

life as the forbidden subject, and those who bring it up commit a fearful solecism.

Each of Gillian Tindall's stories is concerned with death (actual, reported, anticipated or in some other way obsessively present) in this social context. Nearly all of them reflect the awkwardness of death's mystery by having as their spokesman a member of that class most concerned to sweep death under the carpet. As a consequence, the speaking voice in these stories is often vulgarly middle-class, full of clumsy English middle-class phrases such as "a pretty ghastly social worker really," "come to think of it," "in point of fact," "thereby engendering a lasting social neurosis," "with such suitable appurtenances as riding lessons," "what with one thing and another," and so on. What *should* shatter the bland respectability of this prose-style—as it does the often bland lives of the stories' characters—is death's sudden visitation. But, although the stories are always interesting and often moving, Miss Tindall's style seems to be the victim of her bourgeois points of view.

Michael Taylor

GEORGE GALAVARIS

Invocation to a Pagan Divinity

Greece: The Magic Flute, 1972. Pp. 127.

The eight stories of this collection show that the life of the imagination still has force and originality. In a literary world where a bourgeois enumeration of the material of daily living is the rule, the style of Galavaris stands apart for its passion and its mystery. Conceived in the allusive tradition of poetry and myth, each story achieves a distinction that is partly stylistic and partly the result of the strangeness of that other world which has haunted such others as E. M. Forster and Isak Dinesen.

In the "Voices of Crimson Hours," one has a sense of mystery that gives to the stories their pagan overtone.

For how long we danced I do not know. The tiers of rising foothills were rimmed with white in the distance and there was a flood of green moving through the silver lace of the branches. The moon had disappeared as the crimson hours descended. The flute wailed. The tone was powerful born not of wood but of pure metal. The faint light through the branches cast huge shadows around us, on the trees, on a petal. There was a luminous gulf between the trees and the shades began to descend one after the other, a procession of them. There I could see a youth walking side by side with the master, a pale light hallowed his fluttering hair, hallowed his temples. (p. 126)

Haunted by death, the stories nevertheless evoke another kind of life that is filled with heightened senses and emotions. At the end of "The White Swan," we find the following: "Odette is dead. Bloodless trees rise up in smoke. Voices come through the rain and the fog; they swell into a mighty sound. Shadows hover where the screams are heard. Its rings come quickly and enclose me. No gas lamps. The poisonous moon appears through the spider of the mist" (pp. 79-80).

It is a world filled with strange characters. In "The Boy With the Parrot," the main character is a youth who arrives mysteriously in the village. He is a combination of child and deity. The old man who is the speaker in the story says of him: "He had a peculiar gift we all noticed. He spoke the language of the animals. He talked to the horses. He would say something and it clearly communicated itself to the animal. It was not this gift or the light of dusk in his eyes that made him loveable to everyone in the village. It was the mystery about him and the parrot he had with him" (p. 99). In its color and its motion, the story reminds one somewhat of a painting by Chagall.

In "The God Invoked" a stranger appears and has supper with the father and the one who keeps repeating "I am not a witch. I am not mad." The stranger is described: "He walked slowly wearing a smile on his face such as I had never seen before. He never took off his big mantle. There were no words spoken.

He never looked at anyone. He sat silently and through his big glasses I saw his green grey eyes. The candles flickered. It was like the evening mother had died. The candle-flames had the same colour, the same sparkle. Father asked questions. There were no answers. The visitor had a smile on his face the like of which I have never seen" (pp. 19-20).

Filled with music and lavish with color and pictorial design, these stories reveal a surrealist concept of storytelling as well as a deep feeling for the world of art of which they so obviously are intended to be a part.

As the author is a painter and a musician, his literary work has an affinity to those other arts that also sets it apart from the usual fiction written in Canada, and the world we here inhabit is one of dreams and perceptions—no less real for being a consummate work of the imagination. Clearly these are not stories that reflect the current Canadian dilemmas, indeed they are European in tone and content.

William Prouty

ALBERTO MORAVIA

Un' altra vita

Milano: Bompiani, 1973. Pp. 227. L. 320.

Un' altra vita is another collection of short stories by Moravia which, like his *Il Paradiso* (see *IFR*, 1 [1974], 74-75), is also dedicated to female characters. Although apparently common in inspiration and well rooted in the banality of daily routine, these stories are precise, vividly actual, real, and undoubtedly humorous and bizarre. Like most of Moravia's works they are concerned with characters who have been stripped of faith and hope, who are often indifferent, lethargic, and incapable of loving or of being loved.

The stories while having an appearance of banality, at the same time reveal the strict tie existing between appearance and reality, normality and madness. One thinks

of Pirandello and his world, since, as in Pirandello, madness often seems to be the last refuge of human dignity; also, Moravia, too, is a virtuoso of the cold, unpitiful art of conciseness.

One of the dominant themes in this work, as in most of Moravia's fiction, is the moral decadence of the middle class. The characters, female or male, are largely depicted as aimless human beings who seem only to be preoccupied with material, sensuous, or hedonistic concerns. Their family make-up is often inadequate in some way and these antiheroines breathe an air of sterility, meaninglessness, and *unsatisfying relations in a world which is defective in some way.*

Typical is the story of a wife and husband who are convinced that they hide none of their feelings. One evening they tell each other their respective experiences of the day. The wife unwinds the usual daily chronicle of a good bourgeoisie: a visit to a girlfriend, shopping, attendance at an art exhibition. Suddenly, forcefully and nonchalantly she tells him how that same afternoon she has been unfaithful between shopping and cocktails. The husband seems to remain indifferent. Urged by her he accounts his day. He too has been unfaithful: with his secretary. The wife is resentful, at which the husband denies. "Ma io ti ho tradito davvero" (but I really have been unfaithful to you), she insists. An incredulous husband looks at her: how is it possible? The "distraction" must be erased, ignored by reality.

The everpresent dichotomy between illusion and reality, bad faith and authenticity, is one of the most powerful messages and themes of the stories. Thus, for every character there exist possibilities of unveiling "another life" that would have to be created but which almost invariably reveals itself as unsizeable, elusive, and impossible.

It is so for Cecilia who thinks of escaping a conventional middle-class marriage through the paradise of drugs and who finds herself at the end reaching back into that very feared "past" represented by her family, marriage, and normality. Or, for instance, the lady staying alone in her villa carefully devising a plan to seduce her gardener in order to finally leave him languish and die in her cellar. But it is she who will instead be seduced and