

Word Count with Citations: 636

Word Count without Citations: 546

### Acceptance into America

George Seferis, the writer whom Marilyn Chin cites before beginning her title poem “A Portrait of the Self as Nation, 1990-1991”, is a contemporary Greek author and former diplomat. He seems to be honored as a poet who gave a new direction on Greek poetry, combining mythology and history with experiences of the present day. Seferis’s quote suggests that within yourself, there exists two beings [perhaps among others]: the stranger and the enemy. Both are not what one expects of themselves. Humans expect to be familiar, to be the hero to both themselves and to others. Marilyn Chin includes this particular quote in her epigraph to introduce the feelings of being unknown and exclusion from American society discussed in her poem. In *A Portrait of the Self as Nation* Chin compiles many of her poems which include a plethora of historical allusions, religious references, and arguably political takes. Therefore, Chin may have also included Seferis’s quote due to her connection with the themes of his writing with hers.

The historical allusions Chin draws connections to in her writing are both from Chinese history and American history. This of course compliments her Chinese American upbringing but doing so also adds impact to her writing. As Maxine Hong Kingston says in an interview with Angels Carabi, bringing up history, mythology, and overall culture from other countries into American literature provides more information to draw and dwell upon because of America’s homogenous culture: “I am sure that the reason we draw on myths from Africa and from Asia is that there is such a sterility in America. What is American culture now?. Is it what we have from television, from advertising?. Is that all we can draw on?. That’s not enough” (Kingston 141).

In accordance to American history, Chin brings up the League of Nations that was established shortly after World War I. The mission of the League of Nations was to seek peace for the world yet failed in doing so come the onset of World War II. Chin compares herself to her former American lover, herself lonely and war torn, and her partner who she refers to as “you” or her reader, young and ambitious.

The partner Chin describes becomes a metaphor for the United States. When describing the partner who dreams of becoming a “prince” or a “lord” over the “new world order” paints obvious individualistic tendencies, similar to how the United States itself is seen as very individualistic due to the efforts of capitalism (Chin 52).

Chin moves on to describe a moment of intimacy with the aforementioned partner where a cross is seen on her partner's necklace. This moment, along with the following naturalization of Chin which reads,

You are an American citizen,

Naturalized in the name of God

The father, God the son and the Holy Ghost (54).

further contribute to the partner's representation of the United States. This is due to the fact that by law, the church and state have to be kept separate. However, religious differences remain polarized in modern times and Catholicism and Christianity rule the nation, as seen utilized in Chin's naturalization process.

Throughout the poem, Chin describes her lover as barbaric, and against her own ideals.

She writes,

This is the way you want me-

Asleep, quiescent, almost dead,

Sedated by lush immigrant dreams (53) to discuss the United States' outlook on foreigners and immigrant acceptance. To be "sedated by lush immigrant dreams" juxtaposes with the dreams of becoming a leader of the nation of her partner mentioned earlier. However, she seeks refuge in her opposite partner, in America, for her to seek her own sense of self and belonging. Despite her goals being perceived as dreams, she becomes naturalized and finds herself blending together and becoming bigger than what had long before treated her so harshly.

#### References:

Barnstone, Willis. *Eighteen Texts: Writings by Contemporary Greek Authors*. Reprint 2013 ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1972. Web.

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Kingston, Maxine Hong, and Angels Carabí. "Interview With: Maxine Hong Kingston." *Atlantis*, vol. 10, no. 1/2, 1988, pp. 139-146. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/41054582](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41054582).