Nathan Asch's writing career began with the publication of his short stories in the Paris-based *transatlantic review*. The oldest child of the great Yiddish writer Sholem Asch and his wife Mathilda Spira Asch, he was born in Warsaw, Poland. When Asch was ten, the family moved to Paris; three years later, after brief stays in Germany and Switzerland, they immigrated to the United States. Settling with his family in rural Staten Island, New York, Asch completed his secondary education in the New York City public schools and attended Syracuse and Columbia universities.

In the early twenties he returned to Paris. Although Asch had had two stories accepted by the *Nation* before he left for Paris "to write and to find himself," his career as a writer was launched with the 1924 publication of the stories he submitted to the *transatlantic review*: "Gertrude Donovan," "Marc Kranz," and "The Voice of the Office," all of which were later incorporated into his first novel, *The Office* (1925). ("Gertrude Donovan" was also included in *The Best Short Stories of 1925*.) In the 18 January 1925 Paris *Tribune* (the European edition of the *Chicago Tribune*) Eugene Jolas quoted Pierre Loving as saying, "In the work of Ernest Hemingway and in that of Nathan Asch, Mr. Ford introduced two interesting young writers to the public."

*The Office*, which one reviewer compared favorably with John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), consists of seventeen chapters. The first and third chapters, "Wall Street" and "The Office," respectively, provide in terse language the background for the fourteen narrative sketches which characterize the employees, from porter to president, of a firm which goes bankrupt. As one reviewer said, the second chapter, "The Voice of the Office," employs "savage staccato language" through a "sensational accumulation of words ... like a list of irregular verbs" to mirror the mood of the office on the day that it failed. The remaining chapters are written in a "bald and hard, acidly economical, at
times hot, but never warm hearted" style, and narrate the employees' "pallid, unimaginative, disheartened efforts at amusement" after they learn of the crash.

As a result of his association with the transatlantic review, Asch gained entree into the expatriate colony in Paris. Among his friends were Josephine Herbst, John Herrmann, Ivan Bede, Morley Callaghan, Evan Shipman, and Malcolm Cowley. Of course, he also knew Ford Madox Ford, who was instrumental in helping him get The Office published, and Ernest Hemingway; however, Asch felt that both alternated between "patronizing and snubbing him." About twenty-five years later, his reminiscences about those days were published in the Paris Review (Summer 1954) as "The 1920's: An Interior." This piece, an excerpt from an unpublished novel, "Paris Was Home," was, according to Malcolm Cowley, a "sensitive lyrical" description of a day at the Dome Cafe. Hemingway, though objecting to parts of the novel, also found the sketch "first rate."

While in Paris Asch met and married an American girl, Liesl. Although by the time his second novel, Love in Chartres, was published in 1927, Asch and his wife had returned to the United States, it chronicles their love affair in France. In this work the unnamed, sensitively drawn, young American novelist, recognizing that in order to devote himself to his art he must renounce marriage, leaves the girl and Chartres and returns to Paris to write. One reviewer described it as "spiritually allied to the Hemingway School" in its "absolute freedom from sentimentality and ... disciplined compression." Another saw in its faithful and convincing rendition of "that mystical and exalted state of sexual attraction" a close resemblance to Sherwood Anderson's Dark Laughter (1925). The novel ironically foreshadowed Asch's divorce three years later in 1930.

When the Aschs and their son returned to America in 1926, they lived for a year in Preston, Connecticut, in a "frozen farmhouse" near John Herrmann and his wife Josephine Herbst (who had returned from Paris in the fall of 1924); next, along with Hart Crane, they stayed in a boardinghouse near Patterson, New Jersey; and then they moved to Sherman, Connecticut, in 1928. During this time Asch wrote Pay Day (1930), a novel set against the background of the Sacco-Vanzetti execution. It appeared simultaneously in the United States and Germany, and a year later it was published in Yiddish in Warsaw. Despite the book's apparently wide market, Asch and some of the other less successful former expatriates living near New York felt rejected by the New York publishing world. Thirty years later Asch commented: "I do think it's a crazy situation that the elimination was so brutal, that of all the writers in Paris then, Hem is holding the world by the handle and everybody else is either obscure or dead. But you can't blame Hem." If Asch felt rejected by the New York publishers, he was pleased by the reception his work received in Germany, where both The Office (Als Die Firma Verkrachte, 1929) and Pay Day (Der 22. August, 1930), and quite a few of his short stories continued to be sold until the rise of Hitler, who banned them because Asch was a Jew.

During the thirties Asch resided in various parts of the United States including Hollywood, where he was a scriptwriter for Paramount, and Washington, D.C., where he worked for the educational wing of the Works Progress Administration. In this period, Asch published two more novels: The Valley (1935) and The Road in Search of America
(1937). Both resemble *The Office* in form and style in that they are composed of tales and sketches. The tales in *The Valley* reflect the tragedies of rural men whose soil has become a wasteland much in the same way as the sketches in *The Office* detail the tragedies of their urban counterparts, although the portraits in this later novel are drawn with greater sympathy and insight. These same qualities are carried even further, to the point of sentimentality and melodrama according to some reviewers, in *The Road in Search of America*. Others continued to see the influence of Dos Passos and Sherwood Anderson in this work, which Asch dedicated to his friend Josephine Herbst. Between 1931 and 1939 Asch also reviewed books regularly for the *New Republic*. The approximately three dozen reviews reveal his thorough knowledge of American and European culture and a sympathetic understanding of the human condition.

In 1939 Asch married Caroline Tasher Miles of Philadelphia, and they moved to Saratoga Springs, New York, where they stayed until both enlisted in the armed forces during World War II. After their discharges they moved to Mill Valley, California, where Asch wrote and published short stories and conducted writing workshops for interested students in his home. Most of his stories appeared in the New Yorker, but a few were published in such magazines as Commentary, Forum, and the Virginia Quarterly Review. All reveal a keen sense of place and a sensitive awareness of people. He died of lung cancer in 1964. According to Malcolm Cowley, as many as five of Asch's novels remain unpublished, but the location of the manuscripts is unknown.