

themes of Italian literature between 1940-1950 such as life, politics, and society were in great part a source of personal disappointment for Gallo because of the detached way in which writers, critics, and essayists had dealt with them.

It is in the articles on Italian post-war fiction that scholars and students of this genre will find the most challenging comments. The writers of the neo-realistic movement, although deeply involved in the partisan warfare for the liberation of Italy, generally failed to produce a fully committed literature; this was partly due to the impossibility of adapting a highly literary lexicon, like Italian, to everyday life.

The only valuable exceptions are the short accounts (*cronache diaristiche*) of Corrado Alvaro, in a crude and simple language Natalie Ginsburg, Primo Levi, and a few others who were able to represent the new moral and social values, achieved through the struggle for independence. Gallo sees Carlo Levi's *Cristo s'è fermato a Eboli*, hailed since its first publication in 1945 as a masterpiece of neo-realism, as a work standing between the ethical and political essay on the one hand and the fiction of involvement on the other. The problems of Southern Italy which constitute the main topic of the novel fail to receive a thorough analysis since the superstitions and the myths of the peasant world are treated simply according to the literary imagination of its author.

Gallo examines at some depth the early works of Vittorini and Pavese, usually considered the initiators of neorealism. Vittorini's *Uomini e no* is seen, on account of its Resistance background, as a continuation of *Conversazione in Sicilia*. Its lyrical intuitions and the musical rhythm of its prose place this work in a world of literary enchantment from which, according to Gallo, Vittorini will never be able to detach himself as a writer. He finds Pavese technically perfect in the development of his stories and novels; they contain a vision of the world which is a reflection of the author's effort to establish in his intellectual personages a relationship between their active participation in social and political life and their individual conscience. This attempt carries them further down into a hopeless solitude which is more and more the reflection of Pavese's own as a

writer and as a man. It is particularly significant that precisely in 1950, the year of this comment, Pavese ended his troubled existence by committing suicide.

Ignazio Silone, very seldom included among the great Italian contemporary writers by Italian critics, is here briefly remembered as an outstanding neorealist, although his formation as a writer took place abroad in the thirties, as an exile outlawed by the Fascist party. Vasco Pratolini and Italo Calvino, two writers of a younger generation, receive Gallo's acclaim: the first one for his motion picture technique in depicting the street life of his native Florence; the second one for his skill in enveloping his Resistance stories with a fable like atmosphere. In an effort to relate the long span of Moravia's literary production to his times, Gallo returns often to *Alberto Moravia*, perhaps the most read writer of the Italian bourgeoisie. He focuses on Moravia's treatment of lower class people in his Roman stories to point out that the author skillfully takes advantage of neorealist themes but changes them into allegorizing interpretations.

Particularly useful for an insight into Gallo's human side are the letters reproduced in the final part. Most of these were written to the poet Vittorio Sereni who served with him on a publishing committee for Mondadori. His suggestions for the improvement of manuscripts are the most valid examples of the depth of his knowledge. *Scritti letterari* is an excellent, well-edited collection of writings, and it is essential for an understanding of the literary period which followed the second world war.

Maddalena Kuitunen

RICHARD CHRIST and
MANFRED WOLTER, ED.
Fünzig Erzähler aus der DDR
Berlin: Aufbau, 1974. Pp. M 12.00.

Fünzig Erzähler aus der DDR (Fifty Storytellers from the GDR) is a collection of fifty stories by fifty East-German writers. The fact that these stories have been published once before, and that they are shorter than thirty pages (with only

two exceptions: Volker Braun's "Die Bretter," 32 pp., and Wolfgang Kohlhaase's "Inge, April und Mai," 33 pp.) are the principal features these stories have in common. The collection includes works by older, well-established writers as well as by younger, relatively unknown authors. It contains stories that adhere to the rigid doctrine of socialist realism, as well as works which experiment with modernistic styles and untraditional themes.

The story "Siebzehn Brote" (Seventeen Loaves of Bread), 1953, by Friedrich Wolf (1888-1953) is a good example of the first type. In seven pages the author narrates an episode which allegedly took place on the Russian front in 1943. The narrator, a German physician who fights with the Russians against "Hitler's army," appeals to his Russian superior to save the lives of forty German prisoners of war who suffer from hunger and cold. Instead of granting him his request, the Russian officer suggests that he approach the Russian soldiers directly hoping that they might agree to donate a part of their very limited daily ration and thus save the lives of the prisoners. Because this day, January 21, coincides with the anniversary of Lenin's death, the German physician reminds the Russian soldiers of Lenin's humanistic ideals and implores them to follow the example of this great leader and help their defeated enemy. After some deliberations, the Russian soldiers donate seventeen loaves of bread to save the lives of their German prisoners. The narrator ends his story by voicing doubts as to whether his countrymen have appreciated this generous deed or not.

This typical example of the tendentious white-and-white projection of communist ideology is what shifts this and similar stories from the realm of belle-lettres into pure propaganda. This naive and one-sided attitude of East-German writers during the late forties and early fifties is what made a number of Western critics and scholars call East-German literature dictated, boring, and philistine. It is a blessing, no doubt, that writers of the younger generation have freed themselves from the rigid literary doctrine of socialist realism, abandoned the unrealistically optimistic Weltanschauung of the forties and fifties, and approached individualistic themes and unconventional forms. It is very gratifying to find a considerable number of these modernistic

experiments among the collection. The best example may be Gunter Kunert's "Ich und ich" (I and I), which was written in 1973.

Although he deals with a traditional motif, namely the Doppelgänger, the author has succeeded in giving his story contemporaneity and human relevance. In five pages the author depicts the situation of a man faced not only by one, but by many Doppelgängers. Because his ghostly counterparts multiply at an alarming rate, the protagonist finds himself unable to start a meaningful conversation with anyone of them since not only do they resemble him, but they also think and act exactly as he does. Later on he discovers that this frightening uniformity is the cause of the disinterest and apathy that surrounds him.

There is no doubt that this collection includes some very challenging and rewarding stories. Perhaps one day someone will drop the tendentious and ingenuous stories of the forties and fifties, replacing them with unorthodox and experimental ones. A collection of this kind would be of great literary value.

S. Elkhadem

KENT THOMPSON
Across From the Floral Park
New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974.
Pp. 151. \$7.95.

It is tempting to call this pleasant, charming, seemingly inconsequential, and certainly unsettling novel a parable, for it is that much removed from conventional fiction without exceeding any bounds of continuity and character. Yet it is undefinably disturbing; some indeterminate suggestions and ideas dwell in its conservatory and linger in its Park. As with his first novel, *The Tenants Were Corrie and Tennie*, Thompson's framework is a house, like the story itself somewhat of a maze. Its new purchaser, Simon, finds that it comes not entirely freehold but with Mrs. Fish, wife of the former owner, Fred (now, possibly, a ghost), and Joan, formerly in ambiguous "service" to Fred. Simon marries Joan, and the couple experiences