

Rosalina from the town, is likened to a watchdog, forbidding Cerberus. These attributes are repeated like Greek epithets, reinforcing the notion that people on the brink of a wilderness are in perpetual struggle with primitive forces, which they come to personify.

The characters are indelibly marked by nature in other ways: Joey Bird with one white, blind eye; Quiquina with muteness; Rosalina with the mingled blood and conflicting desires of her forebears. Thus Rosalina feels bound both to perpetuate her father's vendetta and to reenact the lusts of her grandfather. Joey Bird believes it his lot to be a wanderer, although at times he yearns for his childhood on the ranch of his godfather, the imposing Major Lindolfo. To each comes the recurrent thought that what befalls him is God's ineluctable will. Questioning it is both futile and blasphemous.

Dourado's intricate interweaving of memory and action, past and present in a stream-of-consciousness narration that shifts from one character to another is reminiscent of Faulkner's style. The divided soul of Rosalina recalls Joanna Burden of *Light in August*, another woman split between daytime sobriety and nocturnal sensuality. Greatly to Dourado's credit is his compassionate portrayal of women. Unlike so many other contemporary Latin American writers, Dourado does not deal in the usual stereotypes of woman as *puta* (of the Magdalene or innocent-beauty variety), madonna, earth mother, or dubious intellectual. And his interior monologues express the women themselves rather than serving, as they often do in Latin fiction, as depictions of surrounding events, historical epochs, place, atmosphere.

In *The Voices of the Dead*, Autran Dourado has created a work of charged prose and electrifying tension, effectively conjuring up a dense, erotic, foreboding world. [WV]

●

THE PRISONER'S WIFE

by Jack Holland

(Dodd, Mead; 177 pp.; \$9.95)

Alfred McCreary

At first glance this looks like another Irish-American cliché about Mother Ireland. Michael Boyd, a New York reporter born in Belfast, returns to cover

the old story. He rekindles and consummates a relationship with Nora Costello, who had sublimated her earlier hopes of an artistic career to marry Johnny, a Provisional IRA leader now behind bars. Holland could have written the same, tired tale of Catholic Irishmen fighting to free themselves from the British yoke in Northern Ireland—even though their Protestant fellow-Ulstermen wish fervently to remain British. For not a few reporters this latter has been an awkward detail; why let the facts spoil a good story!

Fortunately Jack Holland has also tramped the reporter's beat in Belfast. He has noticed the sulphur in the air, and he appears too experienced to write a familiar story that could have every Irish-American crying in his beer. Instead he has drawn a finely sketched portrait of people trapped by history and by their own blindness and bloody-mindedness in a quarrel that has its own odd integrity. Sadly, the Catholics and the Protestants of Northern Ireland both have a case, though the Protestant one is understated in this novel.

Everyone in this book, indeed in this province, is trapped. Johnny Costello is in jail. His wife suffers the enforced chastity and crushing loneliness that is the fate of those women whose men have fallen in love with Mother Ireland. The IRA is trapped by its sectarian view of the past and the present, by its internal feuds, and by the illusion that "one more push" is necessary to get the British out. The Ulster Protestants are trapped in their homeland. They are fearful and suspicious of the British, and even more suspicious and fearful of the Republican Irish. And the British are trapped. They would like to leave, but they have to do the decent thing and protect a million citizens who want to remain British and some of the half-million who also want to be Irish. The complexities of the Falkland Islands seem crudely simple by comparison.

The one person in the novel with the key to freedom is Michael Boyd; and he is free precisely because he opted out of the quarrel physically, if not emotionally, long ago. He can offer Nora a new life, but if she takes it, she will betray her husband at the deepest core of misplaced patriotism—by letting down the man prepared to give his life for his country. Nora can leave, but all the others, including the British and the Protestants, cannot do so without

agonizing about duty in the one case and about roots in the other.

There are major flaws in Holland's idea. Any visiting reporter who behaved like Michael Boyd, by getting involved with the wife of a Provisional leader and then acting as a go-between in an internal terrorist feud, would need his head examined, if it had not already been rearranged by an IRA bullet. Mr. Holland might also have used his experience to sketch in the strong flavor of Protestant frustration and fear. In simple terms he might have pointed out that the Protestant Shankill Road in Belfast has its slums as well as the Catholic Falls Road. Catholic Irishmen have been maiming largely Protestant Ulstermen, and women and children too, but outsiders seem hardly to care.

Jack Holland is at his best in his cameos of Belfast people. He knows the double standard of the Catholic hard man who thinks about sex but is embarrassed by the reality. He senses the frustration and the strength of the Catholic woman who, like Mother Ireland, is expected to live with the suffering but who must battle with the frailties of the flesh and with the despair that blessed Mother Ireland in her abstraction never has had to bear. Holland also has a keen eye for detail: It is only when you actually pass through a New York subway barrier and a Belfast security gate that you realize they are much the same. Sadly, however, Holland seems to have few if any pleasant memories of Belfast. If it were as bad as some people believe, most Ulstermen would have left long ago. Holland is at his most telling when he notes—and accurately so in my own experience—that Americans do not really want a complex Irish story. "They tend to be impatient with explanations, especially as regards anything to do with Europe. After all, that's what most of them left behind and they don't want to waste too much time worrying about it." More of them should read this novel and worry yet more about a strange land where nothing is black and white or even simply orange and green, and where the people are warm, kind, and passionate to the degree that they kill one another to prove a point. They are trapped even more than poor Nora Costello. People who are their own worst enemies are doomed to live with themselves and each other as prisoners all. [WV]