

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

subsequently abandoned. Or Eleonora, whose cry "vorrei morire" is identified with the change of scenery from the Roman fantasies to the more concrete environment of her familiar "deep south."

The world of language as a means of communication, or non-communication, in this universe of duality where the image of "another life" is always present or possible depicts the alienated, futile, aimless lives of Moravia's characters. And if the atmosphere which pervades their existence is one of boredom and indifference, of "noia" in a word, then their language remains a faithful mirror of their world.

While these short stories are rather unspectacular nonevents, they unfold in a measured prose characterized by an indulgence in descriptive details and bring us the clear, rapid, lucid somewhat amusing pictures of women of our time, with their conquests and deceptions. It is not necessary to be a Roman like Moravia in order to have empathy with his portraits of women, of passion, jealousy, love, boredom, despair, and cruelty. These unforgetting portraits are images that will not easily cease to trouble the reader.

Anna M. Kinsella

GIOSE RIMANELLI and  
ROBERTO RUBERTO, ED.  
*Modern Canadian Stories*  
Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1966  
(reprint edition). Pp. xxxi, 402.  
\$8.95.

Giose Rimanelli's anthology differs, it seems to me, in two important respects from the anthologies of Canadian short-stories in English that preceded it, namely those of Raymond Knister, Desmond Pacey, and Robert Weaver. It is both more pretentious in its editorial apparatus and in its claims for itself, and at the same time the superficiality of its pretensions is displayed both by the bias of its omissions and by the errors of fact or logic contained in its introductory apparatus.

For example, in dealing with Alfred de Vigny's judgment of "the French of Quebec in colonial times," Rimanelli writes as though Acadia and Quebec were one and as though those French and de Vigny were contemporaries: ". . . if Alfred de Vigny judged while being outside the tragic reality of Acadia at that time devastated by internal struggles, religious pressures and a lack of cultural contact with France." In point of fact nearly a century in time separated de Vigny from the Acadia under discussion, and that Acadia was certainly not Quebec!

The degree of Rimanelli's superficiality, however, is best exposed by his treatment of Haliburton and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts as against Stephen Leacock and Duncan Campbell Scott. Rimanelli has the annoying habit in his preface of disposing of writers with a few damning phrases like the following: "Haliburton was a journalist who wrote satirical sketches in Howe's newspaper, *The Novascotian*. They meanwhile have lost a great deal of their humorous fragrance because they were limited to restricted milieu, namely Nova Scotia, and they lack those human and universal qualities that allow a work of art to survive and to project itself beyond its time and the setting that inspired it." Only the most abysmal ignorance of Haliburton's work, literary background, and career could have produced such remarks. And how, after having so dismissed Haliburton, Rimanelli could; patronizing—he is always patronizing when speaking of Canadian literature—praise Leacock and use three of his "sketches" in his anthology as short stories is difficult indeed to comprehend. It is very odd, incidentally, that he should have remarked of Leacock ". . . he is much closer to Mark Twain than [sic] he is to any other [sic] British writer."

Rimanelli disposes of Roberts on the ground that "he was to emerge in the end as a poet rather than a story teller"; at the same time, he uses Duncan Campbell Scott's poetry to enhance his claims as a writer of short stories. Roberts' invention of the animal story is one of the few original achievements in our formal literature, but Rimanelli writes: "In these stories animals move about and think like human beings but without that sacred irony that we find in say, Aesop or La Fontaine, nor do they have that tension of high adventure that we find in Kipling. Hence they founder in the grotesque and the childish and it is