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This study explores the function of family in mediating ethnic identity in five literary texts by American writers of Greek descent: Ariadne Thompson's *The Octagonal Heart* (1956), Daphne Athas's *Greece by Prejudice* (1962), Elias Kulukundis's *The Feasts of Memory* (1967), Nicholas Papandreou's *A Crowded Heart* (1996), and Catherine Temma Davidson's *The Priest Fainted* (1998). All texts, ranging from fiction to memoir to autobiography, can be seen as examples of the ethnic *Bildungsroman* that feature the dynamic processes of ethnic self-definition, processes that are also marked by gender issues.

To analyze the complex processes through which family matters shape and influence ethnic identity formation, I specifically refer to the works of Paula M. L. Moya and Satya P. Mohanty. What is most crucial to my discussion of the literary texts is their claim that experience has a cognitive and theoretical component. Their theory of identity formation underscores the possibilities of individual and social agency that I find useful in examining literary representations of Greek American ethnicity.

Family, in its various configurations in the Greek American texts examined in this study, plays a prominent role in the negotiation between the different subject positions that hyphenated individuals occupy. The texts sometimes affirm and sometimes contest the idea that ethnic family promotes individual strength and fosters an ethnic consciousness in the narrators. The protagonists re-claim and/or re-invent their ethnic identities through physical and cognitive journeys to ancestral homes, through re-visions of myths about family and Greece, as well as through re-working of classical Greek myths. In analyzing the emotional and cognitive efforts of the protagonists in constructing an identity through family, this study's ambition is to contribute to scholarship on family matters in Greek American literature.

*Keywords:* Greek American literature, ethnic identity, family, ethnic *Bildungsroman*, gendered identity, experience, social location, journey, myth, politics.