

Theatre for Development program. Circumventing the usual arguments waged against such theater by nationalist chauvinists, Batra reads the play in terms of Onweume's rejection of "both postcolonial nationalism and Western feminism as offering solutions to the problems facing Nigeria" (131). For her, Onweume's play usefully initiates a dialogue on economic and sexual justice "by referencing African traditions of social alliances between rural women and sexual alliances between urban women" (145). Such a vision may be said to have been anticipated in the 1970s by the playwright Femi Osofisan, who in *Morountdan* had foregrounded women's equal participation in revolutionary movements. Thus, both in terms of vision and technique, Batra envisages postcolonial feminist and queer theater of the 1990s as carrying forward the subversive agendas of epic, poor, and participatory theaters while, simultaneously, recalibrating their male-centered theoretical frameworks.

There may be other equally legitimate ways of tracing the antecedents of the present-day postcolonial drama, but Batra's focus is on theater that is self-consciously directed toward "changes in social perceptions, provision of justice, and social and self-acceptance of non-normative life choices" (26). Her research is thorough, and she offers a multilayered thesis. Above all, it is her passionate commitment to cultural activism that animates her writing and makes research data and theory work together in the book which may well be deemed a commendable performance of academic activism.

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Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature

By ERIN KHUE NINH

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In its investigation of intergenerational conflict and the dynamics of the immigrant family, Erin Khue Nihn's *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* returns to familiar critical territory in the field, but raises new, intriguing questions. The book's propelling question is: why are second-generation Asian American daughters so often represented in the language of trauma, pain, suffering, and anger, despite the relatively comfortable and mundane conditions of their upbringing? Turning to well-studied texts such as Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Evelyn Lau's *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*, Catherine Liu's *Oriental Girls Desire Romance*, and others, Ninh suggests that attention to the phenomenology of what she calls the

“immaterial suffering” in these texts has been overlooked by scholars, in part because these texts have become so easy to dismiss. Branded by critics as commercial writing or as too complicit with the myth of the Asian American model minority, these texts, Ninh argues, do not fit easily within current paradigms of Asian American cultural criticism, which tend to valorize literature that challenges hegemonies of power more explicitly.

Seeking, therefore, to reinvest the figure of the daughter in these texts with political significance, Ninh argues that the discourse of Asian American intergenerational conflict “appears apolitical only when its language of filiality and affect . . . is allowed to be spoken in isolation from the politics of family” (6). By paying close attention to the micro-aggressions and disciplinary discourses of the family, Ninh uncovers insidious, and often invisible, forms of violence that produce the subjection of the Asian American daughter. Each chapter in the book focuses on a specific form of discursive violence that gets enacted by the family and internalized and absorbed by the daughter. In the first chapter on Jade Snow Wong’s memoir, Ninh argues that the Asian American family functions as a form of “capitalist enterprise” in which the daughter becomes enslaved by a kind of debt-bondage, forever accruing debt just by virtue of being born and being alive (2). A particularly fascinating aspect of this chapter is the analogy that Ninh draws between the systems of filial debt that oppressively bind the Asian American daughter to her parents and those of peonage that have historically exploited the labor of Asian American migrants. Although not necessarily bearing a cause-effect relation, Ninh offers this homology of micro- and macro-capitalist enterprises that have powerfully shaped Asian American identity through the process of “recruiting labor into wages that advertise but cannot ‘earn’ autonomy or its privileges” (38). Chapter 2 offers a fresh perspective on Kingston’s much-studied text *The Woman Warrior*, illustrating how the family can also operate through a disciplinary logic akin to that of sovereign power. Like the sovereign who wields the power of banishment and bare life over his subjects, the parental figures in Kingston’s text leverage a constant threat of disownment on the daughter figure, conditioning and producing in her a devastating sense of provisionality. The challenge of expressing such immaterial pain gets worked out, Ninh argues, through Kingston’s deliberately circuitous and fragmented narrative form. Chapters 3 and 4 make closely related arguments about the extreme forms of rebellion (e.g., drug addictions, suicide, running away from home, and sexual promiscuity) that Asian American daughters adopt in the face of oppressive parental control. Ninh suggests that these masochistic acts are underwritten by the daughters’ desire to reclaim their autonomous selves, paradoxically, through a form of self-destruction.

What struck me in reading *Ingratitude* was the sense of subjective experience that productively informs the analysis throughout. The writing is intimate and personally engaging, but the book never comes across as simply an autobiographical exercise. Although written for an academic audience, *Ingratitude* should also easily resonate with generalist readers, especially those who have at some level felt the sting of the immigrant family’s often invisible, yet suffocating, discipline. The book’s endeavor to investigate the figure of the daughter in Asian American literature is perhaps a little weakened by the fact that six out of seven of the primary texts selected by Ninh are by writers of Chinese American descent. Ninh addresses this limitation in the conclusion of the book by explaining that the project began more than ten years ago when

Chinese American texts dominated the field. It would be fascinating to see how Ninh's concept of the debt-bound daughter is inflected in texts written by the newer generation of Southeast Asian or West Asian authors, both in America and in other sites in the Asian diaspora. An original and generative contribution to the field of Asian American studies and ethnic studies, *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* lays an important critical foundation for future studies.

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Realism, Form, and the Postcolonial Novel

By NICHOLAS ROBINETTE

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Nicholas Robinette's *Realism, Form, and the Postcolonial Novel* takes up the challenges and the possibilities of realism as both a distinctive literary style and an interpretive framework through astute analyses of literary theory and three works of postcolonial fiction written by authors from the periphery of the contemporary world system. The term *peripheral realism* was coined by Jed Esty and Colleen Lye in a 2012 special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly*. Because Robinette is not only recognizing but also developing this concept as it informs and is transformed in different ways by various postcolonial writers and texts, readers are encouraged to consult Esty and Lye's essay to better grasp this monograph's point of departure. This is not to say that Robinette's thinking is merely derivative. On the contrary, his introduction brings a refreshing perspective to the realism-modernism debate by reassessing the work of critics such as Georg Lukacs—often seen as a stalwart champion of realism against the avant-garde—in order to show how realism not only allows but also embraces the kinds of formal experimentation and innovation so often associated with modernist aesthetics. Robinette further develops the salient point that any cognitive mapping of the world system generated through the dialectical tension between literary realism and modernist writing must be reconfigured if the socio-political circumstances of writing and reading are not those of metropolitan Europe but instead those of the postcolonies or other countries on the periphery. From their particular vantage points, Robinette argues, George Lamming, Nuruddin Farah, and Zoe Wicomb employ realism as literary style and interpretive framework to map out the totality of social forces glimpsed from their positions in the world system.

Robinette considers the transformations of peripheral realism in three chapters with close readings that are meticulous and nuanced, attentive both to each writer's historical and cultural context as well as the theoretical positions staked out by the