

Boyne, that sacred river of the Celtic past which is yearly commemorated by Orangemen as the site of King Billy's victory over the Catholics in 1689. Yet with all things considered, Harvey is proud of his family's heritage in Ireland: "If we had settled in America we'd be a monument," he asserts. One of his ancestors supported the brief home rule under Grattan's parliament before the Act of Union in 1800, and even now, Everard, as the current master of Mount Harvey, does battle at the dinner table for the oppressed of Belfast and Derry, much to the pained annoyance of his unfeeling friends in neighboring manors.

Yet man, as *The Distance and the Dark* reassures us, does not live by politics alone. The oppression and violence of The North almost recede into the background as Harvey is caught in the swirl of his deceptively leisured life. He is intermittently estranged from his dumpy, unmarriageable daughter, and he is frequently bickering with his English second wife, the "lily-slim" Sally, who is twenty years his junior and disapproves of what she considers his Irish gaucherie. His first wife was the "magnificently frumpish" Kate, whom Harvey had chosen from the Catholic underclass, and he would like to relive her memory in Aileen, the wife of his neighbor, an indifferently beautiful woman who was loved and lost in youth.

Far from being a love story, *The Distance and the Dark* (the title is from Browning) is generically a comedy of manners. As a member of the privileged classes Everard Harvey spends much of his time in polite conversation while eating and drinking. In some of the most brilliant passages of the book, author White makes Harvey the Clausewitz of the strategic digression, the apropos *bon-mot*, and the bold-faced equivocation. At table he can always best his opponent, especially when she is bombastic Bertha, the tweed-suited maiden lady who equates Catholics in the North with the filthy wogs who destroyed the Empire.

While Harvey's humanitarian liberalism is victorious at the cocktail party, it is impotent in the face of the rhetoric of bombs and guns of the revolutionaries. After unwittingly discovering the identities of a local cadre allied with the I.R.A. Provos, Harvey is a marked man. When a car-bomb intended for him kills his son instead, he is morally paralysed. He fears that revo-

lutionary socialism is the revenge for the Stuart and Cromwellian Plantations some three centuries late. Timorously he stalks his son's murderer to a rural cabin where, after peering through a dirty window, past rows of empty beerbottles, he sees a poster of the author of his undoing, James Connolly, the Irish socialist martyred in 1916.

Although it is never likely to be required background reading on the problems of Northern Ireland, *The Distance and the Dark* is by far the most distinguished of the fifteen or sixteen novels now available which deal, one way or another, with the subject. Fittingly, he is the only Irishman who has developed the theme in the novel. As literary editor of *The Irish Times* he is, ironically, a journalist as well as an artist of fastidious attention to style. His *The Distance and the Dark* is the kind of novel that E. M. Forster might have written about Northern Ireland.

James MacKillop

SAROS COWASJEE

Goodbye to Elsa

Toronto: New Press, 1974. Pp. 152.

The autobiography of Tristan Elliott, a fictional Anglo-Indian, concerns those whom he betrays and those who betray him during his thirty years of restless living. He is an assistant professor of history at a Canadian plains university who has come to realize that he must leave his overweight wife Elsa and ugly infant son through suicide. His recent loss of sight in one eye is symptomatic of his fear of loss of his other physical and mental faculties. To explain his projected suicide to Elsa, he reviews his lifetime of relentless capers with vivid details characteristic of but more realistic than Vonnegut's cryptic exhibits. The crispness of the rapid telling brings pictures of macabre and exciting incidents many of which portray in graphic forms the sights, sounds, and smells of his many sexual encounters. One of these involves his mimicking a lusty dog with chokingly humorous ardor.

This, as Tristan says, is all proof of his irresistible attraction: "Except for the whore in London, no woman has been able to resist me."

Humor is the great charm of the book. A gentle humor occurs when his current love, young unsophisticated Marie, deplores his poor English as he reads to her a devastatingly clever denunciation of military life in India. This same Marie later angrily and incongruously tells him that she will never speak to him again if he succeeds in killing himself. Caustic humor is there through his organizations, his satiric knife cuts sharp portraits that are recognizable to pocrisies and frauds of university life. Although Tristan gives somewhat more power than is the fact to faculty wives and their organizations, his satiric knife cuts sharp portraits that are recognizable to anyone connected with the academic condition in general and with Canada in particular.

But there is deep pathos too as Tristan tells of his widowed mother foregoing a second marriage for love of him. She becomes part of the portrayal of Tristan as a tortured Christ. As insanity closes in on him, his likeness to Jesus increases. He grants Marie's plea for him to father her child as he thinks of the baby-to-be with its mixture of Anglo-Indian-Canadian blood as the savior Canada needs. It is sad that Marie goes away to Vancouver without the necessary consummation. However, she is received there by her lover Joe, the carpenter, and it may be in a further novel that the Canadian Messiah will issue from this union.

Jesus's gift of prophecy descends to Tristan as he attempts to shoot Marie's twin sister Marion and shed her blood as a way to destroy the womb that causes sin. With Christian magnanimity he promises her he will shoot himself as soon as he has killed her and Christlike promises as well to rise to heaven after the third day. Climatically, at the end he has become all love and has justified his need to say goodbye to Elsa forever.

Underneath the vibrant frivolity is a profound commentary on alienation in the modern world. The book deserves re-reading for enjoyment and insight.

The public critic George Woodcock in the April *Maclean's* has called this book a

novel of racial misery and isolation. These conditions do, indeed, motivate Tristan in his desperate bids for understanding and acceptance on three continents. This desperateness pushes him from one frustrating and unsatisfactory relationship to another until he cries out for the rest which comes with death. In his fervid attempt to find that rest first through Marion's murder and then his own suicide, he closes his good eye as he aims his gun and thus ironically brings about one final frustration. His promise of resurrection cannot, for the nonce, be fulfilled.

This is Cowasjee's first novel. He is an English professor at the Regina Campus of the University of Saskatchewan and a well-known commentator and editor of Anglo-Indian literature (see *IFR*, 1 [1974], 54-56). It seems obvious that he has allowed Tristan to live in order to delve further, in another novel, into his insane fantasy replete, as it is, with social insights.

Orlene Murad

GORDON PINSENT

The Rowdyman

Scarborough, Ontario: McGraw-Hill
Ryerson, 1973.

A parlay means "to apply an original stake and its winnings on a further stake, as on another horse in a later race." It is increasingly common as a technique for stretching one's profits in the incestuous arts where films beget books which beget plays which emerge as TV serials and so on. There are inescapable problems in translating a work of art conceived in one medium into another. A film of a play may have to dispense with much of the dialogue but it may compensate by opening the play out or expanding the settings. A film of a novel may lose much of the interior psychological subtleties but it may be able to render setting and transition much more economically and effectively. The parlay, of course, concerned as it is with using one