

HUBERT GERLACH

Wenn sie abends gehen

(When They Leave in the Evening)
Rudolstadt, German Democratic Republic: Greifenverlag, 1973. Pp. 295. M7.60.

To make boring incidents and monotonous happenings amusing and interesting is what Thomas Mann and Arthur Schopenhauer regard as the secret of storytelling. And this is exactly what Hubert Gerlach does in his second novel (his first novel *Die Taube auf dem Schuppenschendach*, 1970, is "just" a mystery story). In *Wenn sie abends gehen* Hubert Gerlach (born 1927) watches a group of East German workers very closely; he describes how they spend their working hours in the factory and what they do "when they leave in the evening."

Although it has been noted that most of the writings that takes place in socialist (read communist) countries is completely dedicated to political issues and social questions, and that "The unrealistic white and white projection of people and incidents gives these stories their exemplary nature and thus shifts them from the realm of belles lettres into pure propaganda" (*IFR*, 1 [1974], 75), this could not be said about Gerlach's novel, simply because he keeps the ideological aspect of his society in the background of the story and devotes himself to describing the inner and outer life of his characters who do not lack originality and individuality. He does not shun from touching the many negative sides of the people around him because he realizes that they do exist not only in his, but in every other society. With honest realism he describes their collective activities during the day as well as their very private life with all its hopes and worries.

In doing this Gerlach resembles the West German writer-worker Max von der Grün who, although only one year older than Gerlach, has succeeded in his four novels (*Männer in zweifacher Nacht*, 1962; *Irrlicht und Feuer*, 1963; *Zwei Briefe an Pospischiel*, 1965; and *Stellenweise Glatteis*, 1973) in detailing the everyday life of the workers in West Germany, especially of those in the mining industry, and without being either boring, argumentative, or bathetic.

Therefore, it will be of great interest to see if Gerlach will cling to the theme,

style, and people he knows best, as Max von der Grün does, or if he will substitute them with new characters, forms, and subject matters. However, one thing is evident, whatever he writes in the future, it will undoubtedly be amusing and beguiling and that is because he has demonstrated in this novel that he already knows the "secret of storytelling."

S.K.

TERENCE DEVERE WHITE

The Distance and the Dark

London: Gollancz, 1973.

A frequent note sounded in the chorus of postmortems on the contemporary novel is that the social sciences, in their own crude way, provide a better picture of contemporary man and woman. Not only does non-fiction see more astutely, or "scientifically," but it sells better too. As a writer in the *New York Times* recently put it, pop sociology, *The Naked Ape*, *The Hidden Persuaders*, etc., are to our age what the three decker novel was to Dickens'. This folly, we would aver, is challenged by Terence Devere White's most recent novel, *The Distance and the Dark*, which deals with the current generation of violence in Northern Ireland, and provides the insight that only a novel can. There are no street scenes from Belfast, no simulated interviews with stunned bystanders; instead White concentrates on a sensitive man of conscience who is miles from the bombing, Everard Harvey.

Like author White, Everard Harvey is a member of the landed, Protestant, and Anglo-Irish gentry of the Republic of Ireland, which, the papers tell us, is removed from the violence in the Six Counties. As a member of the ascendancy, Harvey is a horse rider and fox hunter and lives at Mount Harvey, the hamlet founded by an English ancestor in the seventeenth century. Mount Harvey, we learn, is not as remote from the present as its master would have it; the Great House is built alongside the main Dublin-Belfast road at the juncture with the River