

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 206

TOPICS VOLUME

Volume 206

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Commentary on Various Topics
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys
of National Literatures**



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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *TCLC* by nationality, followed by the numbers of the *TCLC* volumes in which their entries appear.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 127, edited by Janet Witlec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witlec. Vol. 127. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 3-8.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

American Immigrant Literature

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Representative Works</i>	1
<i>Overviews and General Studies</i>	2
<i>Cultural Displacement</i>	33
<i>Stereotypes, Identity, Representation</i>	78
<i>Literary Technique and Use of Language</i>	104
<i>Further Reading</i>	131

Canadian Literature

<i>Introduction</i>	132
<i>Representative Works</i>	133
<i>Overviews</i>	133
<i>Personal Identity and National Identity</i>	160
<i>Native Canadian Authors</i>	174
<i>Other Major Authors</i>	193
<i>Further Reading</i>	232

Chilean Literature

<i>Introduction</i>	234
<i>Representative Works</i>	234
<i>Overviews</i>	235
<i>Major Chilean Authors</i>	253
<i>Chilean Literature and Politics</i>	313
<i>Further Reading</i>	365

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 369

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 481

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 497

American Immigrant Literature

The following entry provides a critical overview of twentieth-century literature written by and about immigrants to the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Literature by and about immigrants, like U.S. immigration policy itself, has gone through several phases that mirror the historical and social context from which it arose. Immigrants before the middle of the nineteenth century, as scholars point out, came mostly from northern and western Europe, as well as China, and were generally accepted into the “melting pot” of various nationalities that contributed to America’s economic and social growth. However, public attitudes toward immigrants began to change in the late nineteenth century as millions of mostly poor, uneducated people from southern Europe, Italy, and Greece began to arrive in the years between 1880 and 1920. Considered an “inferior” class of people by some of their American contemporaries, these immigrants experienced prejudice and racism in addition to the hardships of daily life in their new environment. Worry over their growing numbers led to immigration policies—culminating in the National Origins Act of 1924—that sought to restrict or impose quotas on immigration from certain countries. Immigration between the 1930s and the 1950s slowed down, though many war refugees entered the U.S. during this period. From the 1960s onward, a more liberal social and political climate led to more inclusive immigration policies that allowed many more immigrants, especially from non-European countries, to come to the U.S. These newer immigrants differed from their predecessors in being better educated and in their wish to retain ties to their native countries and cultures rather than relinquish or downplay their ethnicity in the interests of assimilation.

Autobiographical and fictional narratives by early immigrants, for example Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land* (1912) and Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896) tended to stress the immigrants’ struggle to make a new life for themselves and to fashion themselves into the prevailing image of Americans. Katherine B. Payant has observed that there is actually a dearth of early immigrant literature because so many of the immigrants were either illiterate or came from cultures that relied on oral tradition. One exception to this is Jewish immigrants, whose story is well-

documented by such authors as Cahan, Daniel Fuchs, Michael Gold, Ludwig Lewisohn, Henry Roth, and Anzia Yezierska. Up until about the 1960s, immigrant fiction was regarded as narrow, regional, and parochial, and was neither included in nor studied as part of mainstream American literature. With multiculturalism and a new wave of “transnational” immigrants in the later decades of the twentieth century who celebrated and nurtured ethnic differences, immigrant literature has become an important genre, systematically studied by students and pursued by scholars. In fact, some literary historians point out, all of American literature can be considered immigrant literature.

As notions of assimilation gave way to cultural pluralism, critics became interested in pursuing various approaches to immigrant literature, especially focusing on such underrepresented groups as women, children, or minority writers. Payant, Kathryn Hume, Thomas J. Ferraro, and Nahem Yousaf and Sharon Monteith have provided key background information for the study of immigrant literature. The question of how gender influenced the immigrant experience and, in turn, immigrant literature, is the focus of study in works by Magdalena J. Zaborowska, Sarah E. Chinn, and Arvindra Sant-Wade and Karen Marguerite Radell. Edward A. Abramson and Sanford Sternlicht have delved into the specific cultural position of immigrant Jews and their writings, while Ruth McKoy Lowery and Timothy Prchal have investigated how depictions of children in literature influenced attitudes toward immigrants and other marginalized social groups. Writing about the fiction of more recent groups of immigrants, Susan K. Harris, Kelli Lyon Johnson, and David Cowart have explored the connections between immigration, multiculturalism versus assimilation, and personal writing style.

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Julia Alvarez

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents (novel) 1991

Mary Antin

The Promised Land (autobiography) 1912

Russell Banks

Continental Drift (novel) 1985

Saul Bellow

Mr. Sammler's Planet (novel) 1970

T. Coraghessan Boyle

World's End (novel) 1987

Octavia Butler

**Dawn* (novel) 1987

**Adulthood Rites* (novel) 1988

**Imago* (novel) 1989

Abraham Cahan

Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto (novel) 1896

The Rise of David Levinsky (novel) 1917

The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories (short stories) 1968

Lan Cao

Monkey Bridge (novel) 1997

Willa Cather

My Ántonia (novel) 1918

Guido D'Agostino

‡*Olives on the Apple Tree* (novel) 1940

James T. Farrell

†*Young Lonigan* (novel) 1932

†*The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* (novels) 1934

†*Judgment Day* (novels) 1935

Carole Fernández

Sleep of the Innocents (novel) 1991

Daniel Fuchs

The Williamsburg Trilogy (novels) 1934-37

Michael Gold

Jews without Money (novel) 1930

Oscar Hijuelos

The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love (novel) 1989

Maxine Hong Kingston

The Woman Warrior (novel) 1976

China Men (novel) 1980

Ludwig Lewisohn

The Island Within (novel) 1928

Bernard Malamud

The Assistant (novel) 1957

Bharati Mukherjee

The Middleman and Other Stories (short stories) 1988

Chaim Potok

The Chosen (novel) 1967

Mario Puzo

The Fortunate Pilgrim (novel) 1964

The Godfather (novel) 1969

O. E. Rølvaag

Giants of the Earth (novel) 1927

Henry Roth

Call It Sleep (novel) 1934

Philip Roth

Goodbye, Columbus (novella) 1959

Isaac Bashevis Singer

Enemies: A Love Story (novel) 1972

Amy Tan

The Joy Luck Club (novel) 1989

Edward Lewis Wallant

The Pawnbroker (novel) 1961

Anzia Yezierska

Bread Givers (novel) 1925

Israel Zangwill

The Melting Pot (play) 1909

*These works comprise the Xenogenesis trilogy.

†These works comprise the Studs Lonigan trilogy.

OVERVIEWS AND GENERAL STUDIES

Katherine B. Payant (essay date 1999)

SOURCE: Payant, Katherine B. Introduction to *The Immigrant Experience in North American Literature: Carving out a Niche*, edited by Katherine B. Payant and Toby Rose, pp. xiii-xxvii. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999.

[In the following excerpt from the introduction to her collection of essays on immigrant literature, Payant identifies the major phases of immigration in the United States as well as the native attitudes the newcomers faced.]

More than forty years ago, in his now-classic study *The Uprooted*, the historian Oscar Handlin declared that when he set out to write a history of immigration in the United States, he discovered that the "immigrants were American history" (3). Today in the field of literary criticism it is commonplace to say that "ethnic literature" (of which immigrant literature is a part), in the past seen as a tributary or branch of the mainstream of American literature, *is* American literature. In fact, it is frequently argued that terms such as "ethnic," "immigrant," or the currently fashionable "multicultural" tend to ghettoize this literature and therefore devalue it (Ferraro 1; Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 8). As early as 1940, Caroline Ware in *The Cultural Approach to History* stated that the culture of immigrants "*is* American culture, not merely a contributor to American culture" (87).

Despite such positive support, the fact is that literature about immigration has had a long struggle to be accepted as worthy of scholarly study, and it is still seldom taught as an integral part of the canon of American literature. As Thomas Ferraro points out in his 1993 study of ethnic narratives, the first critical studies of Jewish immigrant fiction done by scholars such as Leslie Fielder and Irving Howe tended to dismiss this writing as "regional," narrowly parochial, and defensive, being overly concerned with prejudice and thus suffering aesthetically (2). In 1964 Daniel Aaron suggested that an immigrant writer could come into his own only by "dehyphenating" himself through coming out from "behind the minority barricade," and becoming a writer in a "universal republic" of letters (215). Such an artist did not have to give up ethnic subject matters, but somehow he had to universalize his material. In all of this criticism, there was the tacit assumption that ethnic subjects could not be universal, of interest to audiences outside the ethnic groups, or part of the main body of American literature.

In the 1970s, with the birth of the "new ethnicity" influenced by the civil rights movement of the 1960s, ethnicity suddenly became acceptable, in some circles even fashionable. Sociological studies such as Michael Novak's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (1972) and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1970) pointed out the "myth of the melting pot," that, in fact, the stew of America had not assimilated differences between groups, and that ethnicity persisted. Novak called for a celebration of diversity: "by each of us becoming more profoundly what we are, we will find greater unity in those depths in which unity irradiates diversity . . ." (71). Glazer and Moynihan stated that "the ethnic pattern was American, more American than the assimilationist," and the ethnic pattern offers hope of a diverse but common society (xxii-xxiv).

Just as sociologists began to study and celebrate ethnic differences in the 1970s, literary critics began to take an interest in ethnic literature, including the literature of immigration. As more young writers, including those of the "new" immigrant groups, began writing of their experiences and those of their predecessors, critics began studying their work. For example, the 1970s saw the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), and Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), as well as the founding of *MELUS*, the Journal of the Society for the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (1973). On college campuses, anthologies of ethnic writers began to appear as well as a few representations in "mainstream" textbooks such as the Norton Anthology.

Equally concerned with prejudice, especially that faced by ethnic, nonwhite writers, literary criticism of the new ethnic fiction often expressed anger at how these writers had been excluded from the canon. Perhaps the most well-known example is *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* edited by Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong (1974). The editors criticize the lack of attention to Asian American literature by reviewers and scholars, and also fault some of the literature of the past and present for being inauthentic and ingratiating to the dominant white culture.

In the 1980s, new studies of ethnicity by Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* and *The Invention of Ethnicity* (1986; 1989), took a seemingly radical new direction by suggesting that rather than being an "essentialist" condition acquired by biological and cultural "descent" from one's foreparents, ethnicity is an invented condition, one of "consent," discovered by various groups *after* they immigrated to the United States. In this viewpoint, ethnicity is part of fiction making whereby a group continually reinvents itself as it negotiates and renegotiates its identity vis à vis the larger society. In an example given by many sociologists, Italians of the late nineteenth century (the various provinces of the Italian peninsula were united into a nation only in the 1860s) had little sense of being Italian but rather thought of themselves as Sicilians or Calabrians (Hechter xiv-xv; Portes and Rumbaut 104). When they discovered that others thought of them as "Italian" and often were prejudiced against them, they began to acquire an ethnic identity.

According to Sollors, the formation of an ethnic identity, which began in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe of growing, competing nation-states, involves the creation of national or ethnic symbols as obvious as a St. Patrick's Day parade or a Chinese New Year's Day parade, or as complex as a group's literature and folklore. This is not to suggest that there is no such thing as "Irish" or the "Chicanos," only that ethnic

groups should not be imagined as “natural, real, eternal, stable, and static units” (*The Invention of Ethnicity* xiii-xiv). Rather, they are constantly reinventing and reinterpreting themselves in each generation and by each individual, and it is this reinterpretation that is the project of the literature of these groups. Similarly, another critic, William Boelhower, in 1987 argued in *Through a Glass Darkly* that in the United States ethnicity is not a definable cultural essence but is constantly in flux (31-32).

Sollors and Boelhower’s work turns literature by immigrant groups outward, arguing that it has much more in common with the mainstream of American culture than its creators would acknowledge. By examining a number of examples from America’s literary and popular culture throughout history, Sollors demonstrates their debt to broader cultural symbols such as the myth of Pochahontas, or the West. As such, since his purpose is to show the commonality of this literature with mainstream American culture, his work does not consider in detail how writers interpreted the experience of immigration or adaptation to an unfamiliar culture.

In addition to hundreds of essays on individual writers and works, there have been many books and anthologies in the last twenty years dealing with ethnic literature, such as *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* (1992), edited by Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling; and *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*, edited by Hector Calderon and José D. Saldivar (1991). However, few have concentrated specifically on the experience of immigration, and instead are concerned with larger issues of cultural conflict and theoretical issues of interest to scholars. *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States* (1996) edited by Alpana Sharma Knippling provides surveys of the literatures of nearly every major ethnic group, but much of this material does not speak directly to the experience of immigration. Thomas Ferraro’s *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America* (1993) concentrates on narratives of immigration, but the scope of the works he studies is fairly limited, dealing mostly with works about earlier European immigrant groups and only one work by the newer non-European immigrants. In his Introduction, Ferraro explains that he is interested specifically in immigration and social mobility, how ethnics become writers, their cultural distancing, and the ways in which they encompass national and rhetorical traditions in constructing their narrations of “up from the ghetto” stories. Another anthology, *How We Found America* (1995) by Magdalena J. Zaborowska, focuses on gender themes in East European immigrant narratives, but discusses only one author born since 1900.

Our focus in this volume of essays on immigrant literature attempts to fill a gap—to present essays about literature that deal in very direct ways with the experience

of immigrating to a new culture. Unlike Ferraro, we are not especially concerned with artistic formation, but rather with commentaries on how immigrant authors have portrayed their experiences coming to America or in the cases of second- or third- generation writers, those of their parents and grandparents. We are also particularly interested in presenting the experiences of non-European groups, especially those immigrants who have come to America since 1965, most of whom are non-European and nonwhite, and to assess how their writing may be different from the earlier groups of immigrants. We are not alleging that these works are necessarily “authentic” in the sense of being an accurate historical record of immigration, but rather that they are artistic visions of the writers’ views of their own experiences or of their ethnic groups’ experiences.

One question we had when we began compiling these essays was whether the literature would reflect the assimilatory pattern that is part of the mythology of immigration in America—the idea that people come here as aliens, as uprooted strangers in a strange land, are thrown into the stew pot of America, pick up the ways of the native-born, and eventually, perhaps not until the second generation, join the throng of assimilated Americans. We suspected that this theme would be found in the earlier literature by writers of European roots, but that a new paradigm would be found in the literature of more recent non-European immigrants. As will be seen, our suspicions were correct concerning the newer writers, but we found that the assimilatory pattern was problematic, even in the older writing.

Another theme that emerged as we began to collect essays was gender and the immigrant experience. We found many essays by women critics about women authors writing about women protagonists. In all these essays and works, the gender of the author and characters were important factors in the types of experiences recounted in the literature. Earlier history, sociology, and literary criticism had tended to focus on the male immigrant, his experience as being the norm (Oscar Handlin almost always gave male examples to illustrate his themes), but there was obviously a body of literature written in earlier times and being written today that concentrates on the experiences of women immigrants and their descendants. In fact, today it appears that of the immigrant writers currently being studied, women authors outnumber the men.

When studying the literature of immigration—to understand its composition, why some groups are underrepresented, for example, and to read its themes perceptively—it is helpful to know something about the history of immigration, as well as cultural attitudes toward immigrants, and cultural mythology about the formation of the so-called national character. There have been three great waves of immigration to the United States.

During the first wave, which lasted from about 1830 to 1860, immigrants came from northwestern Europe, specifically the British Isles, including Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. Often English speaking, these people sometimes were fleeing revolutions or religious persecution—famine in the case of the Irish—and many were searching for economic opportunity. They were fairly similar to those native-born Americans descended from the earliest settlers. It is these people who formed what has sometimes been called the “old stock” of Americans, and from their ranks have come many of the mainstream writers still composing the canon of American literature. Few of these writers have written extensively of the immigrant experience.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, cultural attitudes toward immigration were very positive, one could say welcoming (Handlin 264). Even when the flow of immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s became heavy, immigrants faced little opposition because it was believed that all these new people would contribute to the melting pot. Differences, which were not very great anyway, would disappear as immigrants became Americans. European travelers to the United States such as de Tocqueville remarked that America was creating a “new man” from the mixture of European nationalities composing it.¹ This “new Adam in a new Eden” was someone different, a new breed of human, more freedom loving and independent, more practical, more hard-working, and less likely to bow to arbitrary authority than the Europeans who were his ancestors. Crèvecoeur, another Frenchman who immigrated to America prior to the Revolution, asked:

What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendent of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. . . . He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.

(qtd. in Sollors, 1986, 75)

Although the east coast of America had been first settled in the seventeenth century by the English, according to early nineteenth-century mythology (the effects of which still reverberate in the popular culture today) this new American being created in the “great melting pot” of the new nation was decidedly not English (Handlin 265). In 1920, nearly two centuries after Crèvecoeur, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner expressed this mythology in his famous study of the effects of the frontier on American society: “In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics” (23). The greatness of America, seen to be the hope of the human race, was derived from this stew of humanity, each nationality contribut-

ing important parts of the national character. Instead of taking on any particular prescribed traits, this new-comer to America would contribute what he brought with him to the new land.

These attitudes began to change with the arrival of new immigrants in the later part of the nineteenth century, a change that produced the first extensive literature of immigration. Lasting from the 1880s to the 1920s, this wave of immigration was composed of people from southern and eastern Europe, peasants or uneducated urban people from Italy, Greece, the Slavic countries, and another somewhat different group, Jews from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe. These non-English-speaking people dressed differently, and they had different religions from the Protestant majority composing most of the native born. Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish, these “huddled masses” of Emma Lazarus’s famous poem crowded into ghettos in the urban centers of the United States. In the minds of the native born, they created unsanitary conditions and taxed public resources. Up until this time, other than the Catholic Irish, who came after the famine, and the Chinese, who came during the mid-nineteenth century to work in mining and on the railroads, immigrants had faced little overt prejudice. However, that began to change with the continual flow from Europe.

Assimilation began to mean something different in the national mythology. Rather than all groups stewing together, each contributing something to the national character, creating a new creature, “an American,” scholars and social scientists began searching for a predetermined definition of national character, a type to which immigrants would have to aspire if they wished to be accepted. Unfortunately, in developing their thinking, they were influenced by European writers on racial differences, men such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Arthur Gobineau, who were saying that northern Europeans were racially superior to people of other national or ethnic groups such as southern European, Jewish, or Asian. And it seemed to sociologists who studied the social pathologies of immigrant groups that these theories were borne out in the disease, alcoholism, crime, and poverty sometimes prevalent in the tenements.

American intellectuals influenced by these racist theories (later used by Hitler in developing his ideas) began to suggest that the national character was northern European—rooted in the culture and traditions of pre-Norman England, or perhaps the Teutonic tribes of Germany. This, of course, made it difficult for Irish, Slavs, or Jews ever to achieve this status, except by consciously adopting the culture, behavior, and customs of the native-born groups. Because it was now expected that an immigrant would have to assimilate to these predetermined standards, the effect these developments

had on the immigrant experience was profound. In examining the work of the fiction writers from these groups, such as the Jewish writers featured in our collection, the reader can see these ideals and sometimes a willingness, even eagerness, to conform to them.

Prejudice toward immigrants grew during the latter part of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth. As Oscar Handlin recounts, the media, intellectuals, and politicians began to call for restriction of these "inferior" groups. Amid these commonly accepted, we would now say racist, theories, the first major restriction of immigration, the Chinese Exclusion Act, was passed by Congress in 1882, in response to the growing nativist alarm in California about the Chinese who had immigrated to work in mining and in railroad construction. After this, the doors remained open to Europeans for over forty more years, allowing in a growing flood of immigrants. But because of nativist fears of these newcomers, concern over jobs and the effects of these different cultural groups on American culture, and buttressed by the pseudo-scientific studies mentioned above, Congress finally passed the National Origins Act in 1924.

This set up a system of quotas based on percentages of national groups already in the United States, thereby giving precedence to nations in northern Europe. Though many people had immigrated from southern and eastern Europe, the American stock was still heavily weighed toward northern Europeans. Thus, as Handlin said, "Now the moving men [came] to rest" (293). From the founding of the republic in 1797 until 1924, more than 35 million had flowed into the United States, 23.5 million of them during the years of 1880-1920 (Handlin 35; Knippling xv). From this point on, literature of immigration, at least that written by first-generation immigrants, diminished greatly in prominence, not to resume until the changes of the 1960s.

With a few exceptions, such as the Jews, many of these earlier ethnic groups produced little literature of note. Even the Irish, from whose ranks later came great American writers such as Eugene O'Neill, produced little notable literature during the nineteenth century, the peak years of their immigration. According to Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes in their survey of Irish American literature, the immigrants of the famine were mostly illiterate peasants who poured into the urban slums and struggled at menial labor jobs to survive amid prejudice and almost intolerable living conditions. The works that came out of this period served to confirm stereotypes of the Irish as shiftless, ignorant, and a burden on society. Irish immigrants were urged to emulate the Yankee work ethic and disavow their Irish roots (265-269).

Other groups such as Italian and Polish who came in large numbers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

century were composed mostly of peasants who came mainly from oral cultures with little literary tradition. These groups did not produce much literature about their immigration experiences. In the case of Italians, the little that was published was influenced by this oral style (Gardaphe 282). According to Yiorgos D. Kalogeras, another group who came in large numbers during these years, Greek Americans, have written relatively little of their immigration experiences. Says Kalogeras, "The immigration story has always had little appeal to the Greeks, and this fact has determined . . . their exclusion from company of canonized immigrant writers such as Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska [two Jewish writers]" (254). In *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (1972) Michael Novak laments this lack of literary documentation of the experiences of white ethnics. He says, "Concerning the urban experience of immigration, it is as though our grandfathers did not live" (169). Novak goes on to say that to some extent the Jewish writers have spoken for these relatively silent groups, though there are important differences between the Jews and other white ethnics. Though Novak underestimates the amount of literature produced by these immigrant groups, it is true that in comparison to Jewish writers and the outpouring from the newer writers, which are the main subject of these essays, non-Jewish white ethnic groups have produced little.

For the next forty years, immigration was very sparse compared with the years from 1880 to 1924. During the 1930s, few had the means to immigrate because of the worldwide Depression, and during World War II they could not (Glazer, *New Immigration*, 2-3). During the late 1940s and 1950s, considerable numbers of refugees came from Europe fleeing the devastation of the war, and some from China (Chinese restrictions had been lifted since it was embarrassing to disallow immigration from a World War II ally). However, in comparison with the numbers who would have wished to come, immigration was limited in the postwar years. During this period, attitudes toward immigrants were less hostile, perhaps because fewer were coming, and the assimilatory mythology held firm in the national consciousness. And, certainly there were exceptions such as Paule Marshall, whose Afro-Caribbean parents immigrated from Barbados in the 1930s, to find not only racial prejudice from whites, but resentment from Southern-born blacks.

As in many areas of national life, great changes came in the 1960s with the advent of the black civil rights movement, which spilled over and affected other disadvantaged or excluded groups in American life. Long-silent groups such as Mexican Americans and Asian Americans began speaking out angrily against discrimination and formed their own movements for civil rights, similar to those of the African Americans. Part of this awakened awareness resulted in the creation of new literature by these groups. Whereas many of the first gen-

eration of immigrants had clung to the old world ways, and many of the second generation had embraced all things American and urged their children to become Americans, their children, the third generation, were less anxious about their ethnicity and more interested in exploring their roots. In addition, a different, more tolerant attitude toward difference and an appreciation for diversity created an audience for such literature.

This literature is also the result of a new immigration policy. It had long been obvious that the national quotas set up in 1924 were racist, and many had spoken out against them during the years following their enactment. In 1965, reflecting the new attitudes toward civil rights and racism, Congress abolished the system of quotas set up under the National Origins Act and allowed many more immigrants to come each year. This momentous event set up the third great wave of immigration in American history, a stream of immigrants from around the world that has increased each year and has greatly affected American life, including its literature. Though this stream of immigrants has never reached the record levels of 1900-1920 (in 1990, 7.9 percent of the population was foreign-born, compared with 14.7 percent in 1910), it has caused upheavals in many areas of the national consciousness (Portes and Rumbaut 6). It is the literature of this group immigrating since 1965 that is primarily the subject of the essays in this book.

How does the new immigration differ from the older immigration, and how does its literature differ? Though there are many similarities between these two groups of immigrants—two major examples being that the vast majority have settled in urban areas and many are willing to do jobs rejected by the native-born—differences between the groups are most often noted (Portes and Rumbaut 7). These new immigrants are overwhelmingly from what we would call undeveloped nations. In 1994 the top five nations sending immigrants to the United States were Mexico, China, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam, and the next five were India, Poland, Ukraine, El Salvador, and Ireland. If one goes back just a couple of decades, we can see that into the 1980s many immigrants came from Korea as well as the Caribbean area.

Thus, because they are non-European (though some come from areas colonized by European nations), these new immigrants bring different cultural baggage with them: different religions (non-Judeo-Christian totally or in part), unusual, “exotic” languages, and different customs. Perhaps the greatest difference is that the newer groups are mostly nonwhite, or at least darker-skinned people whom white Americans perceive as “colored.” For example, Mexican Americans are usually *mestizos*, mixtures of Spanish and Indian stock. Racial prejudice is certainly nothing new to American immigration

(discussions were actually held in the 1880s about whether an Italian was white), but these new immigrants face a degree of racial prejudice unprecedented in earlier waves of immigration. This theme of racial prejudice is certainly important in the literature of these groups. It could be argued that the previously mentioned “reaction formation,” a term used to describe an ethnic group’s awareness of discrimination and resultant militancy on the part of the educated, English-speaking second and third generations, has produced much of this immigrant group’s outpouring of literature in the last thirty years.

Another distinguishing characteristic of this new group setting them apart from earlier waves of immigrants is that they tend to maintain close ties with their former countries for several generations. Rather than severing ties and not looking back as many earlier immigrants were forced to do,² modern communications and travel have made it possible to communicate with those “back home” frequently, to send children to be with grandparents during the summer, and to travel home frequently for visits. This new “transnationalism” (and sometimes dual citizenship), plus the acceptance of multicultural lifestyles in the United States, has slowed the process of assimilation greatly. Many of these people live in ethnic enclaves and continue with the customs of their native lands; though considering themselves American, they consciously choose not to assimilate to certain aspects of the American lifestyle they consider undesirable for themselves and their children. These closer ties with the homeland and admiration for their national cultures certainly can be seen in the literature, where writers often find fault with certain aspects of American life, and where characters often return home for visits, or reflect on the strengths of their cultural heritage.

Another important difference that has contributed to the greater production of literature about the immigration experiences of these groups is that many of their members, especially in the second and third generations, are not only literate, but well educated. Contrary to popular stereotypes of most immigrants being peasants or laborers in big cities, a good number of immigrants are high school or college educated—in the case of some groups, more educated than the native born.³ This situation was partly aided by statutes passed in the 1980s allowing special status to professionals such as engineers and doctors.

After the initial liberalizing legislation of the 1960s, the numbers of immigrants allowed in during a given period were consistently raised, leading to the point where nearly one million are coming legally each year, not including the thousands of illegals. This flood, perceived as destructive to mainstream culture by some conservative intellectuals and threatening to job security by some blue-collar workers, has led to largely ineffective mea-