

George Giannaris

*GREEK IMMIGRANTS AND THE GREEK-AMERICAN NOVEL*

Athens: Filippotis, 1985. Pp. 272. [In Greek]

Reviewed by John Taylor

George Giannaris, who has published nine collections of poetry (in both Greek and English) and critical works devoted to such subjects as the music of Mikis Theodorakis, the writings of Jean Moréas and the criticism of Kimon Friar, has with *Greek Immigrants and the Greek-American Novel* provided us with a thoroughly researched, intelligently written study of a little-known aspect of American (and Modern Greek) literature. It is a work which deserves to be translated into English, for beyond its obvious interest for Greek-American readers lies its importance for the more general investigation of the American ethnic or immigrant novel. Besides several articles and collections of essays devoted to "immigrant literature," similar book-length studies already exist for the Scandinavian-American novel, the Jewish-American novel, and the Black-American novel. Studies of Greek-American literature have also been published--notably Alexander Karanikas's pioneering *Hellenes and Hellions* (1981)--, but Giannaris's work has the virtue of synthesizing concisely the significant themes and trends, and of analyzing in detail the novels of such major writers as Harry Mark Petrakis, Elia Kazan, and Charles Jarvis. Besides the chapters devoted to these three authors, Giannaris provides long presentations of nineteen others. Surely the book has already introduced Greek readers to writers unjustly unknown in Greece, and perhaps it will, in time, foster translations. The frequent fate of the immigrant writer is indeed to remain unheralded in both his former homeland and his adopted one, in both the old country and the new.

Giannaris's study is restricted to novels written by authors belonging to what he terms the "first" and "second" generations of Greek-American writers, in other words works written in English and published between the years 1945 and 1982. The two generations are respectively defined as: (1) those writers who were born outside the United States and who later immigrated, such as Kazan, Michael Mastroiannis, Anastasios Aslanis, Nicholas Gage, and Angela Catramadou-Parker; (2) those writers who were born in the United States of at least one Greek parent, such as Petrakis, Jarvis, Tom Chamalis, Harry L. Mountzoures, Albert Isaac Bezzerides, Michael Yatron, George Christy, Dean Brelis, Jim Dilles, Thomas Doulis, Harry S. George, Mary Vardoulakis, Daphne Athas, Ariadne Thompson, Corinne Demas-Bliss, Roxane Cotsakis, and Athena Dallas-Damis. Thirty-five novels are analyzed in the book, though many others are mentioned. Non-fictional memoirs such as Christopher Castanis's *The Greek Exile* (1851)--the earliest example of the genre--are noted, but not examined, though Giannaris does discuss the importance which autobiographical details take on in nearly all Greek-American novels. Novels written by immigrants, remarks Giannaris, are generally about immigrants.

As to other authors falling outside the above categories, such as non-Greek writers who nonetheless depict Greek immigrants in their works, one must turn to the copious footnotes, which sometimes are of such interest (and length) that one wishes they had been incorporated into the text itself. Giannaris mentions, for example, Jeanette Lee's *Mr. Achilles* (1912), the first

American novel in which a Greek immigrant appears as a hero. Notable in this respect are also such popular works as Dashiell Hammett's novels *The Maltese Falcon* (1929) and *The Thin Man* (1933), Ellery Queen's *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1932), James Cain's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940). Greek characters appear as well in novels by Robert Penn Warren, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Jack Kerouac. Giannaris, whose erudition is admirable, convincingly demonstrates the importance of the Greek immigrant as an archetypal figure in American fiction. His study demonstrates that literary historians and critics must no longer ignore the role played by immigrant writers in the development of modern "national literatures," if indeed the term may still be employed without qualification.

Beck, Brenda E.F., Peter J. Claus, et al, eds.

*FOLKTALES OF INDIA*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Pp. xxxi + 357

Reviewed by Uma Parameswaran

*Folktales of India* is the thirteenth in a series, *Folktales of the World*, issued by the University of Chicago Press under the general editorship of Richard M. Dorson. It consists of 99 tales collected by 18 folklorists from 14 different languages of India. Clearly, the work is designed to be a definitive text book. All the hallmarks and accessories of a scholarly text book are here—full documentation of sources, including the name and background of the folklorist who collected any given story and of the one who narrated it; a useful bibliography of source books and critical volumes on India's folklore; and indices that classify the stories under different systems. In addition to the general alphabetical index of words and titles, there are indices that categorize the tales according to motifs, tale types, and tale type motif in each story. The sequence within the volume is based on a classification of relationships (familial or in societal values) and each of the eight major sections contains between eight and twenty stories. Each section has an introduction to the role which that relationship plays in regional or Indic folklore and culture, and each story has an introduction that explains the significance of the action that takes place.

These classifications and introductions seem impressive in scholarship and sensitivity and are so for the most part. However, one cannot be as laudatory about the choice, narration, and editing of the folktales themselves. One does not get much reading pleasure from the collection.

A.K. Ramanujan, in the Foreword, speaks of the inappropriateness of embroidering old folktales with such Westernized concepts or translations as "honeymoon," "breakfast" or "Prince Lionheart." But translating a tale without idiomatic adjustments is not the answer either.

The prose style of most of the narratives is inadequate. Often there is earthiness and hyperbolic poetry in the original dialect version; there can be sophistication of narrative techniques and structural flow in modernized ver-