be in touch with her Asian heritage. The phrases both mock her desires because of their childlike implausibility and reinforce them because of their childlike susceptibility.

Line 48 then marks a turn in the second stanza. Whereas the tone of this poem has been, up to this point, laden with self-deprecating wit, Chin’s tone becomes caustic when the speaker states, “History has turned its stomach/ on a black polluted beach--” The “polluted beach” is the one where the speaker’s family landed in America. She implies that her history, indeed, that history itself, is made sick at the idea of how her Asian heritage has become corrupted by American culture. To make the point of comparison she alludes to an American poet, William Carlos Williams, in one of his most famous, Imagist poems, “The Red Wheelbarrow.” Williams was known to have been influenced greatly by Chinese poetry. According to Zhaoming Qian in Orientalism and Modernism, “The Red Wheelbarrow” was the result of Williams’ study of “Taoism/Chan- Buddhism.” Qian describes Williams’ poem as being a “Chan-like impromptu” (145). But Chin cites

the poem to indicate how “life doesn’t hinge/ on that red, red wheelbarrow, (Phoenix 17)” as opposed to the actual Williams’ poem, which reads: “so much depends/ upon/ a red wheel/ barrow” (56). Chin’s double-consciousness and struggle with assimilation are both quite apparent here. In order to expose the lack of “inner resources,” the speaker bemoans the fact that American life does not value works of substance and influence, such as William’s poetry, but instead is more likely to be preoccupied with an American soap opera set in Santa Barbara California, near where the speaker’s family arrived from China (lines 52-55). So for Chin, life in America is not the stuff of great American poetry (influenced by great Chinese poetry) but more the stuff of tawdry, mediocre television.

In the third stanza the speaker treats her attainment of adulthood. The reader is clued into this because the Chin descendents are at least of marrying age, if not older, as she notes, “A third, the sad brutish one/ may never, never marry.” Adulthood is the age in which people often reflect on their lives and seek out meaningful spirituality. Thus “the Great Patriarch Chin” appears. Chin maintains her wry, sometimes dark sense of humor while reinforcing the kind of stereotypes that she has railed against in the previous stanzas. Her ancestor peers “down from his kiosk in heaven.” In this stanza the process of assimilation to American culture has begun to take hold of the speaker to such a degree that she begins believing in the labels too. This is evidenced by the fact that she places “the Great Patriarch” in a kiosk, as though even in heaven the American stereotype of the hardworking Chinese trinket peddler has come to fruition. Her dead ancestor looks down at the Chins and sees that they are “ugly.” They look Asian, instead of American: “One had a squarish head and a nose without a bridge.” Then the speaker goes on to describe herself as “his least favorite/ ‘not quite boiled, not quite cooked.’” She is always

somewhere in between—not quite Asian, not quite American, and not quite content with that state of being. Her discontentedness emerges in lines 68 and 69 where she is disquieted enough to simmer in her own “juices” but “too listless” to do anything about it (Phoenix 18). In the final lines of the stanza, Chin points that wry, knowing finger towards herself:

“To kill without resistance is not slaughter”

says the proverb. So, I wait for imminent death.

The fact that this death is also metaphorical

is testament to my lethargy.

Here the speaker admits to having lost the will to fight assimilation, so her metaphorical death will be the loss of the last vestiges of authentic Asian culture within her. In John Gery’s essay, “‘Mocking My Own Ripens’: Authenticity, Heritage, and Self-Erasure in the Poetry of Marilyn Chin,” he notes Chin’s pattern of “self-erasure.” Of this closing in the third stanza he states, “Indeed, the section closes with the poet awaiting her ‘imminent death,’ one that arrives not with a bang, not even with a whimper, but virtually unnoticed, and having almost entirely lost a sense of herself, her identity” (36).

In the fourth and final stanza the first eleven lines are written as a mock epitaph. The stanza begins, “So here lies Marilyn Mei Ling Chin,” echoing the poem’s first line but undermining that “stalwart indicative” now. She then goes on to list the speaker’s lineage in a style that resonates with Chinese influence. Each of her family members is given a descriptive prefix: “the patriarch,” “the brooding,” “the virtuous,” and “the infamous.” She also goes on to say that she was “the sister of a dozen, cousin of a million/ survived by everyone, and forgotten by all.” Everyone, except her, she feels, has

been able to maintain his or her Chinese heritage, and because she has become so Americanized, she has been “forgotten by all.” Yet as an American, “She [is] neither black nor white/ neither cherished nor vanquished.” Because in America race is generally parceled between black and white with very little attention to the multitude of other races which make up the country, Chin’s Chin is forgotten here too. She stays in a perpetual state of in-between, perpetually overlooked.

But then the fourth stanza takes a turn after the twelfth line which breaks the stanza into two eleven-line parts separated by the line, “minding her poetry—.” These last eleven lines describe the moment of “death.” Here, the ground opens up and swallows her whole. She compares the “chasm” that opens beneath her to “the jowls of a mighty white whale/ or the jaws of a metaphysical Godzilla.” The “white whale,” of course, refers to the classic American novel by Herman Melville, Moby Dick, while Godzilla is a classic Asian monster made popular by Hollywood, so, in effect, the speaker imagines that she is “swallowed whole” by both American culture and Asian culture as it has been reinterpreted by Hollywood. Godzilla is transliterated from an Asian icon into an American one through film much as Mei Ling’s name is transliterated into the film actress’ name, Marilyn. After being consumed both by American culture and by America’s distorted interpretation of Asian culture, the speaker survives.

The tone in the last lines of the poem conveys none of the wry humor or bitterness characteristic of much of the rest of the poem, but instead suggests a sense of wonder at the speaker’s condition even as she adds further irony: “mesmerized/ by all that was lavished upon her/ and all that was taken away.” “All that was lavished upon her” is all that she has come to know in America, and “all that was taken away” is all the culture she

has lost from leaving Hong Kong. The final lines, according to Gery, are “both iterating the absence of a self in [a] contemporary American cultural context that ranges from Moby-Dick to the movies and, surprisingly enough, by celebrating, Whitman-like, her own kind of survival” (37). The irony of the poem lies in these last lines as the speaker realizes that by mourning the loss of her Asian identity, she also memorializes it and therefore sustains it, within the poem.

This poem, which Chin refers to as an essay, uses some of the same constructs to signify America as does Simic, such as the movies and television. Simic watches porn on TV and Chin watches soap operas, both of which are sexual in nature. Yet, neither is valued for their substance. Both poets use these symbols of America to point out their own differences from the country and therefore the inevitable isolation an immigrant feels. They, at once, feel the pains of the native culture slipping away and the alienation of living in a country in which they view the culture as vastly different from their own. In the case of Chin, she also perceives that people in the US view her as vastly different from them.

“Turtle Soup” provides another example of how Chin explores her Chinese heritage and juxtaposes it to her American situation, as a way of exposing the consequences of assimilation. Similar to the way Simic compares and overlaps the experiences from his war-torn past with his American present, Chin intertwines her Chinese heritage with her American upbringing. However, instead of the past informing the present and becoming inextricably inseparable from it, Chin experiences her Chinese past often as something that is simultaneously inseparable from her, yet also slipping away—transforming into something else. Gery observes in “Turtle Soup” the “resources

she inherits...persistently threaten to erase her identity” (26). The first four stanzas of the poem are written in the second person, as though the speaker is relaying what it was like to grow up in her household. According to Moyers, “This poem is written in the voice of the Americanized child reminding her mother of what is sacred from the old country” (77). In the first stanza of “Turtle Soup,” the speaker explains that the daughter is a professional compared to her mother, who has been at home cooking for twelve hours. The mother in this poem resonates with the mother who is “flanked/ by loving children and the “kitchen deity,”” in “How I Got that Name.” She cooks turtle soup, a traditional Chinese meal, and the speaker wonders skeptically, “who knows what else is in that cauldron?” (24). This line reinforces the differences between mother and daughter, Chinese and American. The mother has been hard at work cooking soup all day, but the daughter thinks of it as a witch’s brew cooked in a cauldron. This phrase labels the mother’s activity as well as the soup itself as an anachronism in the mind of the speaker.

In the second stanza, she relays the conversation: “Ma, you’ve poached the symbol of long life.” The tone here is ironic as she both acknowledges the tradition her mother engages in by referring to the turtle as “the symbol of long life” and mocks it by chiding “Ma” for having poached it. In lines 6-9 when the speaker informs her mother of how long the turtle has lived and where along various Chinese rivers it has swum, it is as though she is reciting information from a geography class. This marks a stark contrast in viewpoints between the two women. One is immersed in the culture, cooking a traditional meal for hours, not because she wants to cook something traditional but because it is her nature to do so. In contrast, the daughter recites geographical information about the turtle and the homeland, but in fact is not really a part of the culture. The speaker sees the turtle

as a symbol of Chinese culture but the mother is so deeply entrenched in the actual culture she simply sees it as food. In her interview with Moyers, Chin acknowledges: “The speaker in the poem cannot comprehend the historical forces that made her mother—the revolutions, the famines, the vicissitudes of the times that peasant women suffered and which made her generation very practical. In this poem her mother poaches the turtle for food and is not interested in the turtle as a cultural symbol” (77).

The mother speaks in the third stanza and compares the plight of the turtle, which is now dinner, to that of “Uncle Wu who rode ten thousand miles/...and ended up/ with his head on a pole” (24). In line 11 she says, “All of our ancestors have been fools,” and she includes both the turtle and the uncle in this blanket statement. This negative comment signifies the erasure of the speaker, as well as her mother’s loss of their native culture. They have traveled long distances to end up in “decorous Pasadena,” only to feel their Chinese heritage diluted by American culture. The mother concludes this stanza by saying, “Eat, child,/ its liver will make you strong.” Despite the mother’s acknowledgement of the dying of her heritage, she knows no other way to be and will therefore continue living as she always has—virtually unassimilated to American culture.

In the first line of the fourth stanza the speaker replies, “‘Sometimes you’re the life, sometimes you’re the sacrifice.’” The line is addressed both to the turtle and to the mother. “As a religious symbol the turtle has the capacity to sustain life, but it also sustains life as part of the food chain, (76)” observes Moyers. Chin agrees and adds: “The line refers to her [the mother’s] personal and familial suffering and also to that of a whole generation of women like her. The turtle is such a revered Chinese mythological symbol—it’s a symbol of longevity and patience and grandeur and antiquity—but the

irony of this turtle is that it ends up in a swirl, in a soup, in Pasadena, California” (77). The statement about life and sacrifice sends the mother into “inconsolable sobbing” (Phoenix 24). The personal sacrifice that her mother has undergone in order to be in America becomes clearer for the speaker in the concluding lines of the stanza when she resigns to eat the soup at her seat in “decorous Pasadena.” In Chin’s words, “I see these creatures in my poems as self-portraits” (77). The turtle indicates Chin’s doubleness in its ability to be both life and sacrifice, both literal and symbolic. The contrast between mother and daughter also reveal Chin’s preoccupation with assimilation and double-consciousness.

In the last two stanzas the speaker addresses the person to whom she has been telling this story, and the poem shifts in tone. The speaker no longer politely condescends but becomes acerbic, even pleading. In the fifth stanza she says, “some high priestess got it all wrong” (24). She goes on to describe the gold sticker on the bottom of a green knick knack, and deliberately uses the word “underbelly” linking the disposable trinket to the turtle, a Chinese symbol of longevity. The knick knack, “says ‘Made in Hong Kong.’” Chin uses the end rhyme (an off-rhyme) between “wrong” and “Hong Kong” to reinforce her point that the state of her heritage has devolved into something cheap and trite. The deep sense of loss that Chin displays in much of her poetry is apparent in the final stanza when the speaker questions whether or not there is anything left of her heritage that is not as empty as the turtle shell. She asks, “Is there nothing left but the shell/ and humanity’s strange inscriptions,/the songs, the rites, the oracles?” There in Pasadena, they have only these customs and trinkets to remind them of home, but they are so incomplete that those things only serve to remind them of all they have lost.

“Autumn Leaves” is another poem in which the Chin grapples with the idea of losing her heritage through assimilation and exhibits double-consciousness (primarily in the Sollors/Anzaldúa sense of double-consciousness— seeing oneself as embodying two distinct heritages simultaneously) through content and form. Chin uses the dead leaves of autumn and the act of clearing them away as a metaphor for change and assimilation. In this three-stanza poem, the first and last stanzas are each four lines long and the second stanza is three. Chin emphasizes a phrase that is written in a mock-Chinese style in both the first and last stanzas by italicizing the lines. These stanzas also have an indented line that emphasizes the *Americanness* of the poem despite its mock-Chinese phrasing. The fourth line, which follows the italicized line, is indented in the first stanza, and the second line which precedes the italicized line in the third stanza is indented. These similarities in form visually connect the two stanzas to emphasize Chin’s theme of assimilation and double-consciousness.

The poem depicts the speaker’s family living above another Chinese family. The speaker sweeps her family’s dead leaves down onto the “Wong” (42) family’s patio; “Achilles Wong” eventually cleans up the mess. The poem is a metaphor for sweeping away the old, which in this case is the speaker’s Chinese heritage, and pawning the burden of cultural upkeep onto another Chinese family. In typical Chin style, however, she employs humor to express meaning. For example, Chin anthropomorphizes the leaves by referring to them simply as “the dead.” The poem begins, “The dead piled up.” This seemingly tragic beginning is quickly transformed into humor when the reader discovers that “the dead” are only a pile of leaves. Another example of this is in the second stanza when the speaker says she “let the dead rain over the Wong family’s patio.” Although

sweeping dead leaves from her patio onto her Chinese neighbor's is another way that Chin represents the issue of assimilation and double-consciousness, by framing it with hyperbole and humor, she does not treat the issue as seriously in this poem as she does in "How I Got That Name" and "Turtle Soup." By over-dramatizing the metaphor, Chin mocks her own fascination with assimilation while continuing to explore it in a genuine way.

In the first stanza, the speaker says, "*All that blooms must fall*. I learned this not from the Tao/ but from high school biology." Here, Chin acknowledges that she has already assimilated to American culture, while also acknowledging her desire to preserve her Chinese heritage. Therein lies the double-consciousness of the poem. Her Chinese is a part of her, but inevitably, can only be expressed through an American filter (in this case high school biology). What has bloomed and fallen is her family's Chinese heritage.

The second stanza begins, "Oh, the contradictions of having a broom and not a dustpan!" The speaker is stuck with the predicament of only being capable of clearing away the past and not being able to collect it. Since neither she nor her family can preserve her Chinese heritage or the memory of her ancestors' teachings, they pass along the burden to another Chinese family. The speaker says, "I swept the leaves down...and let the dead rain over the Wong family's patio."

It is clear in the third stanza, however, that the Wong family will not be any more apt at preserving Chinese in their American setting. After all, Chin says in her interview with Moyers, "The vector only goes one direction and that is toward the future" (70). The speaker notes, "It was Achilles Wong who completed the task" (42). Like "Marilyn Mei Ling Chin (16)," "Achilles Wong (42)" sounds like a name that is part Chinese and part

something else. Achilles, of course, refers to the Greek who was described as immortal in all but one small spot behind the ankle, and it was that weakness that eventually caused his death. Here, in applying the name to the daughter of the Wong family, the Wongs burden her with an impossible expectation. In “How I got that Name” Chin is burdened with the impossible expectation of being both a sexy, white American woman and a Chinese stereotype. Similarly, Achilles is expected to be a Greek God and a male God at that, in addition to growing into a kind Chinese woman. Achilles Wong’s weakness is her inability to preserve her Chinese past and, like Chin, that inability begins with her own name. Chin indents the second line of the third stanza, “We called her:” Like the first stanza, the indented line calls attention to the double-consciousness of the entire sentiment including the succeeding line that is a mock-Chinese title, “*The-one-who-cleared-away-another-family’s-autumn.*” Here, it is not just the speaker who has become assimilated, but her whole family. “We called her” not an actual Chinese name but a name that satirically emulates a Chinese name in an Americanized way. Despite that, the speaker’s family passes the impossible responsibility of preserving her family’s past to the next generation, Achilles Wong grows to be “tall and benevolent.” The forward motion of assimilation cannot be stopped nor avoided, nor does it, perhaps, need to be lamented. Achilles Wong grows to be tall which is not a trait of most Chinese, so her assimilation is evident even in her physicality, but she also reminds the reader that change does not always have to be negative.

Throughout these three poems Chin clearly struggles with assimilation. In her interview with Moyers, she says, “I am afraid of losing my Chinese, losing my language, which would be like losing a part of myself, losing part of my soul. Poetry seems a way

to recapture that, but of course the truth is we can't recapture the past...So the grandeur of China—the grandeur of that past of my grandfather's, of my grandmother's, of my mother's and so forth—that will be all lost to me. I lose inches of it every day” (70). Chin’s poetry expresses this deep sense of loss, yet through her lament emerges a redemptive quality that preserves the heritage by memorializing it. Because it is filled with the tensions between her American culture and her Chinese culture, her feelings about assimilation and otherness, her endeavor to preserve (through poetry) her native culture while simultaneously acknowledging that it cannot be preserved, and her unflinching honesty that alternates between self-degradation and self-righteous indignation, Chin’s poetry is rich in complexity and double-consciousness. Of the three poets, Chin most deliberately addresses assimilation and double-consciousness. Yet, rather than only lamenting the divided state of the Asian-American identity, she manages to reconcile the split by dramatizing it with intensity.

Compared to Simic, whose poems concern the isolation that comes with double-consciousness and the feeling of “otherness,” Chin’s poetry directly confronts both her native culture and the struggle of assimilation itself. While Chin is desperate at the idea that there may be “nothing left but the shell/ and humanity’s strange inscriptions,/ the songs, the rites, the oracles” (24), Atefat-Peckham questions the customs of her native background, particularly in regard to women. She wonders why the women continue to teach girls to wear the traditional headdress and concludes that there is some comfort in bondage, some safety in oppression, an idea which seems in the context of the rest of her poetry to be ironic. Although Chin does evoke the patriarchy in “How I Got that Name (16),” when the speaker describes her father as a scoundrel, who leaves her mother at

home to take care of the kitchen and children, the moments of female marginalization with her poetry are but a small facet of the larger concern for Chin, which is assimilation. For Atefat-Peckham, on the other hand, issues of misogyny define her poetry, as they indicate the degree to which she has already been assimilated into American (Western) cultural values.

Susan Atefat-Peckham was a first generation American born to Iranian parents in 1970. Despite the fact that she is the only American born poet of the three discussed here, her poetry arguably deals with her own ethnicity more directly than Simic's or Chin's. According to Sollors, "Ethnic writers in general confront an actual or imagined double audience, composed of 'insiders' and of readers, listeners, or spectators who are not familiar with the writer's ethnic group" (249). This seems particularly relevant in the context of Atefat-Peckham's poetry, as it is marked by Iranian customs and language so much so that That Kind of Sleep contains a glossary of terms for readers unfamiliar with Iranian culture. While Simic's poetry has the point-of-view of a post-war European immigrant living in America and Chin's is from the point-of-view of a poet who is very much both American and Chinese, Atefat-Peckham's point-of-view appears to be that of an American peering into a culture that she does not fully condone nor condemn. However, although Atefat-Peckham's poems most directly depict ethnicity, compared to Simic and Chin, she is the most assimilated and expresses the least amount of double-consciousness.

That is not to say double-consciousness does not exist in her poems. In an interview with Jodie Ahern for *Poets & Writers*, Atefat-Peckham discusses That Kind of Sleep and states, "I feel torn down the middle. I found that what I was trying to do was

build a bridge between the two cultures” (<http://www.pw.org>). Atefat-Peckham clearly grapples with the differences in the two cultures, but she does so in a way that expresses both profound knowledge of Iranian culture (with nearly every poem referring to a particular custom, style, or term that is exclusive to Iran) and a perspective that is intrinsically American. This is evident because Atefat-Peckham’s exploration of cultures seldom questions American culture or her place in it but very often questions the perceived injustices in Iranian culture, particularly as they apply to women. In addition, Atefat-Peckham’s free-verse, confessional style of writing, despite her use of Iranian words and phrases, resonates as contemporary American poetry.

In the poem “Fariba’s Daughters,” (51) the form reinforces the idea of double-consciousness within Atefat-Peckham’s work. It is written in five stanzas of varied line length. For the first four stanzas every other stanza comprises either seven or eleven lines. The final stanza however contains only six lines. This is significant because the speaker recollects specific incidents that took place in Iran in the first four stanzas, but in the fifth stanza she is speaking from Nebraska. Atefat-Peckham uses this form to make a distinction between the speaker’s experiences as an Iranian and of those as an American. In addition, each stanza except for the fifth repeats significant words. For example, in stanza one, the word “under” is repeated three times. It refers to Fariba’s books hidden “under/ the mattress.” Not only does the act of women hiding books by its very nature draw an immediate contrast to American living, Atefat-Peckham makes a point to emphasize the word “under” because it also implies oppression. The books are kept under the mattress; likewise, the women are kept under the men. In the second stanza Atefat-Peckham repeats the words “freedom” and “hard.” Here, “freedom” refers specifically to

the West, again drawing a connection between the two cultures. In contrast the word “hard” is associated with Iran: “as hard as the roll of her eyes when someone/ wants more doukgh, more bakhlava,” for example. The third stanza repeats the word “her” and the phrase, “for my daughters” (52), emphasizing the Iranian female tradition of wearing a scarf. In the fourth stanza the speaker repeats the words “chador,” “safe” and “under.” All of these words seem significant in their repetition. The “chador” refers to traditional Iranian robes worn by women. It is significant that the speaker both needs to be kept safe from the oppression of the postars and that by being “under” the chador she reinforces her own oppression while maintaining her physical safety. In contrast, the final stanza which is set in Nebraska, has no repeating words or phrases. The speaker recollects scenes from previous stanzas and speculates as to what has happened since she was there. This is yet another element of style that shows the double-consciousness in Atefat-Peckham’s poetry. In form, word choice, and content, she sets the last stanza apart from the others, which are set in Iran.

Another aspect of double-consciousness exemplified within this poem is how Atefat-Peckham presents Iranian content through the enjambment style of free verse that is typical of contemporary American poetry. Nearly every line in “Fariba’s Daughters” is an example of enjambment; in fact this typifies all of Atefat-Peckham’s poems discussed here. In a review of [That Kind of Sleep](#), Joel Van Valin notes, “Although quotes from Rumi are sprinkled throughout the book, Atefat-Peckham’s own style is much more American, resembling Adrienne Rich or Robert Lowell’s confessional poems. The words are dense, with few metaphors, and the highly-enjambed lines are seldom lyrical...” (<http://www.whistlingshade.com>). For example, in the first stanza Atefat-Peckham

writes, “She likes her books under/ the mattress” (51). Because the enjambment breaks the sentence at the word “under,” the poet creates emphasis that would not have been there in a prose form. This directs the reader to pause at the word “under” and to consider its emphasis and repetition as meaningful in this context.

Double-consciousness is also part of the content of this poem. It is clear that Atefat-Peckham empathizes with Iranian women and has a vast knowledge of the culture; however, her Western perspective opposes female subjugation. The poem’s epigraph works as an indictment of that oppression. Although the statement, “Iranian law states that once a girl turns nine, she is of age and must wear the chador in public places,” (51) could be taken as a matter of fact, when coupled with the context of the whole poem it is clearly a condemnation of the law meant to indicate the young age at which women are subjected to repressive Iranian law. The first line, “Fariba pulls her scarf off when we are alone,” expresses the poet’s negative opinion of the law by implying both that Fariba does not want to wear the scarf and that she is not comfortable choosing to pull it off in public. The scarf in this poem symbolizes the larger picture of female oppression in Iran. The poet not only appears to express contempt for the Iranian laws which oppress women, but also shows, from an American perspective, how their ability to subvert the laws plays a part in their happiness. For instance, when describing Fariba’s books hidden under the bed, she says Fariba “likes her books under/ the mattress.” Fariba makes the most of her oppressive situation and asserts her individual freedom through small rebellions such as hiding her books and reading. She may or may not like oppression, but the fact that the books are hidden adds to the allure of her private possessions.

In the second stanza the speaker relates that Fariba asks “how freedom feels,” and specifically, whether or not the speaker has had sex out of wedlock “like girls/ in the West, or if [she] was a good Iranian virgin.” Fariba is both curious about the sexual freedom that a woman might experience in the West and also judgmental of it. The two women take turns admiring and judging each other in this way. Since, of course, the speaker’s and Fariba’s sentiments are both expressed by Atefat-Peckham, essentially this exchange represents, perhaps, both perspectives within the poet. In turn the speaker says, “I tell her what freedom is,” so there seems to be an exchange of cultural ideas between the two. Also in the second stanza, the speaker asks why Fariba “never teaches her daughters/ a different way.” In response, Fariba gives the speaker a hard stare and is described as “worn from wanting.” The speaker makes a significant comparison in the context of the poem that emphasizes the degree to which women have been oppressed—indeed, oppressed so far past the point of trying to live a different life that the question is as tiresome to her as if a child were asking for more goodies. When the speaker asks “why she never teaches her daughters/ a different way” Fariba stares back “Almost/ as hard as the roll of her eyes when someone/ wants more doukgh, more bakhlava.” It represents, perhaps, American naiveté toward Iranian culture. In the context of this poem, there is no other way for Fariba to teach her girls. However, the speaker indicates that Fariba is interested in having a different kind of life, despite the fact that she is resigned to her current situation, because Fariba is “worn from wanting.” This sympathetic description of Fariba’s reaction indicates some double-consciousness with the speaker. Although she questions Fariba’s actions, she is receptive and understanding

of the Iranian customs and Fariba's, revealing a more complex Iranian-American personality.

In the third stanza the speaker juxtaposes the recollection of Fariba saying that Jean Paul Sartre is her favorite and that "they say,/ his wife was smart" (52) with the moment the poet notices the daughter looking at herself in the mirror while wearing her mother's scarf. Atefat-Peckham splits line twenty so that the first part reads, "his wife was smart, she says," and the second part of the sentence reads, "But I can see her," namely, the daughter admiring herself in the mirror. This line emphasizes the double-consciousness within Fariba as well as the speaker. Despite Fariba's worldly knowledge (reading Sartre) and her obvious admiration for women who are smart and free, she continues to uphold oppressive traditions within her own family. Meanwhile, the speaker also cannot help but admire Fariba for her education while judging her for raising her daughters in the tradition of oppression. The speaker recalls: "I ask Fariba why/ she wears it. For my daughters, her fingers/ catch in her hair, for my daughters" (52). The movement of Fariba's fingers catching in her hair seems to imply that there is more than just a cultural pride that motivates her—regard for her daughters' safety, perhaps.

The fourth stanza recalls a time when the speaker was a child and went into the bazaar without wearing a chador. At the time, as the poem indicates, her father said that because she was "not old enough/ to choose [her] way, that [she] would be safe." The word "safe" implies that wearing the scarf is not simply a matter of choice and tradition but that there could be consequences for a girl caught without it. This view elucidates and perhaps reinforces Fariba's reasoning for wearing the scarf, "for her daughters." She is looking after their safety. But the speaker describes further how in order to protect the

child, her grandmother “pulled [her] under” her chador so that the “postars” (“revolutionary guards,” according to Atefat-Peckham’s glossary [118]) would not harass them. The grandmother adds a warning to her to “Watch it” (“*Bepau*” in Iranian). Here, again, Atefat-Peckham emphasizes the oppressed state of Iran from her speaker’s perspective. But then, ironically, she says that she felt safe in her grandmother’s chador, adding “Perhaps there is some joy in being captive,/ some comfort in knowing we obey” (52). Like Fariba, who enjoys hiding her books, the speaker enjoyed the danger of her situation and her small rebellion. The comfort, then, came not from being a captive to her country but from her grandmother’s robes and therefore, by obeying her grandmother’s stern warning, she was actually asserting herself against her oppressive society.

The final stanza expresses the speaker’s American identity for the first time by indicating her home is in Nebraska, and then by revealing how far removed she is from Fariba’s situation by listing questions concerning Fariba and her daughter’s habits. The most indicative instance of double-consciousness comes in this final stanza. Here the speaker juxtaposes the snow in Nebraska with the snow drifts in Iran. This, coupled with the final sentence, “Daughters are warm/ wrapped in their grandmother’s chadors” (53), indicates the speaker’s recognition of a connection to Iranian women. She acknowledges that being in the chador can be both oppressive and in some way comforting, albeit a sad sort of comfort of last resort, though it may even be a way to quietly assert themselves. Thus, perhaps somewhat ironically, the chador becomes both a symbol of feminine repression, motherly comfort and safety, and feminine rebellion, in the context of this poem. This is a stark contrast from the longing represented in Chin’s poetry for her native culture and the sadness and isolation that Simic expresses in his. Here the poet’s empathy

clearly lies with American mores and the plight of Iranian women. Like Chin, Atefat-Peckham celebrates the culture by memorializing it. Unlike Chin, she does not lament her own assimilation but she does seem to take comfort in it. Chin attempts to keep her Chinese culture alive through poetry, but Atefat-Peckham attempts to bring attention to the atrocities imposed on Iranian women by the use of her poetry—a thing she could not easily do if she were not assimilated into American culture.

Because her poems concern ideology in Iran, not in the United States, Atefat-Peckham's struggle with identity has more to do with anger and empathy for the women who are part of an oppressive Iranian society than as an American-Iranian living in the United States. An example of this is in "To The House," a poem set in Iran during the speaker's childhood. Of its three stanzas, the first and third have five lines and the second seven. The first and last stanzas address the speaker's personal experiences directly, while the second portrays events that have happened presumably many times to many women. Atefat-Peckham uses stanza length to unify the first and last stanzas.

To suggest multiple meanings, the poet uses enjambment throughout. For example, the first stanza begins with a strong, angry statement: "I should have emptied my colander of rice/ into their smiling eyes" (49), where Atefat-Peckham breaks the line to carry two meanings, the first of which builds toward a more violent second. Then, in the second stanza, she describes a scene in which several women are "stuffed/in a postar's car and branded whores because one." The line break at the word "one" gives the reader the expectation that many women are suffering for the deeds of "one" (perhaps a whore). So the horror of the situation is underscored when in the next line the "one" is revealed to be "one/button missing on a coat." These women are brutalized for no more

reason than a missing button, which the poet later illustrates is an excuse to extort money from them. In the third stanza, the poet uses enjambment so that the word “burning” can have a dual implication. In the lines, “My mother unknotted her scarf, pulled the burning/ cigarette,” the phrase “pulled the burning” literally refers to the cigarette, but because it is separated from the word “cigarette” it also implies that the mother’s scarf was burning, metaphorically. This is consistent with the poet’s use of the scarf and Chador as symbols of oppression throughout her work. Atefat-Peckham uses this very American style of writing to express her rage against the Iranian government. The language throughout this poem is also aggressive, as the poet peppers “To The House” with violent words and phrases such as “screech,” “halt,” “dragged,” “stuffed,” “branded whores,” “struggling,” “hauled,” and “whippings.” Her diction is decidedly Western, even as her sympathies lie with Iranian women.

The poem begins *in medias res* which lends immediacy to its emotional impact. Although the action occurred when the speaker was a child, it is as if the wounds she suffered during this period are not only still relevant but still powerful and painful. Recalling that she should have emptied the colander of rice introduces the reader to the idea that this speaker wants, at least retroactively, to subvert the authority of her culture by refusing to carry out a traditional task. She then goes much further by wishing she had thrown it into the guards’ eyes. She does not equivocate as to whether or not the postars deserve such treatment when she says, “Postars’/ eyes lingered on little girls when they passed.” For the speaker, here, the postars are leering pedophiles.

In the second stanza, the speaker’s wished violence is further justified when she describes the treatment of several women. In this scene the postars “dragged shrouded/

women under by the necks of their scarves.” The women are “branded whores because of one/ button missing on a coat.” The injustice of these acts is obvious, and as in “Fariba’s Daughters,” Atefat-Peckham again uses the shroud as a symbol of female subjugation in Iran. In the last three lines of the second stanza, the speaker indicts not only the postars for treating women unjustly, but the legal system at large when she describes how the women were brought to “stand before a judge/ who decided the proper exchange of coins for whippings.” The only way to avoid being beaten for fabricated infringements, according to this speaker, was to pay off the judge. In these first two stanzas in particular, the reader certainly understands that the poet sympathizes with the plight of the women in these situations. She recalls the incidents as though she were a young girl in Iran recently, evident by the poem taking place *in medias res*, which creates an immediacy of emotion, yet her style (free verse, informal language, a bit prosey and enjambed) is undeniably American. That style may place her within the action emotionally yet oddly separates her from it. She sympathizes to the point of rage, but her judgment of the culture in combination with her American style keeps her simultaneously both other from her heritage and assimilated into American more than Iranian culture.

In the third stanza of “To the House” the speaker expresses the small ways in which women subvert the authority of their political system. Upon arriving in “the house,” her mother unbuttons her scarf and offers a cigarette to her young daughter: “whispering/ ‘You want to try it? Try it—’” In the United States this offering would be looked down upon, at best—of course, a mother should not offer a cigarette to a child. The fact that the poet is no doubt aware of this American taboo and aware that her readership is primarily American adds particular emphasis to the moment. Only in a place

where women are this oppressed, beaten, and marginalized would it seem like a moment of empowerment for a mother to take off her shawl and offer her child a cigarette. For women in Iran, Atefat-Peckham seems to say, there is a double-consciousness. Society necessitates, in fact, that women exhibit public selves that, at least in the cases of Atefat-Peckham's women is very different from their private selves. In public the women cover their heads in scarves; they obey; they pay crooked judges and allow themselves to be falsely accused all in order to maintain their own safety and the safety of their families. However, in private, they pull their books from hiding; they remove their scarves; they smoke cigarettes and share them with their young daughters. They embody double-consciousness, a state of being that Atefat-Peckham understands well and sympathizes with, but the poem's speaker does not herself embody that condition to the same degree. She is aware of the American perspective of Iranian culture, because she herself is American. She uses that knowledge and her knowledge of female oppression in Iran to explode, in blistering detail, the subjugation of women. In Valin's words, "That Kind of Sleep is a dialogue itself, in a way, between the United States and Iran—and between a wandering poet and the family she left behind" (<http://www.whistlingshade.com>). It is this dialogue between the two cultures that Atefat-Peckham creates that also creates the double-consciousness in her poetry, since ultimately it is she who speaks for both sides.

In the poem, "Avenue Vali Asr," Atefat-Peckham describes a bus scene where all of the women are crammed into the back of the bus while the men lounge comfortably in the front, where there is enough seating for them to prop up their feet. In her interview with Ryan Blay, Atefat-Peckham recounts the experience in Tehran that inspired the poem: "The Islamic state says men and women should maintain separate spaces to keep

lust out. It's also safer for women. What ends up happening is that it's restrictive. Everything is separated. The bus was one third women, and two thirds reserved for men, but women are traditionally the caretakers and ride the bus more often. There were very few men on the bus, and we were packed" (www.michigandaily.com). Comprised of eleven three line stanzas and a couplet, "Avenue Vali Asr" has enough structure to reinforce the rigidity of the poem's theme yet lacks any further formal structure, such as a rhyme scheme or meter to restrict its idiomatic American usage.

Like Chin, Atefat-Peckham recalls a female American icon in her poem, "Avenue Vali Asr." However, instead of evoking an American symbol that represents dubious morality, unbridled sexuality, and ultimately self-destruction (among other, arguably, more flattering traits), such as Marilyn Monroe, Atefat-Peckham recalls Rosa Parks—a symbol of courage, integrity, change, and ethnicity. As defined by Atefat-Peckham's glossary, the poem's title is the name of "a major avenue in Tehran" (115) where the poem is set. The first stanza is one sentence that begins with a powerful first line, "We need another Rosa Parks" (45). The speaker wishes for someone like Rosa Parks to sit in "that front seat/ and say, I am too old for later." In a *VG: Voices from the Gaps* review of [That Kind of Sleep](#), Jo Anna Wahlund writes of "Avenue Vali Asr," "This poem also contains a reference to Atefat-Peckham's American roots and the freedoms that she wishes Iranian women could share with their American counterparts" (<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/>). Whereas Chin seems often to overlook positive aspects of an American identity in favor of her native identity, Atefat-Peckham sees redeeming aspects of American culture, particularly when she compares it to her Iranian heritage. America has produced someone such as Rosa Parks whom Atefat-Peckham admires and

respects. Clearly, the poet also alludes to Rosa Parks in order to make a connection between what happened to African Americans in the United States and what is currently occurring to women in Iran.

The issue of oppression is dramatized through the context as well as the phrasing. Word choice complements the narrative to create a repressive tension that is both physical and emotional. Even the sky in Tehran is smothering: “Smoke folded edges in city air.” Then in the third stanza the speaker explains, “I unstuck the doors, pushed/ the edges forward and apart.” Once she struggles through the doors, she runs into another obstacle which is not a person, not even a face, but just “the fat thumb pointing backward.” The thumb emphasizes again the marginalization of women; the driver does not even condescend to look at her but only directs her to the back and yells.

In the back of the bus, the speaker is packed in tightly with the other women all dressed in chadors, and she is “breathing in wet wool/of hair, breathing in their breaths,” (45-46) the act of which is making her feel ill. The speaker says, “We are not sheep” only to be shushed because “It is good this way, without voice.” The women wipe sweat from their brows and “shove the heat for space,” while the men sun their “hairy hands” and prop their feet up on empty chairs in the front of the bus, “leering/ into the small noises we made.” Clearly, she is insinuating the injustice of the situation because the women are crammed, like “sheep” into the back of the bus, and the men have room to spare in the front. In perhaps the most poignant line of the poem the speaker says, “I know that words can’t help them here.” The poet seems to concede that despite all she says, not just as the speaker in this poem, but as a poet generally, her words cannot help women in Iran.

Although the speaker's perspective is clearly sympathetic toward the women on the bus, and rightly so, in this poem as in "Fariba's Daughters" and "To The House" she speaks as an outsider. The speaker of these poems is always the one questioning the status quo in Iran while the other women say that it is better "without voice." She calls for an American intervention from someone like Rosa Parks, tells Fariba what freedom is like, and fantasizes about throwing rice into the eyes of the Postars. These calls for American ideology written within the context of Iranian sympathy and knowledge make Atefat-Peckham the most, perhaps, comfortable with both the Iranian and the American aspects of her identity. According to Valin, "her poetry is a synthesis of two very different worlds" (2001).

This tendency in a poet may be more typical than one might expect of an American writer. According to Sollors, "in America all writers can view themselves romantically as members of some outgroup so that combining the strategy of outsiderism and self-exoticization can be quite contagious. In America, casting oneself as an outsider may in fact be considered a dominant cultural trait" (31). This statement could also apply to Chin's work. By way of defying her slow and inevitable assimilation, she is actually expediting it because the acts of defiance and posturing as "other" are in themselves American traits. Even more so, this statement applies to Atefat-Peckham because her poems are so awash in Iranian idioms and customs yet so American in perspective. Trinh expresses a similar notion when she explains that writers who are both ethnic and female are often expected to write as ethnics. "Today, planned authenticity is rife; as a product of hegemony and a remarkable counterpart of universal standardization, it constitutes an efficacious means of silencing the cry of racial oppression. We no longer wish to erase

your difference. We demand, on the contrary that you remember and assert it. At least to a certain extent” (89), writes Trinh. Atefat-Peckham does express her ethnicity, “to a certain extent.” She does not approach the subject of Iran or Iranian customs in a way that could ever be construed as anti-American; however, the poetry is both homage to and judgment of Iran.

As opposed to Chin, who fears her own assimilation and the ultimate loss of her Chinese heritage, Atefat-Peckham seems to fear that Iranian customs will be upheld, at least in regards to the treatment of women. The poet both laments the condition of women in Iran and praises their quiet rebellions. However, the acts of subversion carried out by the women in her poems are so small (hiding a book or hiding in a robe, for instance) that part of Atefat-Peckham’s duality is in her apparent belief that these acts are admirable in Iran but also reflective of Iran’s profound oppression of women when compared to American freedoms. For Chin, the act of writing poems is a way of preserving her culture even while she believes it is slipping away. For Atefat-Peckham, writing the poems is a way to bring attention to the treatment of women in Iran and possibly effect change, even as her poems indicate at times that she thinks it futile.

While Atefat-Peckham revisits instances in Iran that conjure much emotion and her poems have an immediacy about them as if the wounds are still fresh, her poems do not display the kind of intertwined experience and profound double-consciousness, that Simic’s do. Simic’s poems also recollect times and places that are far removed from the speaker’s current situation. Time overlaps, and both past and present experiences create meaning for one another, giving the poetry that distinct feeling of hyphenation. “Cameo Appearance” is a good example of this hybrid style because the speaker slides back and

forth between the past and the present so easily that even he gets confused as to whether he is watching a movie of the war or he is back in the actual war. And while Simic does not seem to celebrate his European culture, the reader knows that that world is an integral part of the speaker, because of the context of the poems as well as of the way they are constructed. In fact, the action in Simic's poem, "Two Dogs" can also be compared to Atefat-Peckham's "To the House." In Simic's poem, members of the oppressive German army abuse a small dog by kicking it. In Atefat-Peckham's poem, oppressive guards leer at small children and abuse women. However, Simic emphasizes double-consciousness by juxtaposing the past with the present both in form and content. Within the poem, there are two points in time, two places, two stories, two dogs and one man. In Atefat-Peckham's poem, it is told from the present as a recollection of the past, and certainly the past has influenced her present so much that upon reflection she is angry, angry enough still to want to throw rice in the eyes of the postars. Nevertheless, the poem does not express the duality of mind to the degree that Simic's speaker does, as the poet is unequivocal in her disapproval of an oppressive state. On the other hand, Atefat-Peckham is closer to Chin in double-consciousness in that she makes a point to distinguish Iranian culture from American culture. Unlike Chin, though, she appreciates aspects of her heritage (the women of Iran) without insistently lamenting her own assimilation.

Simic is such a hyphenated writer that there is nearly no separation between his past European self and his present American one. He is not concerned with losing his heritage the way Chin is because it is so intrinsically a part of him. He does seem to notice his otherness occasionally, however. For instance, in "Cameo Appearance" he tries to get his children to see a glimpse of him in the war movie (which in the context of the

poem is also representative of the actual war) and is somewhat frustrated by the fact that they cannot see him. But on the continuum of assimilation to otherness, Simic is most other, most hyphenate. Chin, on the other hand, is keenly conscious of, even preoccupied with, her Americanism and her Asian background. But oftentimes, even when she is striving to hold onto the things about her heritage that are important to her, she can only do it in an American way. For instance, in the poem, "How I Got that Name" she often laments the assimilation she feels herself succumbing to while simultaneously celebrating her Asian heritage through American pop culture. Atefat-Peckham's poetry focuses almost exclusively on the Iranian experience, but because it does not dwell on the poet's condition in the U.S., it is less hyphenate. The experiences may be Iranian but the perspective is clearly American. That is evidenced by the harsh eyes she casts on the culture of her own heritage. This sort of ethnic posturing might be intentional on her part if she felt the human rights issues would risk notice by portraying happier aspects of Iranian life. (On the other hand, as I am not a student of Iranian culture it is possible that the story Atefat-Peckham tells is the only story to be told.) Either way, while often rich in cultural detail, Atefat-Peckham's poetry seems the most singularly American minded of the three.

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