

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

part of a commercial package to sell another part, is not primarily involved with viably independent artistic forms. Gordon Pinsent in working a novel out of his film *The Rowdyman* can be seen to be working on a parlay which has certain inherent advantages. How much he can capitalize on those advantages depends on whether he aims his book only at those who have already seen his film as a sort of supplement—a chance to get in a few more of Will Cole's outrageous escapades that had to be clipped out of the film script, or whether it can stand on its own as a novel requiring none of our memories of the film to help it out.

Will Cole, as portrayed in Pinsent's film, was unarguably an engaging wild man—a breath of fresh air in the Canadian film industry. Young Will inherited Grand Falls, Newfoundland as his playground when he was just too young to go off to the Second War and never quite grew beyond the opportunity it gave him to shock the town with his antics.

The novel is told chapter by chapter from a variety of viewpoints—memories from his friend Andrew Scott are braided with those of Ruth Lowe, the girl he fences off, Will's sister Mary, Constable Williams, Will's foil on his rampages, and ends with a chapter from the man himself. Thus Pinsent takes the opportunity to present their memories and enlarge on how the young hellion shaped himself. Will is largely seen as an independent force and he is not analyzed as a product of a particular environment. His friends and relatives are so close to him that they cannot get an objective line on what it is that contributes to his almost tragically defiant development. The film naturally concentrated on the episodic saga of Will's drunken ramblings.

The novel embroiders these with even more episodes but does not offer the firmer and more structured development of character that one might expect in a novel. The logic of the narrative structure is not fully justified. A nurse narrates the central encounter with the old man, Stan, in the St. John's nursing home but there seems to be no special benefit derived from her viewpoint. One might expect that multiple viewpoint would add many new facets to the story, yet it is not really so because almost all the narrators find Will's stubborn energy irresis-

tible in a similar kind of way. There are times when Pinsent does not seem to believe in his own form. Chunks of material have to be got in. What does it matter if the narrator could not have been there and could not possibly have known about the event or the thoughts inside Will's head? Thus the storytelling takes on an arbitrary quality. In the film we can accept the convention that the camera is always there. A straightforward third-person narrative would have supplied the logical equivalent and a much more coherent structure, though at the expense of losing some of the flavor of Will's overwhelming impact on those close to him.

The novel also seems to rely on our memories of the film's vivid rendering of the Grand Falls setting. Pinsent's film was so eloquent in catching the right atmosphere for each of Will's adventures that the novel's lack of setting and character description leaves us with only the rich Newfoundland dialect to give us a sense of the soil in which Will Cole has his being. It must be said, however, that Pinsent's rendering of speech is so exact that he manages to give us a considerable sense of place even though he dispenses with much of the novelist's usual paraphernalia.

Many more accomplished novelists would have avoided the pitfalls Pinsent stumbles into. But when all is said and done many well practiced novelists have never grasped a character as compelling as Will Cole nor rendered the explosive potential of human vitality and its tragic consequences as well as Pinsent has done. The rowdyman is presented in a manner that makes us, like his friends, find him irresistible. It is a pity that Pinsent, who has very considerable talents, chose to do a scissors and paste job instead of extending himself. If the film/novel does not satisfy your appetite for Will Cole I shouldn't worry. The next stage of the parlay—the television serial—will doubtless soon be upon us.

Anthony Brennan