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A WORLD IN EVERLASTING CONFLICT:

JOYCE CARY'S VIEW OF MAN AND SOCIETY

BY

SHEKA H. KANU

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1971

TO THE MEMORY OF MY DEAR FATHER

WHO LABOURED CHEERFULLY TO LAY THE FOUNDATION

FOR THIS WORK

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A World in Everlasting Conflict: Joyce Cary's View of Man and Society," submitted by Sheka H. Kanu in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Supervisor

External Examiner

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ABSTRACT

In an interview conducted by John Burrows and Alex Hamilton, Joyce Cary summarises the view of life which permeates most of his fictional and non-fictional writings in these words:

> Roughly, for me, the principal fact of life is the free mind. For good and evil, man is a free creative spirit. This produces the very queer world we live in, a world in continuous creation and therefore continuous change and insecurity. A perpetually new and lively world, but a dangerous one, full of tragedy and injustice. A world in everlasting conflict between the new idea and the old allegiances, new arts and new inventions against the old establishment.[1]

The aim of this study is to examine the major novels of Cary in the light of this credo and to demonstrate how it has given the novels their peculiar provenance and atmosphere. I have concentrated, in particular, on the "everlasting conflict" between the free individual and the old establishment, especially as this conflict manifests itself in areas of prime interest to Cary: religion, and politics in the wide sense in which he uses the term to embrace all aspects of human relations. Most central to all this is the man with the creative imagination, innovative and iconoclastic, suffering the agony of his freedom and inflicting pain on others as he persists in nonconformity in order to realise his creative potential.

I have tried, in each chapter, to clarify Cary's views as I understand them. The African novels are grouped according to thematic affinity rather than chronological order. In the first chapter, I have demonstrated that the conflict is not only between alien cultures, as critics generally insist, but between religious beliefs--mistaken or

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[1] Joyce Cary, *Writers at Work*, ed. Malcolm Cowley, New York: Viking, 1958, 55.

irrational--which often run counter to the realities of a cruel world. In the second half of the chapter, politics, as well as personal, national and intra-communal prejudices, jealousies and rivalries make reconciliation impossible and lead to the general chaos and dissolution at the end. The second chapter deals with the conflict between tradition and change, pitting the pernicious creeds of conservatives against the necessary but unwelcome change which is set in motion by the creative imagination of the resourceful and heedless Johnson. Chapter three shows, in Cary's view, how the imaginative child may either be driven to rebelliousness, or his great energies and insatiable curiosity directed into productive endeavours. The fourth chapter, on the First Trilogy, is a sustained and searching exploration of the recurrent Carian themes of freedom, tradition and change, creativity and injustice. In that trilogy, Cary creates in Tom Wilcher a conservative who commands respect because he understands the value of tradition in a ceaselessly changing world, and dramatises his belief in creative freedom through the fascinating and terrifying life of Gulley Jimson, the uncompromising individualist. The fifth and final chapter shows the violent conflicts which can arise when the inflammable passions of love, politics, class prejudices and unrelenting personal ambitions tangle inextricably.

In all these instances, Cary displays a sense of humour which is occasionally puckish, but frequently bleak and menacing. While not ignoring this humour, I have concentrated on the underlying seriousness of Cary's tragi-comic vision of life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my deep gratitude to the many teachers who taught me how to write. To Professor Eldred D. Jones of Fourah Bay College, The University of Sierra Leone, I owe more than conventional thanks. He literally forced me into the Honours Programme in English in 1963, and his unshakable faith in my ability to succeed in the field of Literature has been a constant challenge and inspiration.

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The patience, devotion and optimism of my wife during this study sustained me more than it is possible to express on this page.

The University of Alberta awarded me a Dissertation Fellowship for the 1969-70 academic year, during which I completed the basic research and wrote a good portion of this study. Without that help this thesis might have been an abridged version of its present form. I am very grateful for the award.

I owe a great deal to the skill and patience of the two ladies who typed this thesis: to Mrs. Farrella Bickersteth who painstakingly ciphered my handwriting in her typing of the first draft, and to Mrs. Mae Cox who brought to the typing of the final version an unusual degree of experience and intelligence which spared me much unnecessary work.

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PART I: The African Novels

CHAPTER I

The Wars of Belief

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
(W. B. Yeats: "The Second Coming," 1-8).

In the African novels, Cary dramatizes his overriding theme of the creative imagination of the individual in conflict with those of others or with authority as the conflict between races and colours, between modes of being alien to each and therefore more or less incomprehensible to each other. In these novels we see primitive peoples faced with a new and largely unintelligible civilization, taking what they want from the white man's religion and way of life and making of it a new thing satisfying to them but baffling to the white administrators and missionaries.
(Walter Allen: *The Modern Novel*, 243).

I. *Aissa Saved*

Joyce Cary's belief in the supremacy of the individual and his right to create his own world and live his life according to his peculiar vision runs through the whole body of his fiction. But to operate harmoniously, society must set its own rules and norms and enforce conformity to them. The men and women who form society, however, are creative individuals of varying talents and inclinations, many of whom feel an irresistible urge to assert their wills against the established order of society. It is the paradox inherent in this situation and the inevitable conflict it engenders in society that Cary repeatedly points out in his novels. The creative mind needs the established order of society to function properly but must continually disrupt that order to realise its own creative potential. Or, as Cary puts it, "the creative soul needs the machine, as the living world needs a fixed character, or it could not exist at all."[1] For Cary, therefore, conflict is endemic and incurable in every society and the

problem is exacerbated by what he calls "an immense element of luck, of pure chance."[2]

In *Aissa Saved*, his first published novel, Cary begins his examination of the everlasting conflict in society. In the preface to the Carfax edition of the novel, Cary reveals that the original plan was to contrast the probity and devotion of Ali, a young boy from the government school sent to his office soon after he took over administration of Borgu District in Nigeria, with the laxity and corruption of the people in the native administration. Although this contrast remains peripheral in the novel as we have it today, it is significant to note that Cary thought of it essentially in terms of conflict. This is how he explains the plan and the reason for its change:

> I was anxious to contrast Ali's standards and ideas with those about him. This, of course, involved questions of local ethics, local religion, the whole conflict of those ideals in a primitive community; and also the impact of new ideas from outside. And Aissa gradually became the heroine because she was more central to a deeper interest, that of religion. Ethics are important enough, goodness knows, but the fundamental question for everybody is what they live by; what is their faith (AS 7-8).

Along with this examination of the various manifestations of faith in different people, Cary probes another problem that is central to his thinking--the fundamental injustice of the world. The latter frequently manifests itself either in the form of impersonal forces in nature, such as the prolonged drought which hastens the clash between the "Christians" and the pagans in *Aissa Saved*, or in the crucial and shattering coincidences one is familiar with in the novels of Thomas Hardy, such as the death of Mrs. Venn in *The Moonlight* which leaves Rose with the responsibility of looking after her younger sisters, a

responsibility that involves great personal sacrifices for which she gets nothing but abuse and, ultimately, death from the hands of the feckless and dependent Ella Venn.

The choice of religion as the central motif through which Cary presents the conflict of old and new ideas in a primitive society is particularly appropriate. Firstly, as is so clearly demonstrated in *Aissa Saved*, religious convictions vary widely even among people who profess the same faith. Thus Mr. Carr shows the fickleness of a pseudo-rationalist while Mrs. Carr displays the obduracy of the religious fanatic. Secondly, religious differences are apt to elicit violent responses from the devout of any faith. Thus, to the opposition between the Carrs and their followers on the one hand, and the pagans on the other, is added a further complication by the introduction of Bradgate, the District Officer, whose inclinations are rationalist rather than religious. His ability to arbitrate between the antagonists is diminished by the fact that he is suspect to both sides: to the Carrs because he represents the meddlesome hand of the civil authority and to the pagans because his rational views about the drought run counter to their beliefs. In the background, and sedately watching the volatile pagans and the excited Christian converts, are the Muslim rulers, headed by the doddering Emir, hamstrung because the will to act has been replaced by their reliance on the will of Allah.

Aissa Saved, then, begins Cary's study of the religious conflict in Nigeria, a conflict that is intensified in *The African Witch* by the tangle of politics and religion. Of course politics play a part in *Aissa Saved*, but only a small part. The novel moves swiftly to show the contradictions in the Carrs, the missionaries, and the passionate

intensity of their "converts" and the tragic consequences of this situation at both the personal and social levels. From the beginning, therefore, Cary emphasises the cleavage between private and public morality: between the sober-sad looks "or responsible European expressions" (AS 23) which the Carrs wear in public and their furious quarrels at home; between the affected sobriety of the converts within the mission and their gay abandon in the dances at Kolu, the pagan capital across the river from the mission. Moreover, Cary suggests with overt irony, the success of the Carrs in holding together their motley band of hardened criminals and social outcasts is due to a view of religion that is close to the hearts of the pagans. Previous efforts to convert these pagans have had little success, Cary tells us:

> But the Carrs were more successful at Shibi than any of their predecessors. The reason was that they were liked. Their lessons were easily learned and firmly believed by those who felt their sincerity, unselfishness and sympathy, goodness of a kind recognized by every tribe and family in the world, even by dogs, horses and cats (AS 20).

Indeed, by stressing miracle stories from the Bible and confirming the value of the private vision in the religious life of the individual, Hilda Carr is unwittingly offering her pagans a version of Christianity that is in harmony with their belief in a universe pervaded by evil spirits and demons. Early in the novel, Cary shows Mrs. Carr indulgently listening to Nagulo, highway robber and murderer, painfully narrate a distorted and demon-filled version of the story of the gadarene swine. Again, without realising it, Mrs. Carr is reaffirming the pagan belief in the power of demons to possess and subvert the human spirit. Then, as if to underline the point, Cary shows in what is probably the climactic episode of the conversion process, the

sensitive and high-spirited Aissa oscillating between demonic and divine possession as she receives her first communion from Mr. Carr. She has witnessed the service before, but with her literal mind, she wants to know what "the Body" and "the Blood" of Christ would do inside her:

> She was startled by the taste; it was not like ordinary blood but sweet. In her surprise she did not notice that the others had gone back to their seats; nor in fact was she aware that Hilda and Shangoedi [a drunken mid-wife] guided her to her own place and put her there on her knees. Her mind was wholly preoccupied. Her attention was all directed inwards to find out what was happening to her. What would Jesus do inside her? What would he feel like? What would he say? She perceived a faint warmth in her stomach. She brought all her mind upon the place. She held her breath. But the feeling had gone already. Where was it? She found it again deeper and further in. It grew quickly, it was like the morning sun whose rays grow stronger and warmer every minute; it pierced through the cold muscles; it passed outwards through the whole body in waves of heat burning out all her cold wickedness (AS 153-54).

Cary's narrative is made intentionally dramatic to match the inner and outer convulsions that characterise this kind of conversion.[3] M. M. Mahood also makes an important observation on this episode:

> Its sequence of self-abandonment, possession by evil spirits, exorcism of the evil spirits and possession by a good spirit, has found expression in many religions and, Cary believed, has distorted the best of them. It has perverted Christianity to a religion of blood-sacrifice whose adherents, attributing the injustice of the world to their own sins, seek a scapegoat whose sufferings will free them from all responsibility.[4]

In the second sentence of this quotation, however, Cary's view is overstated. By pointing out that earlier missions to Shibi had failed and giving us the ironic reasons for the easy success of the Carrs, Cary is implying that there is an acceptable version of Christianity that is capable of stressing the spiritual values of the religion without ministering to the primitive lust for blood which the Carrs share with their pagan "converts." Moreover, Cary apparently wants us to contrast the commitment to the religion of blood-sacrifice

as it manifests itself in Hilda Carr, her "converts" and the pagans who are all inclined to self-sacrifice or ritual murder because of their credulity and ignorance, and Mr. Carr who has knowledge or at least reasonable doubts at the beginning but lacks the will or moral courage to fight against the reversion to blood sacrifice.

The contrast comes early in the novel. Hilda who has always felt "that the mission party ought to go to Kolu direct, in order to strike a powerful blow at paganism in one of its most important centres" (AS 20), leaves her husband in bed one night and follows the "converts" to the pagan capital. Ojo, their leader, has led the party away because, he explains, "the spirit had spoken to him in the men's club room" (AS 23). But Cary leaves us in no doubt about the mixed motives that lead the mission party to the pagan capital. As a group, Kolu is the one place where they can achieve emotional release and satisfaction. As individuals, their motives range from the divine to the profane. Hilda Carr believes wrongly but sincerely that she must strike a blow on the side of her God. For Ojo, as Mr. Carr perceives, the journey is his pilgrimage in search of excitement and personal glory. For Aissa, it is a journey in search of sexual satisfaction from Gajere, the jailbird and father of her illegitimate child who is to appear at crucial moments in the story and undermine her fragile faith. Carr recognises these conflicting motives and realises that the "religious" fervour of his followers is hastening the conflict between the mission and the government represented by Bradgate, the District Officer of Yanrin. But all this is dismissed by Hilda as the reflections of a mean spirit. In a moment of great agony, Carr ponders his

dilemma, and as Cary reports his thoughts, we feel that in this instance the creator and his creature are speaking with one voice:

> Carr, for his part, reflected bitterly that his six months' work of preparation and diplomacy with Bradgate was in jeopardy because his wife had no more judgment or common sense than uneducated savages like Ojo and Aissa. . . . Your religious woman was worse even than the rest because she had an excuse for not thinking. They were all anti-rational in spirit, gamblers, sensualists, seeking every chance to escape from the trouble of planning and deciding, into some excitement or other. For such as Hilda, lame, sick, tortured by worry and anxiety, an adventure like the Kolu expedition offered itself like an escape. She flew to it like a clerk to war or a ruined man to drink. But it was no good explaining this to her because she had no brain to understand it and a complete answer to all criticism. What she felt to be right was God's will (AS 24-25).

In this moment of reflection, Carr has apprehended what M. M. Mahood calls "Cary's distinction between self-reliance and self-abandonment as two forms of response to the world's injustice."[5] From his analysis of the problems confronting the Shibi Mission, Carr appears to be a self-reliant character. But this is an illusion. His reflections take him beyond the immediate problems of the Shibi Mission to the intractable problem of the existence of evil in the world, evil that sometimes emanates from good actions and afflicts people in a fortuitous manner. Thus Carr is led to believe that evil is a cunning and pervasive force which penetrates all existence and which he could feel as "a personal force, as the Devil himself" (AS 25). The result is to make him ask unanswerable questions that will undermine and destroy his pseudo-rationalist views:

> How could you defeat a power which was capable of using such as Ojo and Hilda for his own ends? How could you fight against ambition taking itself for public spirit and egotism pretending to be dependence on God's will? Or even come to grips with greed, lust and selfishness, which could change their very being and appear as industry, love, chastity, and thoughtfulness. And what could you do against the fools? It was not wicked to be foolish, but it was the fools did most of the Devil's dirtiest work. And when would

> fools cease to be? The fight was obviously hopeless and probably useless (AS 25-26).

Carr's reflections have moved him from recognition to fruitless inquiry and, finally, despair. His faith, as Cary would put it, has failed to stand the big knock (AS 8), and the path of reason has been replaced by the way of faith. In their continual struggle for mastery over each other, Mrs. Carr now has the advantage because she is consistent in her beliefs.

So Carr's rescue mission to Kolu is given an ironic twist as he is driven relentlessly to an uncritical acceptance of Hilda Carr's emotional responses as the more appropriate to "the way of faith" (AS 28). It is not surprising, therefore, that when he arrives at Kolu and finds Hilda and the "converts" singing in defiance of the pagan god and his worshippers, Carr should feel "converted." He has been converted to a consistent but irrational view of life in which self-reliance is supplanted by self-surrender. With sprightly humour, Cary mocks at the facile injunctions--"trust God, take no thought for the morrow" (AS 28)--which Carr has been feeding to his congregations. Indeed, Cary's ironic humour makes it apparent that Carr is undergoing a reversion, as subsequent events show the deceptive and ephemeral nature of his new-found joy and sense of release.

Having brought the missionaries and their followers to the way of faith, which for him, is also the way of self-surrender, Cary moves to a closer examination of the confrontation between pagan and Christian. In Moshalo, the pagans have a leader who embodies the violence, the ignorance and the baseless certitude of their creed; her arch-rival is Aissa who has simply transferred the worst elements of her pagan

beliefs into the new Christian teachings but who now looks on the unadulterated paganism of her people with the self-righteous and disdainful eye of the bigot. We have, therefore, all the elements for a really violent clash.

Moshalo is the fanatical priestess of Oke, the Kolua goddess of mountains and fertility. She, like Aissa and everybody else in Yanrin District, is suffering because of a prolonged drought. The drought is the impersonal force of nature, Cary's element of pure chance which, by giving the antagonists a common enemy, only makes their conflict inevitable because they hold irreconcilable views of how to defeat this enemy. Cary therefore uses the fight against the drought to highlight the impossibility of understanding between the different groups, and to expose the inadequacy of the various creeds and assumptions that impel them, collectively and individually, to action. These facts are stressed when an unnamed chief states the aggressive pagan position:

> "'This white man [Bradgate] does not know anything about our country and the Emir is tired and does not care about anything. These rulers want to keep us quiet, to send us to sleep. But we shall not be sent to sleep. We shall look for this person who has cursed our crops and stopped the rain; until we die we shall look, for we are not Mohammedans or Christians who lie down in trouble like a dog waiting to be whipped'" (AS 30).

The statement gives the lie to Bradgate's assumption that because of his long years in Africa as soldier and administrator, he can claim a better understanding of the African and his country. It also dooms to failure the attempts by Bradgate and his disciple, Ali, to use rational arguments to prevent violence between the pagans and the Christians. The pagans and the Christians feel that if they succeed

in "making" rain, they will win the hearts of the people. Thus for Cary, as Hoffman has remarked,

> What is significant is not who can make the rain to end the drought, but what violent emotions are released, what struggles for power and wars are waged, what injustices are done, what sacrifices are futilely made, all because of the conflict of differing ideas, educations, and religions, each separate proponent of which is positive in the belief that his is the true and only way.[6]

In the carnage which follows the two assaults on Kolu by the mission party, Cary shows the frightening social chaos as well as the great personal disasters that can result from the fanatical or irrational beliefs of the opposing parties.

The disruptive social consequences are shown in the fates which overtake a number of "innocent" and self-reliant characters. The first of these is Obasa, the richest pagan in Yanrin, who commands the respect of the people and the confidence of Bradgate but limits his usefulness to the community by refusing to serve in the native administration because it is headed by a Muslim. Essentially a man of action, Obasa could have introduced an element that the local administration needs to change it from a helpless and passive observer of chaos into an active instrument for order and stability. His capacity for quick action is illustrated when he "rescues" Aissa from the pagans who would certainly have killed her for allegedly insulting Oke and wounding Owule and Moshalo, the pagan goddess's priest and priestess respectively. But by trying Aissa and calling as witnesses only people who have already condemned her in their minds, Obasa is violating a higher notion of justice which Ali, the embodiment of the new ideas, understands and wants to enforce. When Ali insists on giving Obasa a taste of higher justice for breaking Aissa's ankle, he is inevitably drawn into the

widening gyre of conflict. For all his innocence and lofty ideals, therefore, Ali is to be overwhelmed and destroyed by the irrational forces which he seeks to replace. In a second attempt to assert the primacy of law over vulgar rage, he is seized by the "converts" and tortured to death; and as a final commentary on the grotesque perversion of ideas in Yanrin, Cary shows the "Christians" pocketing pieces of Ali's flesh because as a literate official, he possessed magic powers which they hope to inherit.

The conflict between Obasa and Ali is the conflict between tradition and change, between stability and anarchy, between stagnation and progress. It fosters new and irreconcilable rifts within the African community. It ranges men like Ali and Zeggi against Obasa and Yerima. Zeggi is a pagan at heart, but his iron discipline is forged out of European furnaces--English, French and German. Yerima, undisciplined, indecorous, arch-conservative and hater of roads and bridges, is the natural ally of Obasa because he sees in Ali the incarnation of white "witchcraft" which is more pernicious because it sets son against father. The clash of these forces is particularly shattering in the African setting because each can draw upon reserves of strength which the other often overlooks or underestimates. The effect is to neutralise the forces of order and release those passions which generate and sustain anarchy. Ali's arrest of Obasa not only removes a man who can use the topsy-turvy logic of the pagans to impose a measure of order on an irrational system, but leaves him open to attack by the very people he seeks to protect. His death is therefore grimly ironical and unsettling in its social consequences because it allows the "converts" their brief but excruciating reign of terror. The irony is

tempered by the knowledge that for Cary, there is something virtuous and noble in this kind of death.

The personal catastrophes are shown mainly through the lives of the self-sacrificing characters. These suffer a kind of poetic justice so that the bigoted and unstable Harry Carr suffers a personal disintegration and then fades into anonymity. But Hilda Carr, whose intense feelings always rout her judgment, is driven relentlessly to sacrifice and self-sacrifice. For her as for her convert, Aissa, faith is rooted in dogma and intuitions although in Aissa's case the new faith has not dampened her keen appetites.

Cary gives prominence to the theme of sacrifice because it is his chosen vehicle for showing the personal disintegration of those who would replace judgment by faith or thought by feeling. Hilda and Aissa are prime examples of those who are willing to resign personal conduct and conscience to the will of others. They are dangerous to themselves and to society because, as Cary clearly realises, their passionate intensity impels them to reckless and criminal behaviour for which they feel no responsibility. They are therefore willing to sacrifice themselves or others on the promptings of a wilful impulse.

In what is probably a parody of later but equally sanguine sacrifices by the "converts," Cary picks on "a dance in propitiation of Oke" (AS 122) to delineate the crude details of ritual murder or sacrifice in the pagan religion. Food, excessive drink, wild dances, and rhythmic chants combine to paralyse the will to self-assertion which is common to these pagans. The individual loses himself in the excitement and achieves complete anonymity. In the particular application of these methods to Ishe, whose son is to be sacrificed to Oke, we see a

deliberate heightening of their effects when she is separated from the crowd and subjected to further blandishments until she becomes delirious and begins to chant: "I give all--I give Numi" (AS 123). But she is not a self-surrendering type. She is the victim of communal ignorance and superstition. The decision to drown her so that she would not report the murder of her son to Bradgate shows how that ignorance never forgets the grim realities of a cruel existence.

The parallel episode among the "converts" shows Aissa torn between her strong pagan origins and her tenuous and unstable Christian leanings. Sacrifice is preceded by the battle for ultimate possession of Aissa. There is real tension as the girl tries to choose between her sensual desires and her new faith. She has transferred to Christianity the pagan belief that prayer must be rewarded in kind. And she has been amply rewarded. She has been saved from certain death by Ojo and Ali, and cured of possible fatal complications from her injuries by Zeggi and Hilda. Above all she has been reunited with the objects of her sensual pleasures. The call to the mission has therefore become superfluous: "'What for I go back? I catch Abba now, I catch Gajere,' Aissa reasonably enquired" (AS 199). But she begins to doubt when Ojo suggests that her conduct is a betrayal of the Christian cause, so that Aissa's violent impulses show up as she sways between vulgar renunciation of Gajere and her fellow converts. Her inner agony is matched by the outward frenzy which takes the form of self-mutilation. But the singing of the hymn of sacrifice dissolves her doubts as she cries in ecstacy:

> All de tings I lak de mos
> I sacrifice dem to His blood (AS 205).

This clearly echoes the earlier pagan incantation and it is significant that Ojo who has assumed the pseudo-rationalist functions of Carr opposes Aissa's decision to sacrifice Abba on the grounds of blasphemy before he is swayed to her side by the emotional wave of the moment. It is while they are enjoying their spiritual elation following the readmission of Aissa into the fold and the sacrifice of Abba that the Christians are overtaken by the pagans and their leaders are put to the slaughter.

Aissa's return to the faith and her final vision has led some critics to give the novel a Christian interpretation. M. M. Mahood's conclusion, which is typical, is quoted in full so that it can be seen against my own different interpretation.

> *Aissa Saved*, as a title, is to a large degree ironic. Aissa is not saved, in the crude sense that she is captured and killed when all her companions escape; and she is not saved in the subtler sense that the certainty of salvation she experiences in sacrificing Abba represents a loss of the real Aissa, the gay and sensual young woman who fights with every ruse in her power against the spirit which is prompting her to sacrifice her child. Cary's manuscript notes on the book suggest, however, that the title is by no means wholly ironic. 'Aissa herself not so plainly escapes,' he writes; and, in another place: 'The end is the crux. Essentials of end Aissa moved by love of Jesus demanding all gives all, i.e. she gives up herself. Ojo gives up somebody else.' And the novel's close shows that Aissa loses her life to save it; in her agony she is again the anxious mother of Abba, whom she believes to be in Heaven and actually sees being given a ride on the Holy Goat. The book finally becomes much more than a satire on religious escapism, because both Hilda Carr and Aissa escape from Cary's directive irony.[7]

This is an attractive conclusion but one that is difficult if not impossible to support from the text. We know from the preface and a later essay Cary wrote about *Aissa Saved*[8] that his plans underwent severe revisions as he struggled with the manuscript over a three-year period. Moreover, his own views on the completed novel conflict with

his declared intentions in the manuscript notes quoted above. This is how he explains the novel to his publisher, apparently answering the reviewers who had interpreted it as an attack on the Christian missions in Africa:

> It is not an attack on religion but an exposition of the effects of several kinds of education, ethical in Bradgate and Ali, materialist in Jacob, Christian in the Carrs and Aissa, pagan in others, Mohammedan in the Emir. It is however in one sense an attack on one kind of sacrifice. It seeks to show that the idea of sacrifice when removed from that of utility, of service, i.e. pleasing God, pleasing Oke, becomes pure juju and also self-indulgence. Thus Carr's conversion in the second chapter and Ojo's and Aissa's discovery in the last that to be happy it is only necessary to abandon personal responsibility and give up all to Christ, are critical points. These are in fact surrenders--escapes of human nature overpowered by the responsibility of judgment, of choosing, into the bosom of a nurse.[9]

Cary has captured here the tenor and the direction of the novel. Again and again he dramatises the effects of the different kinds of education. People live together in time and place, and can even be united by a common feeling as the Christians are united; but they remain separate in their thoughts because, as usual with Cary, each individual lives in the unique world of his own creation. That is why Bradgate, the lover of routine, the practical man for whom the bridge is an essential artery in a new and stable Yanrin has his ideas rejected and ridiculed by Carr whose vision is focused on another world where everlasting peace reigns. That is why Hilda Carr's attempts to bring Christian salvation to Aissa lead her to a brutal and meaningless death.

Cary's directive irony, as he steers Aissa to ultimate destruction, is unmitigated. The ritual of conversion and sacrifice is profane and anti-Christian in all its details. Her frenzy, as she struggles to choose between Gajere and her new faith, is essentially demonic; and throughout that long struggle, the emphasis is on Aissa's

determination to "cheat" God. This is how Cary describes Aissa's response to the approach of the armed members of the mission party who are determined to wrest her from Gajere:

> She snatched a knife from one of them and slashed herself across the chest, crying, 'I love you proper, Jesus. . . . You help me now, I die for you.' She staggered to and fro, pushed Ladije [a member of the attacking party] backwards, nearly fell, recovered herself, and at last tumbled heavily, as if by accident, across Gajere, knocking him flat and lying upon him so that no one could strike him except through her body.
>
> Then she continued to moan: 'See, Jesus, I love you, I die for you.'

And this is how the equally wily spirit that permeates her whole being reacts and replies:

> But the spirit being inside Aissa, wrapped into every part of her being, knew her better than herself. It knew the wifely appetites of her body, the tingling love in her hands, the mother's desire of her full breasts, the greedy cunning of all her muscles, the deceit of her quick tongue and grimacing features, the pride, the vainglory of her obstinate heart, much sooner than her brain conceived a thought. It answered her therefore with much disgust: 'You fool girl, Aissa, you tink you cheat Jesus. You lie on Gajere, keep him safe. You love Gajere mo dan Jesus. You hit yourself with the back of the knife. Why you take care you no cut your breast, Aissa. You tell me dat? You keep you milk for Abba. You love Abba mo dan Jesus '(AS 201-202).

Aissa's sudden "conversion" which follows this diabolic struggle is--except for its crudities which Cary considered an integral part of the African setting--the same as that which we had witnessed earlier in Harry Carr; it is escapism, an abandonment of the right to think and respond creatively to the exigencies of a capricious world. The fleeting joy and peace which these characters enjoy are shown in each case to be deceptive and self-defeating. In Aissa's case, Ojo's semi-rationalist but ineffectual voice is in the background to warn against the futility of sacrifice and self-sacrifice in exactly the same manner as Carr unsuccessfully tried to rescue Hilda from the same folly. The

contrast is between these two women who are free but nevertheless forfeit their lives because they are willing to surrender their freedom; and Ishe who, incapacitated by an overdose of drinks and emotional excitation, continues to struggle to save herself and her son. This contrast is vital to an understanding of Cary's distinction between the self-surrendering and self-reliant characters. Aissa and Hilda sacrifice their children and their own lives because they are willing to forego the right to deliberate choice and action; Ishe and her son are sacrificed against her will because the world, in Cary's view, is fundamentally unjust.

But, it might be asked, does Aissa's death not bring her into contact with God, and with it the certainty of salvation? The answer, unfortunately, is no. The final chapter in *Aissa Saved* is one of the best examples of Cary's bleak humour. It brings into final focus Cary's insistence throughout the novel that Aissa, like the rest of the converts, cannot understand Christianity in any terms other than those of her native pagan religion. Her final vision which has misled the critics is firmly anchored to Yanrin with its incongruous mixture of pagan, Muslim, and ill-digested Christian concepts. The unresolved confusion in her mind is evident when Aissa, growing faint from the tearing bites of the ants, is reunited with her distinctly personal God as well as with Abba and Gajere:

> Jesus had taken her, he was carrying her away in his arms, she was going to heaven at last to Abba and Gajere. Immediately the sky was rolled up like a door curtain and she saw before her the great hall of God with pillars of mud painted white and red. God, in a white riga and a new indigo turban, his hands heavy with thick silver rings, stood in the middle and beside him the spirit like a goat with white horns. Abba was sitting on its back looking frightened and almost ready to cry. One of the angels was holding him and putting his cap straight. The others were laughing at him and clapping their hands (AS 211).

The iconography of this vision is clearly pagan. Gajere is a satanic figure recognising no authority and appearing from time to time to offer Aissa the sensual baits that lure her away from the mission. Christian theology would have him forever in the torment of hell and never in the bliss of heaven. The god whom Aissa perceives is a pagan chief in all his regalia. And one of the basic misconceptions of the "converts" in this novel is shown in their constant identification of the Holy Ghost with what they call the holy goat. It is also important to remember that by leaving her to be torn apart by the ants, the pagans are disposing of Aissa's body in the cruel manner specifically reserved for bad witches in their midst (AS 84, 211).

The conclusion seems inevitable, therefore, that for Aissa, death is not a transformation into a higher existence, but a mere extinction of the life force. She is untouched by divine grace precisely because she cannot conceive of a divine relationship with God. The love she expresses for Jesus is almost invariably sensual. The confusion which Aissa shares with all the members of the Shibi mission is due to Cary's belief that religion is essentially a personal construction:

> The book, in fact, deals with individual religion, that is to say, the beliefs or unconscious assumptions which actually govern conduct. These assumptions are different in every person. That is to say, everyone has his own faith. Of course each great religion does draw large numbers of people together in general rules of conduct and general statements of belief. But each person makes a particular application of the rules and mixes them up with a lot of other ideas and rules drawn from all kinds of sources. This is a fundamental situation due to the nature of things; the fact, for instance, that each individual has to think for himself, and that no religion can cover the infinite variety of problems thrown up to quite ordinary people, living quite ordinary lives.[10]

This is an extreme Protestant view of religion which also implies that each individual must work out his salvation. And the title, *Aissa Saved*, is grimly ironical because Aissa, having been saved on four separate occasions by others, fails to use her vast reserves of strength and resourcefulness to save herself and Abba from mere annihilation.

II. *The African Witch*

The dominance of juju and its destructive consequences on the African scene started in *Aissa Saved*, reaches a climax in *The African Witch*, Cary's third novel. Cary's basic concerns, as he spells them out in the two prefaces, are almost identical. In *Aissa Saved*, his primary aim is to explore the faith by which people live; and in *The African Witch*, the same fundamental question becomes: "What do men live by? What makes them tick and keeps them ticking?"(Af W 9). The question is interesting, Cary claims, because of the tenacity with which every individual clings to and defends his beliefs, convinced "that his creed is the only reasonable certain truth, and that outside it there is in fact nothing but darkness and devils." The result is that man is continually faced with "wars of belief;" but for clearly defined reasons Cary chose an African setting for their enactment:

> The attraction of Africa is that it shows these wars of belief, and the powerful often subconscious motives which underlie them, in the greatest variety and also in very simple forms. Basic obsessions, which in Europe hide themselves under all sorts of decorous scientific or theological or political uniforms, are there seen naked in bold and dramatic action (Af W 10).

The *African Witch*, like *Aissa Saved*, is a study of the irrational forces that operate in man and determine his conduct. These

forces manifest themselves in various forms: in racism and jealousy which are common to all, and in witchcraft which is an inclusive word for various forms of irrationality as well as a peculiarly African malady. Running parallel with this is a satire on British imperialism so that Burwash, the Rimi Resident, remains blissfully ignorant of the sordid realities in his division, and emerges in his imperial aloofness as a larger version of Bradgate because he lacks the limited but practical considerations of the latter.

The conflict in *The African Witch* operates on two levels. The first, between races, is shown in the hostility between Louis Aladai, the Oxford-educated African who has returned home to press his claim to the Rimi emirate because its aged emir is moribund; and Jerry Rackham, an emotional Irish police officer in Rimi. This is the political and social phase of the conflict. Its religious aspect is shown in the clash between the humane Christianity of Doctor Schlemm and the mongrel faith of the blood-thirsty Selah Coker whose extremism has forced him out of the wide and tolerant bosom of the Church in Rimi. These two phases constitute what may be called the external conflict of alien races and cultures. The second level of the conflict is internal and centres on the succession issue as it does on who is to wield effective authority in Rimi. It widens the traditional rift between pagan and Muslim by setting Aladai, the embodiment of the new and dynamic culture of the West, and his uncle and financier, Makurdi, whose native intelligence has convinced him that Rimi will be prosperous under the progressive leadership of Aladai, against the stagnant tradition symbolised in Elizabeth, Aladai's sister and juju priestess, and Salé the murderous Muslim claimant to the emirate.

The first chapter of *The African Witch* plunges the reader into the turmoil of racial conflict and defines the basic attitudes of nearly all the main protagonists. The popular Rimi races have brought the different groups into the open but they remain separate in their designated areas. The white members of the community are in the paddock which is reserved for them and their special guests. They have admitted into one of its separate corners the Emir's chief officers, "dignified persons in blue and white robes, wearing large blue turbans. . . . They were an ornament to the occasion." But when two Africans in European dress entered the paddock, the European spectators "felt strong surprise. This became indignation when it was known that the intruders had not been asked "(Af W 15).

The intruders were Aladai and Coker. They are distinguished from each other by the respective formal correctness and incongruity of their dress. But a more fundamental distinction is made in the assumed dignity of the Africans in native dress and the lack of dignity of those in European clothes. There is an implied preference for the African in his native and therefore primitive state. This becomes evident as the European spectators debate the intrusion and direct their anger towards Aladai not only because he has been joined by Judy Coote, his former Oxford tutor and Cary's representative of the free and enlightened mind, but also because being the more obviously Westernised, he is on that account the greater offender. This attitude is summarised, as often in this novel, by Rackham who tells a screaming Mrs. Pratt: "'It's a regular old chestnut, isn't it? - the cannibal chief in the old Balliol blazer '"(Af W 19).

The encounter with Judy is important because,as the only free spirit around, she transcends the cultural barriers and can therefore mediate between the opposing parties. In his first discussion of Rimi affairs with Judy, Aladai's sensitive and ingenuous mind betrays the nervous tension he feels as he tries to convey his pride in Africa and his desire to gain acceptance in the white community. He knows that he was snubbed at the racecourse because of his European dress,and in his exchanges with Judy, he defines his dilemma and the cultural gulf that now separates him from his origins. The conversation moves from Aladai's rebuff to the cultural chasm that separates Africa from Europe:

> "'I can't understand it,' he burst out. 'Such a great people--a great civilization! And they see that I love it. Think of how I felt when I began to read English books and to hear what civilization could mean--it was like growing up thousands of years in a few months.'
> 'But, Louis, Rimi has a civilization of its own'. . . .
> 'Rimi civilization! Do you know what it is?--*ju-ju*'. . . ."

When the discussion moves on to the related problem of witch trials, Aladai asks with deep emotion:

> "'Do you know what a witch trial is. . .
> 'What happens to witches here?'
> 'Just what happened to yours in Europe--they kill them.'
> 'Yes, we can't boast.'
> 'Yes, you can boast,' the boy exclaimed. 'You have stopped it--you have escaped from it--by your civilization. And then you refuse it to us, in Rimi '"(Af W 24).

In the rest of the dialogue, Aladai shows the crippling limitations of every kind of local Rimi education. But his inescapable links with primitive Africa and his deep attachment to civilized Europe make him a potential bridge between the two radically different cultures. That potential, however, is to be scuttled by two unrelated assumptions of the white community. The first, stated by Judy but later repudiated by

her own actions, is that it is wrong to educate Africans in English "because to take another people's language and literature directly may give them a feeling of inferiority, and it often takes a nation five hundred years to get over that feeling" (Af W 26). The second, which stems from official dislike and distrust of the educated African and is coloured by a romantic desire to keep Africa "as a kind of museum for anthropologists," is stated by Rackham when he remarks that "you don't make that kind of trousered ape [Aladai] into a chief out here" (Af W 56). This second view, which was an axiom of colonial rule for a long time, is the more persistent in the novel and is to change Aladai from a willing ally to a rabid but ineffectual enemy.

Aladai's clash with Rackham is social in character and is hastened by the presence of both Judy, to whom Rackham is engaged, and Dryas Honeywood, the athletic girl whom Rackham loves because their inclinations and impulses are close enough to forge a bond of sympathy between them. In their first discussion of Rimi, Rackham and Dryas expose the irrational prejudices that link them together, with Dryas emerging as the more dangerous character because her aversion to black people is general and untempered by thought. "'I really rather hate black men, I'm afraid. They give me the grues'" (Af W 44), she tells Rackham who receives the information with approval. She is also dangerous in the larger political struggle ahead because in Cary's view, she is an anarchist, the type who distrusts and dislikes all forms of government. She is also inferior to Rackham because his own strong prejudices are selective: "'I'm not against the nigger in his proper place. But what I say is, what's the good of making him think he's equal to a white man when he isn't?'"(Af W 46). The educated "nigger"

who thinks himself equal to the white man is therefore Rackham's only object of hate. Aladai's enthusiastic response to Dryas's formal politeness becomes the fuse that will set off the explosion between the two men and break the frail links between Judy and Rackham.

The initial move toward that explosion comes when Aladai makes his second "invasion" of the white community by entering their exclusive Scotch club in order to speak to the Resident about his political ambitions. But his presence becomes intolerable when he begins to quote Wordsworth and he is left alone with Judy to discuss his rebuff before she is lured away by the irascible Rackham who had initiated the walk-out.

Cary uses these intrusions and the meetings between Judy and Aladai which always follow them to reveal the conscious and unconscious forces that are ripping the two communities apart. In this episode, the discovery first made by Captain Rubin, the officer commanding British troups in Rimi, that Rackham's responses to black people are pathological in origin, is confirmed. Rubin's attempt to convince him that the African is affectionate by nature and that a sweeping condemnation of his character is unconscionable has also failed. Instead, Rackham has become more cynical towards all those who are tolerant towards the African because this tolerance conflicts with his own assumptions:

> "'The blacks out here are not fit to run their own show, and it will be a long time before they learn. Meanwhile we've got to keep the machine running, and the only peaceful way of doing that is to support white prestige'" (Af W 97).

It is pronouncements like this one which make Rackham a Kiplingesque character.[11] Their function is to clarify the conscious springs of his

behaviour. But he remains a threat to the very peace he wants to preserve because the unconscious motives that incite him to violent action are uncertain even to himself. These are rooted in jealousy and intensify his resentment of Aladai whom he suspects of being in love with Dryas. Aladai for his part distrusts the white officials he has to deal with, although he has some justification for it: "'The Resident is my worst enemy. . . . He wants to drive me out of Rimi. He sent Fisk to say so'" (Af W 118). But he is also willing to sacrifice his generally high principles for political expediency, without realising that by willingly identifying in public with the pagans because of their numerical superiority, he is unconsciously tying himself to the irrational forces that will destroy him in the end. Aladai's first public appearance with Coker and his declared support for Aladai now seem portentous. The undeclared motives for that joint appearance have come to the surface and are seen to be not altogether honourable. The great irony in the whole episode is that by preventing Judy from fulfilling one of her vital functions as healer of social wounds, Rackham allows Dryas to come in and salve Aladai's seared ego, thereby hastening the fight between them.

Cary's intention, apparently, is to emphasise the irrationality of the conduct which leads to the wars of belief. It seems no accident that the episode is followed by the introduction of Dr. Schlemm on his way to rescue "a poor girl they have taken for a witch" (Af W 129). In the early sections devoted to the examination of witchcraft in the African society, Cary invariably identifies the phenomenon with jealousy and the victims are always intelligent people: "All intelligent, good-looking persons are exposed to jealousy, and jealousy is the

subconscious source of the hatred which produces injuries--from injuries, fear; and from fear an accusation of witchcraft" (Af W 88). But Dr. Schlemm's rescue mission requires Aladai's support for its success and so brings the Doctor inexorably into contact with Judy and Dryas. The fateful expedition (by boat!) which Aladai, Judy and Dryas undertake to the Doctor's mission at Kifi becomes an exploration of the dark recesses of the human heart in the Conradian sense. The river has become a metaphor for the inscrutable forces that operate within man just as the surrounding jungle has released the beasts that lurk in the human mind. Dryas, tugging energetically at the oar, has become a primitive woman. She begins to feel an instinctive attraction towards Aladai in spite of herself. Nature is asserting itself over nurture. She suspects that Aladai is in love with the girl he helped rescue from the juju house. The truth is that he is taking her with him to the mission because she is too frightened to stay in Rimi. Dryas is also faintly aware that she might be taking Rackham away from Judy. But her metaphysical isolation is conveyed as she thinks and talks at cross-purposes with both Aladai and Judy, the only people with whom she can communicate in the present setting. All this and much more is conveyed as Cary deftly probes his characters in one of the finest symbolic passages in his fiction:

> Aladai was looking down at a girl with bandaged legs who had sat crouched against the half-deck all noon; Dryas had noticed her because she moved her place when Aladai changed his, following the shadow. She thought, 'One of his wives, I suppose. I expect he has plenty. They all do.'
>
> The girl had fine eyes, which she was now turning up towards Aladai with an imploring and terrified look. She looked very ill. 'I expect he beats her,' Dryas thought.
>
> 'Out of hospital,' said Judy in a surprised voice.
>
> 'She ran away,' said Aladai.

'I'm sure she ought to go back.'

'She was afraid to stay because--'

A current from some cave or bank, or perhaps from some unseen tributary out of sight in the forest half a mile away, made the boat swing; Dryas briskly returned to her duty.

It appeared that the sick girl was a witch; no, accused of it. She gazed about her like a guilty dog, hanging her head, while Judy discussed her.

'Why must Judy discuss her?' Dryas thought, angrily tugging at the oar. 'Can't she see how she feels? But Judy can't leave anything alone.'

Aladai was taking the girl to the mission, but she did not want to go. 'Then why make her?'

'Jealousy, I expect,' said Judy, in a sharp, loud tone. 'That's at the bottom of most witch trials.'

Her sharp voice made Dryas smile. She thought with pity and a little contempt: 'I suppose she doesn't realize how mean it is--and how stupid. I believe Jerry is beginning to hate her. I wouldn't blame him.'

Judy and Aladai were talking about jealousy. Judy said that it was the first and worst of all vices.

'So it is,' said Dryas to herself.

It was at the root of all that was bad in everything you could think of--human relations, nationalism, religion. 'Scotch clubs,' said Aladai; but Judy hurried on in her fury against jealousy. It was the voice of the devil himself--the angel that would not stay in heaven because he could not be king of it; and it was as cunning as the Devil--

'The Rimi say that blood is jealous.'

'So it is. Creeping everywhere--into your brain and into your nerves--that's absolutely true. All the jealous gods love blood. Because jealousy is a cannibal, feeding on itself. It would rather destroy itself than help another' (Af W 156-57).

The passage is a superb example of mutual denunciation and self-betrayal. The girl, Osi, whose beauty and intelligence had provoked the false charge of witchcraft is only remotely and indirectly connected with each person's perception of jealousy as the destructive and self-destructive monster of society everywhere. The undercurrents of emotion that escape to the surface show how the more imaginative and socially committed Judy and Aladai move from particular to general concerns while the self-centered Dryas sees the dangers of jealousy purely in terms of the secret struggle between her and Judy for possession of Rackham. But the mention of human relations, nationalism and

religion implicates other characters: "the British have connived at Aladai's expedition because their own tribal security is threatened by the presence in Rimi of an African who is better educated and more capable than most of themselves."[12] The religious jealousy of Dr. Schlemm which leads him into various clashes with his opponents is also questioned. Judy's possessiveness and the jealousy it kindles in her are also exposed. When Mrs. Vowls, Burwash's erratic and foolhardy sister who is also making the expedition in a separate boat with Dr. Schlemm, suffers a stroke, Judy seizes the opportunity to accompany her back to Rimi, leaving Dryas with Aladai. Her unconscious motive is to compromise the girl's character in Rackham's eyes, thereby removing her as a rival for his hand. But when she meets Rackham, their dialogue clarifies the situation for her:

> "'Did you realize that you'd left her alone with that nigger?'
> 'She's perfectly all right. She can come overland if she likes.'
> 'What was the idea? Didn't you think, or had you a reason? . . .' She could not decide. She knew only that she was dealing with motives below reason; and when one entered into such motives, or surrendered to them, one was lost and contemptible" (Af W 164).

Judy's brief moments of surrender to the irrational result from a failure in self-scrutiny. Her conduct contrasts with that of the other British characters, most of whom act without examining their motives. Cary therefore presents them as basically irrational in their prejudices, and he underlines this point by using the circus as an inclusive image in describing their social activities. The leading performer in that circus is Rackham who is explicitly described as "a good conjuror and juggler" (Af W 47). When his prejudices tangle with jealousy, he loses what little self-control he has and joins Dick

Honeywood, the British trader and thoughtless racial fanatic. Conscious of the danger, Rackham surrenders to the irrational without the inner checks of Judy, fulfilling the role of conjuror and juggler as he and Dick use the language of the circus and other animal imagery to discuss Aladai and expose their own absurd responses:

> When Honeywood called Aladai a performing ape, or a monkeyfied Bolshie, he was using Rackham's own words. But Rackham knew perfectly well that Aladai was worth six Honeywoods, both as a man and an intelligence; he was worth an infinity of Honeywoods, because Honeywood was a robot, a set of reactions, a creature ruled entirely by prejudice and a mass of contradictory impulses and inhibitions, which he called his opinions, and thought of as his character. He was a wooden man danced on strings; and anyone could make him kick. The word Bolshie, for instance, caused one reaction --not a mental, but a nervous, reaction--and the word nigger caused another.
>
> His brain did not seek to judge and know; it existed to scheme defence and satisfaction for the beasts and parasites lodged in the zoo of his character. His will was the servant of his nature, the crocodile in the swamp. He had no freedom. (Af W 192-3).

What Honeywood lacks is the inner freedom which enables a man to escape his fate. But if Honeywood emerges as a puppet in this portrayal, Rackham is clearly his puppeteer, and the difference between them is one of degree rather than of kind. It is Rackham who, walking shoulder to shoulder with Dick, assaults Aladai when he lands with Dryas. The public beating; the connivance of the British administrators with Salé who has murdered the Emir and installed himself in the compound; the attempt of the administration to keep Aladai out of Rimi: all these combine to push Aladai into the hands of Elizabeth and Coker as he prepares to fight the British whom he had sought as allies in progress, and Salé whom he sees as an enemy to progress. From now until the end of the novel, social and political considerations mesh inextricably and lead to the final catastrophe in which Aladai, who loses his freedom when he becomes a veritable pagan, and Coker and Dryas who

know no freedom, meet their senseless deaths. Dr. Schlemm is swept to his death by both the irrational forces in Rimi and his own blind attachment to impracticable ideals. Judy, who retains her freedom to the end, proves to be sufficiently resilient and tenacious to survive the turmoil. Rackham, escaping the storm which his own conduct has helped to generate, flees to the rarefied atmosphere of Europe.

Aladai's return to paganism deserves some attention. Cary suggests that it is a surrender to irrational feelings and Aladai's sudden reversion seems to support this. He rejects his European suit and accepts Elizabeth as physician in the place of the white doctor. He also accepts the pagan view that the Rimi should go to war against the Europeans. In fact, he loses all sense of direction. He wants a war to gratify his passion for revenge while Elizabeth is now made to look vastly superior to him by pointing out the futility of such a war:

> 'The white governor pays no attention unless there is bloodshed.'
> 'Then shed somebody else's.'
> 'Are you too selfish to give something to Rimi? Is not Rimi worth a sacrifice?'
> 'For Rimi? What's that? I want you to be chief.'
> 'And yet your own aunt threw herself into the river for Rimi, for the people's sake.'
> 'That was for good fishing, and the fish came. But it won't make you chief if I got shot by some rotten Housa with a white man's gun' (Af W 211).

Elizabeth has clearly become the pragmatist and rational teacher. She is repeating to Aladai a view which Judy had earlier expressed: that there is a distinction to be drawn between the abstraction "Rimi" and the concrete reality which exists in the people known as the Rimi. The presentation, however, is intended to illustrate a view which Cary held and expressed with firm conviction:

> In fact, men live so entirely by feeling that reason has extremely small power over even our most intelligent, our geniuses like Marx and Tolstoy. If you don't believe this, you only have to look at the papers, at day-to-day politics. We see there how little reason, how little even common prudence, can restrain whole peoples, or their leaders, from actions which amount to suicide when they are offered a chance of gratifying such entirely egotistic passions as greed, hatred, revenge, pride, wounded self-esteem or, most powerful, most persistent and most reckless of all, an inferiority complex.[13]

Underlying this observation is a supinely simple view of nationalism, based on the assumption that it is rooted in an inferiority complex and is therefore extremely irrational and dangerous. Aladai, stripped of his decorous European clothes, Cary insists, will expose the naked irrationality of his conduct because he is a nationalist (Af W 21). This conclusion is not only naive; it is unjustified by events. The feeling of wounded self-esteem which Aladai experiences derives not from an inferiority complex, but from the traumatic discovery that he is slighted for no better reason than the colour of his skin. This discovery forces him to assert his individuality and claim his right to rational and proper treatment.

What makes Cary's presentation of Aladai so unconvincing is that he is an uncritical admirer of European culture. He has moved away from the limitations of tribalism and can live at ease in a European setting if accepted. He is not even the hysterical enthusiast that Cary wanted to make him (Af W 11). True, he is shown on occasion to be willing to compromise his principles for political expediency; but this is a political necessity which Cary knew and approved.[14] What drives Aladai to the side of the pagans is the determination of Burwash, and Fisk, his assistant, to use "resolute cunning" (Af W 78) in all their dealings with the educated African. If the relationship

between Aladai and the white officials is characterised by mutual distrust and suspicion, it is largely because of the cynicism and cunning of the officials who drift in their purposelessness and lack of understanding. In each of the major crises of the novel, the officials are shown in various kinds of horseplay, actually bargaining for horses, or searching for new but equally dull games as they seek to overcome their ennui.

Nor are their dealings with the illiterate pagans they prefer any more enlightened. In addition to the barriers of communication which paralysed most of Bradgate's sensible and practical projects in *Aissa Saved*, Burwash is shown as a conservative and decadent administrator anxious to preserve the decay that is part of the Rimi scene. In an argument with a pagan headman about whether to move an old mosque or a new juju house (with the pungent irony that, for Cary, each is a symbol of decay and stagnation) to make room for a new and enlarged street, Burwash emerges as a preserver of decay instead of a builder of the new and dynamic structures that could renovate and revolutionise Rimi spiritually and physically. To the old pagan's plea for the preservation of the new juju house, Burwash replies with all the force of an inept conservatism and so puts himself on a level with the illiterate pagan. The useless argument and Cary's authorial voice point to the total bankruptcy of the system as Burwash opens the fruitless debate:

> "'But why can it not be moved. It is a new place. It is the old mosque in front that troubles me. I don't want to touch that.'
>
> The mosque was a ruin, unused for a long time--since the first and last Mohammedan Emir of Rimi had been killed thirty years before.
>
> 'But the *ju-ju* house is new, lord,' said the old ward chief.
>
> 'So I say, and therefore it can be moved.'

> 'But the mosque is old, lord; it is the *ju-ju* house which is new.'
>
> 'Yes, yes, chief. I understand. And I say I wish to preserve your mosque, but in that case the *ju-ju* house will have to go'" (Af W 82).

Here two incompatible but equally paralysing beliefs have clashed and created, in Burwash's favourite word, an impasse. It is now clear why "slow but sure" is both the motto and the catechism of his shallow creed.

In other important episodes, Cary shows some members of the administration, notably Sangster, the district officer, going beyond the impasse. Like Burwash, Sangster is a conservative, a preserver of the *status quo*. In his dealings with the pagans he wants to keep primitive, he can be high-handed, brusque, rude or even cruel. When the restive pagan women revolt, Sangster goes into action with the mad rage of a bull and the perverse pleasure of the sadist: "He took care, of course, not to shoot them. He only burnt their houses. But he enjoyed himself quite as much as the pagans . . ."(Af W 237). Cary's irony is unmistakable. Sangster, the "'good pagans' man" is enjoying himself in the turmoil of revolt with the pagans; but unlike the pagans who have only immobilized society by their campaign of passive resistance, Sangster has gone further by burning their homes.

Cary's white "pagans" are generally treated with tolerance and even sympathy. This is clearly the case with Bradgate of *Aissa Saved* and Bewsher of *An American Visitor*. These mild-mannered but unimaginative men are examples of Cary's white official who has been assimilated by the African environment. But a man like Sangster who combines his native conservatism with African paganism is treated with brutal irony. This method, though apparently in harmony with Cary's liberalism,[15]

creates problems for the reader and suggests that Cary had some unresolved ambiguities in his mind when he wrote the first three--but especially the first and third numbers--of his four African novels.

Within each of the four Nigerian societies he explores, Cary sets up three incompatible and irreconcilable groups. The Muslims, often providing a ruling elite, are set apart from other Africans by the incompetence and corruption of their rulers and the general mood of resignation which the rulers share with their subjects. The pagans, often in the majority, are characterised by their energetic, even violent responses, their implacable opposition to change which they share with the Muslims, and the terrifying cruelties that are part of their lives. Finally, there are the poorly educated Africans, generally inefficient as workers, contemptuous of other Africans, corrupt and pretentious as individuals. Within these clearly defined categories, Cary's preference is for the pagans. The poorly educated Africans are tolerable because they do occasionally produce the odd creature like Ali in *Aissa Saved* who can learn valuable Western concepts and put them into practice. The Muslims, however, are a contemptible lot in Cary's mind.

In *The African Witch* the contrast between Muslim and pagan is sharp and clear. The old and dying Emir Aliu of Rimi, "irrascible, unreasonable, often brutish," is better than a Muslim ruler in Cary's view:

> Because he [the Emir] was a pagan and not a Mohammedan, he had still, as a very old man, purposeful activity of mind and body. Mohammedans may live old and remain active; but not in purpose. They contemplate, and enjoy, waiting for paradise. But the religion of the waiting-room, of resignation and renunciation, had never soaked into Aliu. For him there was only one world. One lived among men, trees, and beasts. One reckoned with them, handled

> them, fought them, loved them; and, when one died, one was born again a man, a tree, or a beast, to begin again with loving, fighting, and striving for the glory and the honour of creatures (Af W 178).

Yet for all the "purposeful activity of mind" attributed to him, Aliu only reveals a preoccupation with trivial things and tries to escape the ugliness of the present by dwelling on the excitement of the brutal conquests of his youth. The novel itself offers nothing in support of Cary's startling thesis that a Mohammedan is always lacking in purpose. What it does offer, however, is unmistakable evidence of the systematic disintegration of Aliu's household, the erosion of his authority and the defection of all those who had fawned on him. Of course we are given a glimpse of his compound as a sanctuary for those who suffer the injustices of the pagan system. But it remains clear throughout the novel that all the gratuitous talk about his greatness is a mere illusion. Moreover, the pagan's ties with nature are stark, forbidding and depressing. Man in his pagan state is a simple lump of clay, an extension of nature. The serenity, the calm, the conviviality which man in his more elevated forms experiences when he is close to nature are all absent in this naked connection of primitive man and nature. Cary's distinction between Muslim and pagan as part of his dialectic on the internal conflict in the African society is untenable because it stands unsubstantiated.

The purpose of the distinction, it seems, is to press Cary's thesis that witchcraft and juju are the dominant forces in Africa. They have the power to assimilate everything in the environment and either destroy, paralyse or repel those they cannot absorb. It is a

despairing view of things but it is clearly another of Cary's theses about Africa:

> My book was meant to show certain men and their problems in the tragic background of a continent still little advanced from the Stone Age, and therefore exposed, like no other, to the impact of modern turmoil. An overcrowded raft manned by children who had never seen the sea would have a better chance in a typhoon. (Af W 12).

The dominance of these forces is embodied in the superior majesty, the monumental strength and bearing of the juju priestess, Elizabeth Aladai. Every character who stands beside her, including Judy Coote with her vastly superior intellect, is made to look insignificant. The "quality of power" (Af W 33) which Cary attributes to her is the power which sustains Africa and keeps it intact. Poisoned by Salé's agents, thrown into a ditch and strapped so that the hyenas could eat her, Elizabeth emerges unscathed in all her towering strength. Her incredible survival is the survival of juju and witchcraft over all other forces in Rimi. It is significant to note that Elizabeth had taken refuge in a juju grove after setting the women's war in motion in order to escape not only the rival forces of Salé and Coker, but also the strength of Aladai whom she suspects of using his superior white man's juju on her (Af W 240). It took the superior cunning of Salé's agents and the treachery of Akande Tom, her lover, to lure her from her hiding place and make the attempt on her life. The struggle between Elizabeth and these people is the struggle between paganism and the alien forces at work in Rimi--Islamic in Salé and "Christian" in Tom who wants the white man's culture. Elizabeth's triumph over these people is the triumph of her witchcraft over the alien cultures in Rimi.

This reading of *The African Witch* is supported by the fact that Tom is used throughout the novel as a foil to Aladai. They are both intimately connected with Elizabeth; they both have ambitions to rid Rimi of its primitive juju and replace it with the white man's juju. Each emerges as a real threat to Elizabeth's dominance. But while Tom is the veritable savage, Aladai remains a savage only in the imagination of the European community. When Aladai's prospects seem bright Tom dresses himself in his crumpled European rags and trots about joyfully; and as Cary describes his happiness and his dress, the differences and similarities between him and Aladai are established.

> No one can feel that happiness who has not been in Tom's position: a naked savage. . . . For the difference, even in a snob's imagination, between a peer and a tramp is nothing to that in a savage's between himself and a white man. It is so great that the bush negro does not concern himself with it. His indifference to the white man and his ideas is founded on a feeling of difference so profound that his mind will not attempt to pass over the gap. Only the most enterprising, like Tom--men of ambition and ideals--attempt it.
>
> When Akande Tom had put on over a naked skin linen coat, trousers, cloth cap, and black goggles, he felt as near a white man as it was possible for him to be, and enjoyed an exaltation which might possibly be compared with that of a risen soul on his first morning in paradise. Because, for Akande Tom, the change was not only one of appearance, but of being and power (Af W 148-9).

Tom's being, he feels, is the mysterious being of the white man and the power is the magic power of his machines. His imagination and enterprise are steeped in superstition and witchcraft. The problem of his education is therefore the problem of the education of the Rimi which is at the heart of the conflict between Aladai and the European community. When Aladai is killed, Tom goes to Judy who is still recovering from injuries she suffered in the last bloody riots of the novel and asks her to teach him "book" so that he could not be touched

by the local juju. In a final thrust on imperialism, Cary brings the imperial agents together in the penultimate chapter of *The African Witch* and shows their united opposition to education in Rimi while Judy pleads in vain for permission to keep her new pupil and for "proper education for negroes" (Af W 301). This is the final failure of any character to find a substitute to Elizabeth's juju and power. In the last chapter, Elizabeth's supreme authority is demonstrated as she symbolically strips Tom, beats him and makes him crawl on his stomach to her feet.

But what about Coker? Is he something more than a study of religious fanaticism? Is his fateful connection with Aladai artistically necessary or is it merely a part of Cary's effort to manipulate his characters and demonstrate the various theses he outlines in his preface to *The African Witch*? These are some of the questions which Coker's presence in the novel raises because it is clear from the method of his presentation and the author's comments about him that he is not an individual, but a religious and racial type peculiar to Africa. His fanaticism, Cary tells us, is derived from the Watch Tower sect which is narrowly fundamentalist and fiercely self-righteous. Even so Coker has had to leave the sect because to their institutional fanaticism he has added his own peculiarly ugly elements derived from blood: "Blood-love, blood-hatred, were the ethics of Coker's religion; its theology was the geyser, the hot fountain shot out of primaeval mud".(Af W 50). He is also set apart by the uniquely local flavour of his faith: "All Coker's religious phrases had a local twist--like Catholicism in Italy, France, America, or the English Church service in Kent, Ulster, Wales " (Af W 50). The parenthesis might indicate that there is nothing

unusual about the twist Coker has given to his religion. But Cary goes on to suggest that the "chastisement" which Coker tries to bring on Africa by murdering several white people in the name of his religion is the result of a union of "morbid psychology and primitive religion" in the man (Af W 209). But the morbid psychology is also identified as African; and when Cary's definition of primitive religion as "herd communism, herd fear and herd love, blood ties and race hatreds" (Af W 209) is added to this, it becomes inevitable, as he insists, that such a religion must be "pre-human". The insistence in *Aissa Saved* that the African is incapable of receiving any humane teaching is now pressed to its brutal conclusion.

Cary's prejudices become more evident when we look at his treatment of the fundamentalist believer or the hysterical enthusiast on the European scene. In *Except the Lord*, Chester Nimmo's father is a fundamentalist with an apocalyptic imagination: he spent his life calculating and preparing himself for the day the world would blow up in flames. Yet for all his mistaken beliefs he emerges as a man of quiet dignity. In *To Be A Pilgrim* and *The Captive and the Free* respectively, Brown and Preedy are "hysterical enthusiasts" in Cary's sense of the phrase. Religious passion and sexuality are inextricably mixed up in their imaginations. But Brown and Preedy are presented, in spite of their religious and social aberrations, as vibrant and self-fulfilling individuals because they are not subject to the capricious pull of an irrational environment. The pessimistic but unavoidable conclusion is that it is not only futile to try to christianize the African; it is even dangerous to do so.

In contrasting the religions of Coker and Dr. Schlemm, then, Cary is trying to demonstrate the widest possible difference between Coker's pre-human religion and Schlemm's urbane and exemplary Christian dedication to man. What makes the contrast unconvincing, however, is that the religions of the two men are not presented as the perceptions of two individuals, but those of two representative types. Dr. Schlemm, described as a German-American, is a cosmopolitan in E. M. Forster's sense of the term and embodies a Christian sensibility of a very exalted order. He has "fine manners, a complete lack of chicane, moral repose . . . based upon a sure faith, . . . and reserve or moral dignity " (Af W 129). As physician and pastor, he belongs to a distinguished band of men who are noted for their dedication to the relief of human suffering. He is painfully aware of the pervasive influence in Rimi of juju and the witch-doctor whom he calls "the curse of Africa" (Af W 130). Coker, on the other hand, believes in witches and accepts the need for their continued subjection to torture because the Bible attests to their existence. Schlemm is guided by the spirit and essence of true Christianity; Coker worships its mythology. Schlemm's religion is redemptive and regenerative in quality; Coker's faith is pernicious and deadly. Their irreconcilable opposition is shown in their first ominous meeting which also foreshadows their bloody clash towards the end (Af W 131-5).

But in Africa, according to Cary, even the noble missions of the Schlemms go awry. And Dr. Schlemm, for all his moral grandeur, does not escape Cary's cynicism. His missionary zeal is called in question on at least two separate occasions. The first occurs after his request to Dryas to invite Aladai to his Kifi mission as part of his

campaign against witch hunts and trials. When Dryas informs Judy about the request, their discussion quickly moves to the saintly goodness of Schlemm's mission. But the trick he employs to restore his waning influence over Aladai is questioned. When Dryas argues that a man cannot be a saint if he is tricky, it is Judy whose opinions we have come to respect who exclaims: "'Good gracious, Dryas, all saints are tricky. You can't trust 'em a yard--not an inch--at least in religious things '"(Af W 147). The second instance occurs during the expedition to the mission when it is obliquely hinted that Schlemm's fight against witchcraft is due, in part, to religious jealousy. Moreover, Cary's examination of the reasons for the Doctor's presence in Rimi suggests that his motivation might come from an unconscious desire for martyrdom. Even his idealism seems suspect. "It was his strength and his weakness that he could not believe in the treachery or wickedness of his beloved pupils "(Af W 135). But when he is confronted by that very treachery; when he is attacked and slightly wounded by one of his own pupils during the skirmishes that follow Rackham's beating of Aladai; when he tells his European friends that his injury is accidental because he could not publicly admit the shock to his ideals; above all when he refuses to own that Coker who has been attacked and driven out of Rimi by Aladai to prevent him from stirring racial hatred, and who has taken refuge in Kifi might pervert some of the Doctor's own pupils, Schlemm is clearly indulging in a high degree of self-deception. Perhaps his decorous theological uniforms cannot prevent him from yielding to such a weakness in Africa. If the Doctor's characterization reveals inner contradictions, it is because the views of his creator are distorted

by too many wrong assumptions. For a man who is said to represent "*the spirit of the noblest*"(Af W 125) in the human race, the inner contradictions can only undermine that nobility of spirit which is one of the distinguishing marks that separate him from Coker.

Indeed, in the presentation of the final catastrophe in *The African Witch*, Cary seems to have lost the precarious control he has over his material in this novel. The ostensible reason for the manner of its presentation is to demonstrate Cary's belief that education would not abolish barbarity and violence in Africa. On the contrary, Cary insists, "education would bring in more violence, more barbarities; it would break up what is left of tribal order, and open the whole country to the agitator "(AF W 12-13). The result is that in the short space devoted mainly to his illustration of this view, Cary's narrative is so full of contradictions and inconsistencies that it becomes almost impossible to know what to accept as he juggles with events and characters alike.

In quick succession we learn that Aladai is committed to war against the Europeans (Af W 231). On the very next page he is counselling Elizabeth against any killing except in self-defence--a view of war he totally rejected earlier. Then as part of his ceremonial return to paganism, Aladai puts away most of his European clothes, shaves his head, dons a kilt, so that he now plainly looks, in Cary's words, "like the cannibal chief in the comic papers, in his old school blazer" (Af W 263). Here, it must be noted, Cary is repeating the view of Aladai first expressed by Rackham, a view for which the hot-tempered Irishman was so roundly condemned by the author. But it is necessary

to repeat and reinforce this view of Aladai as a preparation for his last major encounter with Judy when she would try to avert the war with all the strength of her rational powers. Nevertheless, the gaping disparity between intention and realisation shows up when the two actually meet. Aladai's attention once more is focused not on himself but on the problems of the Rimi people who remain the worst kind of slaves because they are, in his words, "slaves to ignorance and *ju-ju*" (Af W 270). By the end of the meeting, therefore, Judy is to recognise not the cannibal chief, but a man who "looked more royal, more the leader and king than any ruler she had seen "(Af W 271).

In his well-documented study of the tradition of portraying Africa in English fiction, G. D. Killam has observed that "The educated African might have been expected to symbolise African advancement, but in novels devoted to him or in which he is a central figure, he is a despised and unsympathetic character."[16] This lack of sympathy and the determination to present Aladai as the archetypal educated African account for the inconsistencies in his portrayal. Even while Cary is relentlessly steering Aladai to his fatal reunion with Coker, he cannot but grant him his brief moment of sublime terror and loneliness as he contemplates the agony of his leadership (Af W ch XXXII). But Aladai cannot help himself. He joins Coker in the crocodile hole near Dr. Schlemm's Kifi mission where Coker has been preaching his religion of blood to a congregation drawn mainly from "the educated pupils" (Af W 256) of the Doctor himself. The pupils are attracted by a new and powerful juju in Coker's possession. The juju is Schlemm's head. And

Aladai "had known perfectly well that Coker's juju was Schlemm's head, but he had not wanted to admit it "(Af W 292).

The wheel has now turned full circle. Aladai has become the cannibal chief because he is implicated, even if indirectly, in a cannibal ritual. But the whole reversion story is vitiated by the method of its presentation. The tension between tenor and vehicle is tremendous. In the presentation of at least two vital characters in *The African Witch*, Aladai and Dr. Schlemm, Cary is compelled to adopt in each case two separate and incompatible styles. In Aladai's case, there is an unbridgeable gap between the generally urbane and educated prose he uses in his crucial conversations with Judy and the prose of his letters which is frequently inflated in tone but obsequious in import and invariably betrays a lack of proportion and control. The learned Doctor on the other hand talks over the heads of his congregations, but descends in ordinary conversations to "dissolved philosophies" which no one can understand. But when he is excited, which often happens when the matter is religious, he imposes his native German sounds on a few commonplace English words. There is never a single instance of the American side to his speech. For an author of Cary's extraordinary verbal gifts, the uncertain style is probably the product of an uncertain purpose. When his imagination is unhampered by his own preconceptions, Cary can and does suit his manner to event and character in a large variety of situations. In the two trilogies alone we have six different styles each of which is selected solely for its suitability in exploring a unique individual and his very personal perception of reality.

In *Art and Reality*, Cary formulated the artistic problem that confronted him and marred his art in *The African Witch:*

> The man who goes to Africa or India finds whole peoples living under different laws, a different religion, a different social idea, different arts, and sees that under these conditions they achieve themselves in their own way. Yet they are essentially the same kind of people as himself. Such a discovery is a prophylactic against narrow minds, unless, of course, the traveller goes out with a mind made up that his own national customs and prejudices are the only right ones. This, however, is a common enough phenomenon, especially among those modern travellers who move only in groups of fellow countrymen. They support each other's prejudices and protect each other against any experience that might break through the conceptual blindness of a national ego.[17]

In *The African Witch*, Cary shares with his European characters the conceptual blindness he so knowingly demarcates. He is himself a major character in the novel, denouncing racist characters like Jerry Rackham and Dick Honeywood, yet strengthening their views with the unshakable force of his authorial voice.

As Aladai approaches the end, he becomes a split personality torn between the magnetic attraction of African witchcraft which is dragging him into the pit and the gentle prodding of civilized Europe which is trying to lift him out of the crocodile hole. He is simultaneously moving towards self-sacrifice and self-preservation. He is also trying to put Schlemm's death into perspective and find from it a meaning for his own life. He is at one and the same time experiencing an irresistible urge to join Coker and contemplating ways to subdue him (Af W 292-6). The inner struggle of the mind which is so moving in the novels of James Joyce and more recently in the fiction of William Golding seems inept and forced because Cary's character is robbed of his autonomy:

> "'We all must die,' moaned Aladai. 'He that is first--must be the sacrifice. It is very odd, all this,' said the brain, in a European voice. 'I shall speak to Miss Judy about this. Why this lust for death? It does not seem natural. Nature wants to live--not to die . . .'"(Af W 292).

But the death-wish predominates even after Aladai has discovered, from his contemplation of Schlemm's death, the futility of self-sacrifice:

> "'Why had Schlemm come back to be killed? It was madness; or had he done it on purpose? Had he wanted to die? Or had he been guided--the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church--the blood of the Russian nihilists--the blood of the Irish nationalists. 'Go to bed,' said Aladai's brain. 'You're too tired--too worried. You'll be as mad as Coker, if you're not careful.'"(Af W 294).

In the end it is Coker's madness which infiltrates Aladai's brain. The two men, unarmed, charge into Captain Rubin's company which has surrounded the crocodile hole and are mowed down by bullets.

M. M. Mahood finds *The African Witch* a more confident, more assured book when compared with Cary's first two novels because "its political viewpoint is a good deal more stable than that of *An American Visitor*."[18] The only stable political viewpoint in the novel, however, centres entirely on the insistent irony used in presenting the imperial agents whether as administrators, law keepers, traders or mere loafers. The central figure of the larger politics of *The African Witch* is Aladai, and Cary fails to use his creative talents because he insists on presenting him as both the natural enemy and the natural ally of Coker who is the incarnation of the worst kind of madness in man. Their enmity is natural and believable; but their alliance is obscene and implausible. Moreover, if, as Cary suggests in the preface, his aim is to study the irrational forces that operate in man, then it is conceptually a more defective book than any he ever set in Africa because

> the title suggests what the book itself confirms, that the juju which masters so many characters in the story is to be thought of as a specifically African force. Cary, that is to say, confused setting and symbol when he followed Conrad in identifying Africa and the Africans with the irrational.[19]

The conclusion which this analysis of *The African Witch* leads to is that the novel is so loaded with contradictory assumptions that the reader is never able to maintain a consistent focus for long. Some of the reasons for this weakness are embodied in G. D. Killam's observation that

> The book, in fact, verges on total failure because of Cary's shoddy treatment of Aladai. It is here, in the attitudes he expresses toward the educated African, that Cary's most serious limitation reveals itself. He looks with frank suspicion and not a little distaste on this figure and his disregard for Aladai gets in the way of his detached and disinterested novelist's view. Aladai never has a chance of succeeding in the novel despite the fact that his education, the honesty of his appraisal of the Rimi situation, the moderate nature of the reforms he proposes, make him the logical candidate to succeed to the emirship. Cary, like Rackham in the novel, recognises Aladai's quality; like Rackham, however, Cary cannot overcome an antipathy to Aladai which is irrational and racial in origin.[20]

If therefore Elizabeth, rather than Aladai, emerges as the unchallenged and sceptred ruler of Rimi, it is not because she is divinely ordained to her pre-eminent position even by the events of the story, but because, in Cary's view, she embodies the immutable forces that rule Africa.

CHAPTER II

Private Creeds and the Problems of Revolution

I. *An American Visitor*

An American Visitor and *Mister Johnson* contain between them the fictional versions of those ideas which Cary was later to express in his political treatises on Africa, especially in *The Case for African Freedom*. In the first of these two novels, he argues not only that change is necessary if the African is to escape the entrapment, the poverty and the ignorance of centuries of stagnation, but that this change is also inevitable in the twentieth century, in spite of those who would consciously or unconsciously try to hinder it. In the second, he presents a revolution with all its attendant confusion, showing its desirable and undesirable effects and pointing to the general bewilderment of Europeans and Africans alike as they try to adjust to the new situation. True, *An American Visitor* lacks the technical finesse of *Mister Johnson*. The arguments between the dreamy American visitor, Marie Hasluck, and the hard-headed English interloper, Frank Cottee, contain what are probably the most stilted pieces of dialogue in the whole of Cary's fiction. But the problem is technical rather than conceptual; Cary is unable to avoid the use of clumsy devices in his second published novel. Thus although Cottee clearly symbolises the worst aspects of exploitation under the colonial system, Cary nevertheless adopts him as a spokesman for his own views on the need to change the imperial system of *laissez-faire*. The result is that instead of the racy and easy-flowing dialogue of Cary's mature writing, we have a series of turbid and self-conscious debates between Marie and Frank.

Notwithstanding its technical flaws, however, *An American Visitor* is the first novel in which Cary makes a serious attempt to observe the artistic dictum which he enunciates in *Except the Lord.* In that novel, Chester Nimmo, the narrator, explains that although his story is set in Devon, he avoids the use of the Devonshire dialect because he has no intention of setting people apart by their speech,

> for that speech was the expression of their feelings, their anxieties, which would only be hidden from you in dialect, and I do not deal with a world divided into classes--of gentry and yokels--but one of human creatures under the same sentence of life, their doom and their delight (EL 28).

If Cary had adhered to this artistic dictum in all his fiction, he could have avoided the charge of prejudice. And *An American Visitor,* as a work of imagination, is superior to either *Aissa Saved* or *The African Witch* because, while fully recognising the differences between people, Cary does not also deprive the Africans of their autonomy or the capacity to function as self-fulfilling individuals. It is true, of course, that the African characters in *An American Visitor* are shadowy compared with those in any of Cary's other African novels. But this is probably intentional, for it is part of Cary's aim to show the confusion of life in a transitional period. Moreover, the European characters, with the exception of Marie and Bewsher, are just as insubstantial as their African counterparts. But since Birri is the place which is afflicted by the chaos of revolution, it is the Birri who naturally show the most obvious signs of disintegration. In Uli, for example, Cary portrays an insubstantial but recognisably marginal character--a character that is neither integrated into his own society nor assimilated by the new culture he wants to embrace. But the chaos which hits Birri is not peculiar to the region. It is part of a world

phenomenon and in Gore, the assistant District Officer in Birri, Cary shows the same unsettling effects of revolution on the conservative mind.

The action of *An American Visitor* takes a stage further the clash between white and black cultures. But the emphasis has shifted quite noticeably to a wider issue: that of the conflict between tradition and change. In human terms, it is a conflict between conservatives and revolutionaries. It is also a further examination of the faith by which people live.

The novel is set in Birri, an amorphous collection of villages and warring tribes. The principal characters are "Monkey" Bewsher, the District Officer, determined to bring orderly change to Birri; Gore, his assistant, with a traditional sense of duty and a willingness to assume the role of mediator between Bewsher and a restless group of miners headed by Frank Cottee, an intelligent but unscrupulous pragmatist, who sees the need for change but is opposed to it because it will make the natives restless and therefore interfere with his exploitative endeavours; and Marie Hasluck, an American lady of easy virtue, a peripatetic anthropologist and journalist, a hardened anarchist who has been disillusioned by Western civilization and is out looking for the legendary noble savage and the New Jerusalem, the land of hope and promise. On the African side there is a large number of generally inconsequential characters, including the young chief Obai who apes Bewsher and reflects his views in tribal meetings that were--and this is the central irony that runs through the whole novel--largely devoted to planning the District Officer's murder because the natives suspect that he has "sold" them to the miners; Henry, the enterprising

African who breaks his tribal bonds, finds employment in the European community and creates for himself a new and satisfying life that is clearly debased but freer and superior in some respects to that of the tribe he has left behind; Uli, the marginal character who gropes uncertainly between the two cultures because the flux has robbed him of his identity; and, finally, the Fish, primitive, conservative, and implacably opposed to change because change will destroy his own hegemony in the tribal system.

As usual with Cary, each individual within the group has his own unique perception of things, and each works with a single-minded determination to direct the world according to his apprehension of reality. Bewsher and Marie, for example, described as "two pagan enthusiasts" (Am V 88), determined in their different ways to protect the Birri from what they consider undesirable consequences of Western civilization, hold uncompromising views about what is desirable. Thus when they fall in love and marry, Frank Cottee (whose criticism of Marie's anarchism and Bewsher's autocracy is apparently also that of the author) points out the incompatibility of the match to the myopic Gore who finds it suitable. "Suitable? Bewsher the toughest old pagan and rationalist you could find and Marie the real Boston mystic, direct in descent from Emerson and Thoreau" (AM V 150). This distinction between the two pagan enthusiasts is important, not only because it reveals the reasons for the gentle but incurable conflict that brings tragedy to both of them, but also because it underlines their very different approaches to the problems of life in Birri. Marie's dreamy romanticism makes her unaware of the ugliness, the pain and unbearable suffering that surround her in the drab African village. Bewsher's

rationalism makes him fully aware of the need for change. Therefore he approaches the problem from a practical point of view by trying to create a Birri federation which will give the separate Birri tribes a sense of identity and the feeling of nationhood that has fostered pride and dignity in the Hausas and Yorubas of Nigeria. But the rationalism of Bewsher is insufficient as a guide to life in Birri because it rests on weak foundations: immoderate optimism, a trustfulness that frequently ignores facts, and an inflexible will to pursue political goals for reasons that are partly selfish. The marriage of Bewsher and Marie is therefore the uneasy marriage of incompatible ideals, the gentle yoking of two inadequate philosophies that are not even complementary to each other.

Cary undermines Marie's view of life in Birri by showing from the beginning the seamy side of village life. The novel opens with Cary's usual assortment of Africans--criminals, drifters and castaways. They are gossiping and passing judgment on Marie in particular and the white community in general. They want to know what Marie is doing in Birri "if she isn't a miner or a trader or a teacher or a missionary." When they answer that she is "just walking" (Am V 13), it becomes clear that in their view she is a complete idler, a mere wanderer. But wandering is also the curse of the white man because, as a man in a turban puts it, "They do not know the peace of God because they are idolators and heathen. They have set their hearts on the vanities of this world--on wealth and power and indulgence." The superb irony is that the sedentary villager who makes this sweeping condemnation of the white race is introduced in all his naked poverty darning "a green

silk stocking with brown wool" (Am V 13). But when the gossip turns on the love affair between Marie and Cottee, its "shameless" debates and disputes, the villagers' conversation becomes scurrilous and worldly-wise. They detect a common female tendency in Marie's tantalising behaviour when she repeatedly puts off Cottee's desire to consummate their love. This insight by the villagers into the characters of the white people in their midst is important, because it explodes the myth of the simple, good-mannered and innocent village bumpkin which is at the bottom of Marie's search for the ideal society.

Equally untenable, from Cary's point of view, is the romantic assumption that village life is beautiful, happy and secure. The first villagers we encounter in this novel are all starved, querulous and desperately trying to escape to a new reservation just opened inside Birri. Gore, the proverbial mandarin who has been trying to prevent the inevitable riots among the villagers, "thought he had never seen so many miserable, worried people together, not even in the largest and richest capitals. Even the whites were miserable" (Am V 16). The misery of the whites derives, of course, from different sources. Gore is lonely and miserable because of the burden of his office and his inability, as a conservative, to adjust to new situations. Jukes, the oldest of the miners, is depressed by the weight of his domestic responsibilities and the numbing fear of bankruptcy that is common to the speculator. Cottee, youthful, energetic and impatient, is harassed by the slowness of things in Birri generally and angered by Bewsher's opposition to the exploitation of the Birri whom he has come to regard as his personal property. And when Cary takes us into Nok, a typical Birri village, it becomes clear that the Birri are, even by African

standards, a very backward people. Their tribal organisation is at the simplest and lowest level. They have no established institutions, and even chieftaincy, usually the pivot of tribal order, is a weak institution. Thus, when Cary talks of "the complicated scheme of Nok society" (Am V 54), he is being broadly and intentionally ironical. The life he depicts is one of physical, mental and spiritual confinement.

It is against this background that Marie, "who belonged to the most modern school of anthropologists and believed in the Golden Age, the noble savage and all the other resuscitated fancies of Rousseau" (Am V 66), and who writes glowing newspaper reports about the Birri, must be viewed. In the first of those reports Marie exposes her naïveté and her failure to understand Bewsher's policy when she writes:

> "'The independent spirit of the natives and the rarely enlightened policy of the District Officer, Mr. Eustace B. Bewsher . . . has preserved the primitive culture of the tribe both from the so-called education of the mission and the development of finance. The result is that the Birri are probably the happiest and wisest people in the world. To pass from what we call civilization into this obscure district of Nigeria is like going out of a lunatic asylum where the keepers are crazier than the patients into a spring morning of the Golden Age'"(Am V 66).

Cary's method of repudiating this kind of romantic fantasy is to expose the inconsistency between Marie's theory and practice, and also demonstrate that because change is an inevitable historical process, it cannot be held in check by self-indulgent people.

We already know, even before Marie writes her report, that the idyllic picture she paints is a mere figment of her imagination; and Cary uncovers her self-contradictions in a few telling episodes. The value of money which she condemns is demonstrated by the fact that when her own sponsors fail to remit her allowance, she suffers from temporary

insomnia because of the humiliation of having to live off the miners. Yet when she meets Obai she tries to convince him not to accept money in exchange for the exploitation of Birri land by the miners (Am V 31-3). Later, in what amounts to a public debate on the various beliefs of the main characters (Ch IX), the conservative Gore, himself a preserver of the *status quo*, nevertheless, unmasks the inherent selfishness in Marie's attitude: "Don't let 'em have any money to play with in case they buy the same sort of things that we find indispensable--clothes and metal pots and so on. It's a funny idea at first sight" (Am V 94).

The episode which follows the account of Marie's newspaper report is even more revealing. It is a simple but eloquent revelation of wilful self-deception on Marie's part and the caprice and inhospitality of the Birri which she knew but chose to ignore. The occasion is one of Bewsher's periodic meetings with his tribesmen to preach his gospel of change. Marie, uninvited, has suddenly appeared and she and Bewsher are surrounded at once by a furious mob of natives (Am V 68). In the exchanges which follow, Cary offers a vivid vignette of the clash between conservatism and progress. Bewsher's effort to persuade the Birri to adopt the deeper and more hygienic well latrine of the Hausas is rejected out of hand because the idea and its sponsor are foreign. But Fish, that intrepid and formidable opponent of progress, while betraying the malevolence of the natives, also gives the rationale for their opposition to change. Change is unsettling and even Marie, for all she may think, is already having a subversive influence on the Birri women:

> "'They've got my wife at that mission--she says she won't come back--and this woman here (another jerk at Marie) she tells the girls they can lie down to have a baby--that's a wicked thing--

> it's done so that harm will come--we don't want any perverted white bitches--'" (Am V 70-71).

A small but interesting point to note is that in the eyes of the intelligent but unprincipled Cottee, Marie is also perverse and bitchy. The episode reaches a climax when the spear-wielding Fish, propelled by his furious anger, makes a futile attempt to stab Bewsher. This is Marie's novel experience of the Birri, and it would have been enough to disabuse a less dreamy character of her prepossessions about primitive wisdom. It would also have confirmed that the contrary is true: that the primitive mind is unreceptive to ideas and leads to behaviour which is so whimsical that one might be safer in a lunatic asylum than in an assembly with people like Fish. But it takes more than hard facts to convince Marie's type. She has to have a stake in Bewsher before she can recognise the dangers that threaten him. She also needs the incontrovertible arguments of Cottee against primitivism to create doubts in her mind about the validity of her simple tenets. In an angry moment, Cottee summarises his objections to the primitive cult when he remarks that

> "'What he was talking about was the whole policy of segregation, the idea that civilized dress and amusements were bad in themselves. It wasn't even a justifiable policy. Natives who wore trousers and went to the cinema instead of hunting lions mightn't be so picturesque as the naked savage, but they'd be happier--they wouldn't want to go back'"(Am V 96).

In fact, what Cottee's unrelenting examination of Marie does is to lead her from one contradiction to another, forcing her to admit that if Birri is the kingdom of heaven, then it is not worth anybody's while to search for it. She has to admit, ultimately, that the perennial search for "the golden city" is itself a form of escapism, a blind determination to take man "back to natural obligations and

natural rights . . .--back to providence" (Am V 91). Of course, Cottee's arguments are not always logical. He moves in a series of distended circles that always start in Birri and end in Birri. But the repetitions, the unrelenting questioning, the very circularity of the arguments are all intended to drive home the point that there is nothing noble or wise or pleasant in Birri. Cottee tells an anecdote about a naked Birri chief who goes to Kunama, receives a gift of a beautiful new gown from the emir, and sends in return a bottle of putrid native gin with the message: "This medicine is an infallible cure for the mange, craw-craw and leprosy. If my brother of Kunama will condescend to use it, he will soon find himself in a condition to appear as decently naked as myself" (Am V 93). This anecdote, like the story of the encounter between Bewsher and Fish referred to earlier, is intended to illustrate the incurably bad manners of the primitive man.

Even the story of Uli, the primitive man whose brief exposure to the more sophisticated manners and customs of Kunama makes him ill-adjusted for Birri, only shows the crippling limitations of village life, a life of entrapment from which only the most enterprising can escape. But enterprise is an uncommon attribute among primitive people. That is why, in spite of the sweet taste of freedom in Kunama, Uli returns to Nok still "passionately attached to his own village" (Am V 53) and marries Unuke whose conservatism makes her taboo to most men even in Birri. When the marriage breaks up because he forces her to make love to him in the style of Kunama which is also the style of most people in the world, Uli drifts back into the inner circles of

village life where he achieves emotional release in murderous chants with other primitive men. His bewilderment and his limitations are exposed as he gropes for words to express the social and personal confusion in Birri, until the author takes over and reports directly to the reader:

> It wasn't only about farms, about juju, about law, nationalism, about strangers, whisky, war, money, Christianity, trade, soldiers, and the rights and the powers of the white men and the authority of their Gods, it was about himself too. Where was he, what was he? What had happened to him? Had he committed a sin worthy of punishment? (Am V 80-1).

These are the problems of society as well as the very personal questions which Uli must face. But his inability to cope with any but the purely traditional "issues" in Birri is illustrated as he tries to escape through the exhilaration of war with neighbouring villages or the voluptuous and drunken revels of Nok.

Even when Uli appears enterprising by moving into the Goshi mission of the Dobsons and getting "converted" to Christianity, it soon becomes obvious that he is not only uneducable, but that, like all of Cary's primitive converts, he is busy grafting his pagan beliefs to Christian theology, thereby subverting the old as well as the new. If he commits new lessons to memory, it is entirely because of his belief that the Christian "spells" will make him "stronger or safer in this mysterious and dangerous world" (Am V 144). The only satisfaction he gets from the mission comes from his nightly debaucheries with Atua, one of the mission voluptuaries. Even while he was being pampered by the missionaries, Uli's treachery was so profound that he could still join Fish and Henry in planning an attack on the mission, just as he was later to betray to the missionaries the tribal plans

to murder Bewsher. Finally, when he is expelled from the mission because of his truculent manners, he returns to the tribe and joins the assault on the white community during which Bewsher is killed. The massive reprisal by the British and the nearly complete dissolution of Birri tribal life from the actions and counteractions are probably as attributable to Uli as any other character in *An American Visitor*. At a crucial moment in the tangle of events that led to the bloody clashes between the Birri and the British, Uli is offered a chance to distinguish himself by taking from Gore to the Birri chiefs a message that could have averted the racial conflict (Am V 171). His unequivocal and irreversible decision to reject the distinction of peace maker is a measure--and a weighty measure at that--of the unfathomable difference between primitive and civilized man.

Henry is the antithesis to Uli. Crafty and unscrupulous, indifferent to all ethical considerations and extremely materialistic, Henry, nevertheless, represents and explains a view of primitive life which Cary frequently repeated in his essays:

> Life in a primitive tribe is monotonous and boring. It survives, when it does survive, only because the people who suffer it have no idea of anything better. So, on the appearance of even the worst kinds of European organisation, the tribesman is fascinated. He wants European clothes, however shoddy; he will go away from the tribe to live in the foulest slums only for the freedom--as it seems to him--of a job away from the tribe and life away from tribal law. So we have confusion, conflict, the destruction of old values before the new are established.[1]

When he first appears, Henry is jostling with other village outcasts for the post of cook among the Europeans who are waiting for a steamer to take them from Gwanki, a lonely port on the Niger, to the tin mines in Birri. Cary is also careful to point out the unrelieved boredom of the tribal chiefs who are returning to Birri from Kunama where they

have lodged a complaint about the presence of the mining prospectors on their lands. Equally obvious is Henry's intuitive grasp of the situation which makes him more determined to secure a free passage to Birri because he realises that "if the Birri pagans made war against the government there would be rich pickings" (Am V 19). The irony is that when Henry approaches Marie for a job, they laugh at each other because each assumes a superior knowledge of the weaknesses of the other. But it is the wily Henry who quickly wins his way into the heart of the naïve American anthropologist. Henry is so determined to create a new life for himself that he cannot allow any obstacle, human or physical, to bar him on his way to Marie whom he clearly sees as the vehicle that will take him to his dream of glory. His merciless trampling of the dejected tribesmen around him is the symbolic crushing of the physical obstacles that would otherwise keep him away from his goal:

> He sprung away with large baboon-like leaps which expressed the exultation of his spirits. Ambition gave impulse to his muscles. He began to see a new career opening before him; that is to say, easy money and plenty of it, easy drinks, easy women. In what other direction could he make a career, for he had learnt to despise his tribe, he belongs to no community ready to admire or record his feats of courage or art. His only hope of glory and honour was in having cash which confers distinction everywhere; and of happiness in drink and women which taste the same everywhere (Am V 25).

Henry is thus the first of Cary's creative artists, the men best exemplified in the fully rounded characters of Johnson, Charley Brown, and Gulley Jimson, that irrepressible father of them all. What distinguishes these men from other people is their assiduous and uncompromising determination to shape the world according to their own intuition of reality. They are all ready to pull the world apart or be

crushed in the effort to reshape it rather than yield to the pressures of ossified but still powerful conventions.

Henry is different, however. His incipient creativity is hampered by the gradualism of Bewsher and the impractical theories of Marie. But since, for Cary, man's creative energy is irrepressible, Henry will express himself in a negative or positive manner. The conditions in Birri make the expression of his imagination wholly negative and destructive. He gropes around for a while until he hears some of Cottee's pernicious and cynical views which become the foundation on which the boy builds his more callously materialistic creed. In *Charley is My Darling*, Cary returns to this problem of starving the young imagination and lays bare the terrifying consequences of such a deprivation. The deprivation is acutely felt but the determination to express oneself is always inexorable.

That is why when Henry has set his mind on feeding his expansive ego beyond the confines of tribal life, he is visibly astonished and disgusted when Marie begins to preach her primitive cult to the less enterprising Obai. Henry's extensive travels in Nigeria have left him with the certain knowledge that life outside the tribe is vastly superior to life within the tribe. Thus when Marie argues that people should not be tempted from their farms and villages "even for big pay," because money would corrupt their lives, Henry responds by calling her and Obai "two fools, two savages" (Am V 34). It is another example of Marie's failure to live by the precepts she tries to inculcate in others. She is even oblivious to the fact that by employing Henry, the unethical ex-convict, she is offering him the chance to escape the tribal life she considers wholesome for the life of cash values which she considers

dangerous and unhealthy. The irony is that by persistently blocking the path to orderly change, Marie paves the way to Henry's ascendancy with all its shattering consequences on Birri.

The shift by Henry to what is essentially Cottee's point of view about the supreme value of material things is due as much to his inordinate desire to realise his ambition of personal distinction as it is due to the revulsion he feels after listening to Marie's naïve theories about the pleasures of village life. Henry has become "civilized", and "as with civilized man everywhere in the world of cash values, his good nature, his sympathies had increased with prosperity and he was everybody's friend" (Am V 157). In fact, Henry displays no more than the nominal friendliness of the egotist. He is committed to no one, and uses his contacts with other people mainly as the occasion to talk about his success. He moves gingerly between the Birri and the British, plotting and collecting information about plots. He is, in essense, the cracked mirror through which we see the refracted image of a new Birri, torn between its own stagnant traditions and the fluid conditions of creeping materialism.

In his discussion of Birri marriage customs with the conservative tribesmen, Henry reveals the measure of the difference that now separates him from them. The languid Obai, who has become visibly gloomier since the arrival of the miners in Birri, tells Henry that he would willingly resign himself to a life of loneliness rather than break the tribal custom which forbids him to marry somebody else's betrothed. Obai and all those who support his view are socially and mentally at the totem stage of development and therefore lack the initiative to free themselves from the restrictive moral code of their tribe. But

Henry's response to their condition reveals a sinister and brutally materialistic mind. He is consistent with himself, of course, when he points out that Obai has failed to grasp a wider ethic which the miners (who have expelled the Birri from some of their lands), are demonstrating in Birri itself. He is even logical, given the new ethic he has embraced, when he tells the tribesmen that "in the great world outside Birri men are not afraid to take what they want, and they would laugh at all these rules which tie you like sheep" (Am V 163). But the logic is perverse, and if it is irrefutable, it is only because it is so absolutely wrong. It is wrong in denying value to the Birri code which gives coherence and a semblance of order to the tribe. It is equally wrong in interpreting Western materialism as an unfeeling, amoral and purely exploitative endeavour. For at best, this is only a partial truth which can apply to Cottee but not to his partners in the mining exploration. What Henry's sinister interpretation of the materialistic ethic does is to mirror his own grasp of a grim reality. And, like Cottee, his mentor, Henry betrays that unfeeling detachment which blunts his sensibilities but whets his appetites because all his energies are directed towards gratifying his own vast desires. His brutal application of that ethic to events in Birri is evident in his conduct during the war which he had so clearly foreseen. As headman of carriers in the entire war, Henry had

> made the usual large profits out of his rake-off and the wages of the dead, sick and wounded, has opened a store in the Peré mine-field and is doing a splendid trade in condemned tinned meats slightly blown, second-hand caps and trousers, aphrodisiacs and smuggled gin. Abortion sixpence (Am V 233).

Cary thus demonstrates the wholly negative tendency of the intelligent but undisciplined mind. It is creative only in a very

limited sense. It lacks the paradoxical duality of the truly creative mind for which the destruction of the old is the necessary prelude to the creation of the new. If Henry escapes the entrapment of tribal life, his whole "progress" shows a pathetic failure to respond positively to the freedom which his enterprise has earned him.

When he turns to what may be called the historical arguments against primitivism, Cary is even more devastating. These arguments have escaped the notice of the critics because the trend, by and large, is to look at *An American Visitor* either as a study of personal philosophies or an attack on colonialism.[2] But the personal philosophies and the criticism of colonialism are put into the story to illuminate the central issue of this novel, the conflict between tradition and change. The frequent counterpointing of conservatives and progressives, of anarchists and proponents of order, in the two main groups of characters is intended to underline this fact. Moreover, the setting of the novel in a remote and isolated part of Nigeria, hemmed in by the more advanced cultures of the Hausas to the north and the Yorubas to the south, stresses the futility of trying to protect the Birri against the onset of civilization; and Bewsher's pride in the Birri for "their refusal to be put down by the self-righteousness of the more sophisticated peoples who surround them on all sides" (Am V 93), seems equally vain.

As part of his contrast between native primitivism and Western civilization which is invading Birri, Cary brings a group of Africans and most of his European characters together on board a steamer. The metaphor of the ship is used with a great deal of subtlety, although the Conradian echoes are unmistakable. In one sense, the ship is a

microcosm of colonialism with its clearly established social hierarchies. Below the deck are the Birri who, by throwing the Yorubas overboard, are displaying a more violent human fury than even Conrad's coolies. On the upper deck are the British characters enjoying their "piece of civilization" (Am V 26) which, Cary hints, is unwholesome because it is either self-centred or inspired by the wrong motives. The ship is also a defining symbol which separates primitive Birri from civilized Britain. In a scene of pictorial vividness, Cary brings a Birri dugout "about fifteen inches wide and not so many feet long" alongside the magnificent steamer. The result is that "even on the upper deck it was thought at first that the dugout had been sunk. The height of the deck above the water and the bluff cut of the bow made it impossible to see anything close beneath it " (Am V 37). The juxtaposition of the two images gives a pictorial definition of the gulf that separates Birri from every kind of advancement. But it is important to note that the dugout brings Bewsher, the pagan enthusiast, to the steamer. Without that awareness, we are likely to miss the full significance of Cary's withering attack on the primitive cult when he returns to the metaphor of the ship much later on in *An American Visitor*. That attack, however, is directed not against the Birri, but against the American heroine and the main British characters who are wittingly and unwittingly combining to keep Birri primitive. It is they, therefore, who must first receive some attention.

M. M. Mahood has remarked that we must see in the white characters of *An American Visitor* something more than the commonplace attitudes which as individuals they show towards the Africans in a colonial setting:

> that they are there to be idealized by Marie, served by Gore, converted by Dobson, exploited by Cottee, occasionally shot at by Stoker and intermittently governed by Bewsher. But a jotting among the drafts shows that Cary intended them to have an important part in the story: 'Main story must be whole question of Europeanizing--segregating, encouraging national spirit (which Monkey is doing and which kills him)."[3]

"Monkey" Bewsher's role in that main story is a vital one. He is presented throughout the novel as a man of lofty but mistaken ideals. The criticism directed against him is both personal and general. His determination to federate the Birri and instil a sense of community among them is one which Cary approves in principle. The main criticism against him is that Bewsher, like so many colonial officials in isolated stations, is prone to ignore his code of service and behave like a megalomaniac. What makes the criticism stick is that like Marie, the romantic idealist, and Dobson, the missionary, Bewsher tends to look for easy solutions to problems which he recognises as nearly intractable. In a letter to Gore, for example, Bewsher clearly isolates the dilemma that confronts him in dealing with the claims of the miners who have each arrived with an Exclusive Prospecting Licence (ELP) issued in London by the Secretary of State for the colonies: "*I gather that the new scheme is this. If I stick out, I shall be sacked by the S. of S.; if I don't stick out, I shall be eaten by Lower Nok*" (Am V 61). This is a correct appraisal of the situation, and the criticism of colonialism which is implicit in the problem is evident enough. But it is also obvious that by siding with the Nok against official British policy, Bewsher is failing to come to terms with the reality of his own position. Nor is his dilemma as insoluble as he makes it, since he could always have called on Stoker,

the keeper of British arms in Birri, to protect him against the tribesmen of Lower Nok if he wants to put official policy into effect.

What Cary is questioning is not the basic correctness of Bewsher's policy, but the motives behind it. If Bewsher decides to make the problems of the Birri his own cause in life, he is wrong, nevertheless, to commit himself to that cause with the same blind attachment which Dobson, the missionary, shows for his own abstract principles. Cary's fondness for the word *reality* is tied to the view which he demonstrates repeatedly in his fiction: that a life guided by abstract principles is both irrational and impracticable. Bewsher's policies fail because he lacks a sense of proportion and refuses to admit, like every other official in Kunama, "that the Birri were the biggest nuisances and the rudest savages in the country" (Am V 39).

He is thus the spiritual ally of Marie, but unlike Marie whose beliefs cannot, as Cary would put it, survive the big knock, Bewsher is consistently firm in the pursuit of his narrow goal. The centre of that goal is in his determination to unite the Birri and "to preserve and develop the rich kind of local life which is the essence and the only justification of nationalism" (Am V 133). But to realise his aim, Bewsher must protect the Birri from the civilization of the miners and the religion of the missionaries--a policy that is doomed to failure because of the inexorable march of civilization. The irony of his fate is that by persisting in his plan of federation and failing to search for a realistic solution to the problem of the miners in Nok, Bewsher unites the Birri not to save them from their internicine tribal wars, but to prepare them for war against him for what they consider his betrayal of their interests to the very miners he could not stop from

exploiting the Birri lands. Cary detects a grim kind of poetic justice in the murder of Bewsher and the punitive expedition which followed it:

> The casualties were light and the damage easily repaired where housebuilding costs nothing. But the Birri war had the unexpected result of breaking up the Birri. The old patriarchal government disappeared and the people became a mob. Large numbers of young men drifted away, even during the campaign, to join the flotsam of wandering labourers and petty thieves in the neighbouring provinces (Am V 232).

This "social and political disintegration" of the Birri is the result of Bewsher's failure to live by any rational principles. He preferred consistency to realism. But that narrow consistency denies him the right and privilege (which belong to every intelligent mind) to change his views when the evidence makes this necessary. His refusal to reckon with the fact of the Birri threat to his life, even after repeated attempts to murder him, is wilful and reckless. Cottee is right when he describes Bewsher and Gore as "feudal anachronisms" (Am V 235) because they show, in their very different ways, a pathetic failure to come to terms with the realities of their age and positions. If, as Marie thought, her hero was "moved by the noblest sympathies" (Am V 96), he was also too complacent and too determined to get his own way; and it is no small irony that after his murder, Cottee and the Goshi missionaries, the two groups Bewsher most strenuously sought to keep out of his private fief, should emerge as the supreme powers in a tottering Birri.

Marie Hasluck's conduct sheds considerable light on the life of Bewsher. She is the more conservative of the two but lacks any consistent philosophy of life. Her romantic inclinations are obvious enough, but these undergo severe revisions when she discovers that there is no direct correlation between primitivism and nobility.

When Marie first appears, she is the avowed enemy of Bewsher "because he is the representative of empire, the administrator of an artificial structure of law which begets tyranny, domination and cruelty."[4] She changes this view, however, when she discovers that Bewsher's administrative aim is to preserve as much of the local culture as possible. In fact, the agreement is based on a misunderstanding which arises from Marie's assumption that Bewsher's interim policy is meant to be permanent. Their marriage which follows this agreement is a device to confront Marie with the ugly realities of life in Birri and provide her with the supporting base for what would otherwise be largely theoretical arguments from Cottee. Moreover, Bewsher's intimate knowledge of the Birri is essential for the heroine's education.

Thus, the marriage of Marie to Bewsher only accentuates the hostility of Cottee, partly out of jealousy, but mainly because, like the other miners, he resents her attempt to teach "self-determination to bare-arsed apes" (Am V 27). The conflict between Marie and Cottee is therefore a conflict about what policy to adopt towards the Birri. The outcome of their debates shows that neither of them has any worthwhile policy to offer because while one pleads for primitive anarchy, the other advocates imperial despotism. When Marie, for example, argues that Birri should be spared the evils of Western civilization and be allowed to continue to operate on a cooperative basis, the pedagogic Cottee points out the necessary conclusion to her argument: "So Birri is really the kingdom of heaven. It doesn't need a government because it's been put on the right lines for ever" (Am V 90). But it is left to Bewsher to point to the empirical evidence against Marie's idealistic anarchy by remarking that Obai had attained a position of eminence in

Birri because he had demonstrated his capacity for leadership. Even within the customary law, Bewsher tells Marie, "it's a whole man's job seeing that people learn the rules and keep them and pass them on" (Am V 90). That is to say, "the natural order of things" which Marie assumes is a fantasy because there can be no social harmony without some form of government. Cary's criticism of Marie here centres on the fact that she is opposing civilization without differentiating between its good and bad elements; she is therefore an anarchist of the worst kind.

Marie's search for the natural order of things is really based on her desire to escape the responsibilities of freedom while enjoying, if possible, all its privileges. The early days of her liaison with Bewsher gave Marie the illusion that she had in fact achieved that goal. And when she begins to doubt the propriety of her conduct, she reassures herself by asking:

> Why should she be afraid of her happiness, why should she be astonished at it and try to depreciate it when she had always known that it was natural and right, something that everybody ought to have, that everybody was looking for (Am V 115).

She also finds further justification by saying that it is exactly this kind of licentious freedom which the Christians have in mind when they talk about "a state of grace."

This attitude explains and makes plausible Marie's complete *volte face* when the Birri threaten the safety of Bewsher. The importance of the threat is that it exposes the obstinate recklessness of Bewsher and the fickleness of Marie. But Marie's fickleness stems from her experiences and what Bewsher himself told her about the Birri worship of prowess and heroism. She is therefore right in calling for troops to be stationed in Birri for the protection of Bewsher. But

Bewsher is also right in refusing to summon the troops because, as he argues, "You can't shake hands with a Birri one day and shoot at him the next, he gets the idea that you're not to be relied on" (Am V 121). The rightness of this argument betrays, nevertheless, Bewsher's habit of mind which always prefers consistency to a realistic appraisal of every event. It is also a habit which, as Marie argues later on, identifies Bewsher with the missionaries who either ignore facts or twist them to suit their simple apprehension of reality. Marie's view is confirmed in the thanksgiving service which Dobson conducts to mark the escape of Bewsher from a Birri ambush. The escape, due entirely to Bewsher's excellent bushcraft and the stupidity and superstition of the Birri, is attributed by Dobson to divine mercy and "the strong repugnance of any man, however fierce, ignorant and deceived, to kill an unarmed man who comes to him in friendship"(Am V 219). This is as naïve a faith as Marie takes with her to Birri and although Bewsher does not hold such a belief, he shows the same tendency either to ignore facts or to interpret them to suit his own narrow scheme of things.

But unlike Dobson's confident faith, Marie's naïve idealism derives from a lack of confidence, a general feeling of insecurity; and her life in Birri is spent on a search for personal security. Her marriage to Bewsher is part of that search, but it provides no more than the illusion of security because Birri, far from being the kingdom of heaven, is a hostile and treacherous environment. Its ambushes and traps gradually forced her "to hate the forest, not only because she saw in every mile of it an ambush waiting for Bewsher, but because its terrors made it impossible for her to be at peace within herself"

(Am V 211). But with one illusion destroyed, she dabbles first in Christian Science, and then in desperation, turns to the Dobsons' brand of Christianity, all of which prove woefully inadequate as guiding philosophies of life. And although Marie makes it clear in her last discussion with Gore that she has finally come to recognise the hollowness of the various faiths she sought to embrace, Cary is realistic enough to know that old illusions die hard. On the final page of *An American Visitor*, Marie is shown kneeling by the grave of Bewsher uncertain whether or not she is praying.

In contrast to Bewsher, Gore is a simple and static character. Steeped in British traditions of service, he is as opposed to Marie's primitive anarchism as he is to Bewsher's disregard for official regulations. If he escapes the cruel fate of Bewsher, it is only because he will not venture beyond the safe ambits of his routine assignments. Indeed there is something comic and pathetic about this conservative character. He is comic in his unimaginative but always ready acceptance of official policies. Thus, he readily supports the miners against the obstructionist policies of Bewsher because, unlike Bewsher, he cannot see anything wrong with an official policy which uproots people from their lands to make way for ruthless exploiters like Cottee. But Gore is also pathetic in his inability to enjoy life. He is shown throughout the novel as a brooding, lonely character; the only exceptions come from the brief excitement he feels during the preparations for the punitive expedition against the Birri and in his conversations with Marie when he enjoys life vicariously by observing its vital springs in the American. His brooding melancholy is used, occasionally, to mirror

the bleak and harried existence of the Birri. In a telling juxtaposition of images, Gore is placed in a hut where he tries to escape his loneliness by reading an old Sunday newspaper while drums throb in the background and the Birri enjoy their voluptuous festivity. After reading everything in the paper, he turns to the section on hotel advertisements which

> took his mind straight from Birri and this stinking mud hut to those scenes where his existence most nearly approached happiness, enormous drawing rooms, . . . long hushed corridors full of white doors and bare well-warmed bedrooms with h. & c. and plenty of clean towels (Am V 84).

Gore's reverie offers yet another vivid contrast between primitive Birri and civilized Europe. But it also stresses the inescapable solitude of Gore's entire life. Just before his reverie, he had discussed the domestic life of a former university acquaintance with Cottee. It is not, however, the informal intimacy of life at home that appeals to Gore when he flees in thought from Birri, but the cleanliness and loneliness of a hotel room. In other words, even the luxuries of civilized living can only reach Gore vicariously. Cary summarises Gore's character for us when he writes:

> The fact was, of course, that people like Gore couldn't suit themselves to a world in transition. They were inelastic, too much attached to the old standards. Gore's very eyebrows seemed fixed in the melancholy question, 'Why should everything go to pot at once, the sound and splendid as well as the bad? Why not keep the good and reform the rest?' (Am V 234).

But reform is impossible in Gore's world because he cannot pick the good from the bad.

It is evident from this brief analysis of the main characters in *An American Visitor* that no one knows what to do about the problems of change in Birri. Bewsher takes the wrong approach; Marie and Gore are ill-equipped by education and temperament to cope with an unstable

and treacherous world. These three characters share among them the main responsibility for the chaos which grips Birri at the end of the novel. All three are indicted for their failure to serve the cause of civilization in Birri and the indictment comes when Cary returns for the last time to the metaphor of the ship. The occasion is another of the Birri's many attempts on the life of Bewsher and the final disillusionment it brings on Marie. In a moment of gloom and despair, she indulges in self-laceration as she thinks of the Birri she had portrayed as noble savages; but Cary moves swiftly from her private thoughts to the ultimate historical argument against primitive life. A fairly extensive quotation is necessary here to convey the full force of Cary's views:

> Of course, Cottee had been right to laugh at her. All these men who accepted so easily the insecurity of things, who simply did not imagine any other state of affairs, were right. Only fanatics and fools, communists and sentimentalists like herself could believe in a natural order of things, fixed and eternal, divinely appointed. The lion-faced Birri--no wonder they laughed. The golden age of Birri, like that of Greece-- . . .
>
> The golden age of Greece. Galleys full of agonized rowers bleeding under the whip--chained to battered leaking ships--kept from sinking altogether only by the endless patching and plugging of the anxious carpenters creeping about with their tools in the stinking bilges.
>
> The lamps flickered in the draught and the waves flowed, towards her, she, too, was on a bench listening to the dismal laughter of slaves and there was Gore with a weary dejection nailing up a plank and Bewsher strutting on the captain's plank, shaking his whip at them while they screamed curses.
>
> But the voyage was over. They would soon reach harbour. No, of course, there weren't any harbours for the spirit, no rest. The slaves were chained, the captains, prisoners of the ship. And some day Bewsher would crack his whip for the last time. They would throw his old carcase into the sea, Gore would lie drowned among the rats, and she, if she did not die before, would toil on across the black waves--to nowhere--the ship itself, *the ship of the whole earth*, was rotting under their feet, at last it would open up in space like a burst basket (Am V 193-4, italics added).

Cary thus completes a complex series of images centred on the ship as a microcosm of society. From the second chapter where the Birri

make a concerted but vain attempt to repel the British steamer carrying the miners and other representatives of Western civilization, Cary repeatedly returns to the image of the ship, relying, apparently, on its cumulative impact on the reader rather than on one long episode. Thus when we come to the withering attack on those whose personal creeds have hindered the advancement of civilization in Birri, we recall those other comparisons which underline the helplessness of primitive man: the tiny dugout set in all its insignificance against the towering strength and majesty of the British steamer; the naked Birri and their murderous rage in the lower deck and the placid calm of the British enjoying their "piece of civilization" on the upper deck; and, finally, the sudden recognition of the significance of all these comparisons when we come upon the image of the battered and stinking Greek ship full of battered and bruised slaves, commanded by Bewsher and carrying as part of its human cargo a dejected Gore and a weary Marie Hasluck drifting to nowhere. The metaphor itself has been given the widest extension to become "the ship of the whole earth." Yet it is still so frail that it is liable to burst into space like a basket while its human occupants know nothing but endless toil and misery. Nothing can be more emphatic in stressing the sheer puniness and fragility of primitive civilization. The flash-back to fifth century Athens, perhaps the most idolized of primitive civilizations, is particularly important because, stripped of its traditionally gay and glowing facade, we find in it nothing but the same harried and agonized existence which is an inseparable part of Birri life. There is a grim likeness between the two: the stinking mud huts of Birri and the stinking bilges of Greece, the languid voluptuousness of the

Birri and the dismal laughter of Greek slaves. Life in either case offers a continual but severely painful torment to the body and no repose for the spirit.

Almost inevitably, each of Cary's main characters is captured in a characteristic posture: Gore, the slave to tradition, is shown in his permanent boredom and discontent languidly salvaging the wreckage of a ship; Bewsher, the slave-driver, is at home among slaves displaying the same animated devotion to his task as he did in Birri when he threw caution to the wind because, as Marie puts it, he thought he could shoo the Birri like hens; and Marie herself, adrift to nowhere, floats to her destruction still a slave to the past. They all have to be brought together not merely for the sake of demonstrating the commonplace metaphor of life as a journey, but because as fellow travellers in the eternal journey, they are each guided by the impractical notion that civilization could either be held in check or be allowed in small trickles of their own prescription. How vain their dreams!

> For even if civilization meant for the Birri a meaner, shallower kind of life, how could any man hope to fight against it when it came with the whole drive of the world behind it, bringing every kind of gaudy toy and easy satisfaction? (Am V 234).

All three--but especially Bewsher and Marie--come to grief because they fail to realise that the march of civilization is an inevitable historical process which is entirely beyond the power of any single individual to control.

It is interesting that notwithstanding the many important pronouncements by Cottee in *An American Visitor*, Cary felt it necessary to exclude him from his general denunciation of the thwarters of civilization. But this is probably intentional. Cottee is presented throughout the novel as an outsider, a man without a moral sense, a

man entirely dedicated to the realisation of his dream of wealth. Cary also stresses that what Cottee brings to Birri is not civilization, but "really and truly anarchy, a mess, a muddle" (Am V 95). It is not fortuitous that he is identified a number of times with the ruthless Henry. Both are predators, both show the same unfeeling response to their victims and are guided wholly by the ruthless drive to obtain material wealth. Even as the story moves to a close, Cottee is shown quietly rejoicing at the prospect of gratifying his keen animal appetites. But Cary's criticism of Cottee is tempered by the feeling that it is the conduct of Bewsher and Marie and Gore which makes possible the ascendancy of men like Cottee. If Cottee reveals a very elastic conscience, he is, nevertheless, a realist, and Cary criticises him only because of his wanton disregard for ethics. There is even an ambivalence in Cary's manner as he makes his final synopsis of Cattee's attitude and character in contradistinction to Bewsher who seeks power as an end in itself:

> For man only had one life and if he wanted to enjoy it he had better suit his taste to his times and not try to change the times to suit his taste. Moreover, a period like this just because of its quackery, its confusion, its lack of standards, its cynicism and cowardice offered to a man intelligent and detached enough to seize them extraordinary chances of amusement. There was scarcely any limit to what he could do, given effrontery, money and the proper jargon . . . (Am V 236).

Thus Cottee, with his willingness to suit his taste to his times, his detachment from events generally, emerges as the inheritor of Birri and its people who are already cowed by superior arms.

But for all the emphasis on the social and political disintegration of Birri at the end, *An American Visitor* has a positiveness which is entirely lacking in *Aissa Saved* or *The African Witch.*

Imperialism, shown as a potential disseminator of civilization, fails not so much because of its own institutional ineptitude, but largely because of the personal policies of some of its agents. Moreover, the disintegration is not final as in *Aissa Saved*, nor are we merely taken back to a primitive past from which there is no escape, as in *The African Witch*. Instead, the novel ends with the beginnings of a new administration and the old Goshi mission firmly entrenched. And although Cary finds little to admire in the work of missions in Africa, it is evident from the way the Goshi missionaries handled the worthless Uli that, given the right kind of converts, they can minister well to the bodies and souls of their proselytes. It is also part of the positiveness of *An American Visitor* that instead of erecting more impenetrable barriers of communication between his African and European characters, Cary allows the growth of real friendship and real communication between Bewsher and Obai until Obai becomes a veritable link between Bewsher and his Birri tribesmen. In fact, Cary gives a good deal of prominence to the theme of friendship between the two men, showing Obai, in one instance, defying his whole tribe and going over to the defence of Bewsher's person and his principles. Obai joins the plots to murder his friend and mentor only when he has ample evidence to suggest that Bewsher has actually broken his promise to protect the Birri lands from the miners. Nor is there anything unusual about the break-up of their friendship. Cary repeatedly dramatises the fragility of all personal relationships in both his African and European novels because one of his central beliefs is that conflict is an inescapable fact of society everywhere.

II. *Mister Johnson*

To turn from *An American Visitor* to *Mister Johnson* is like walking out of a dark tunnel full of slime and sharp rocks to the light of day. The light might seem lurid and blinding at first, but it is certainly preferable to the darkness of a tunnel where the law of the jungle reigns supreme, where might is right and where most people are so brutalized that they revel in their intolerance and callousness and show no traces of humanity. Despite these evils, however, *An American Visitor* is the novel which looks forward to *Mister Johnson*. The conflict between tradition and change which is begun in *An American Visitor* is shown in its fullness in *Mister Johnson* where the invading civilization captivates the imaginative Johnson and turns him into an effective instrument of revolution. *An American Visitor* merely puts the case for civilization and makes a number of statements about its disruptive consequences on the traditionally sedate life of the village community in Africa; in *Mister Johnson,* civilization is seen in action and its disruptive chaos is shown with all its dramatic power. Yet this drama is artistic in every detail. It has nothing to do with Cary's assumption in the preface to *The African Witch* that Africa, "Just because it is dramatic, demands a certain kind of story, a certain violence and coarseness of detail, almost a fabulous treatment, to keep it in its place" (Af W 11). This assumption forced Cary to defile his art by introducing, in each of the first three novels he set in Nigeria, a particularly brutal kind of violence which is obviously intended to illustrate the drama of the jungle. In *Mister Johnson*, however, Cary finds the theme which is native to his genius, and he is able to

demonstrate that (notwithstanding important external differences) the everlasting conflict between the creative individual and society is the same everywhere.

Part of the reason for Cary's sudden blossoming as an artist may be found in his view that every artist must have a philosophy of life to sustain his art. This view, first found in the preface to *Aissa Saved*, gets its clearest formulation in *Art and Reality* where Cary states that

> . . . all great artists have a theme, an idea of life profoundly felt and founded in some personal and compelling experience. This theme then finds confirmation and development in new intuition. The development of the great writer is the development of his theme--the theme is part of him and has become the cast of his mind and character.[5]

And one must repeat again that in *Mister Johnson* Cary first finds his theme of the cross-purposes of man, the free creative spirit running against the stagnant but necessary order of society. Most critics, however, continue to look at the novel in terms of the conflict between European and African values. But this, at best, is a half truth and to put it forward as the whole truth is to falsify through oversimplification what is really a complex treatment of Cary's theme. Frederick Karl, whose largely negative response to Cary's fiction makes him particularly prone to distortion, sums up the conventional view of the novel when he writes:

> This basically humorous novel has as its main theme the changes taking place in Africa that put natives like Johnson in a no-man's land between two cultures, one too backward for him to embrace and the other too complicated and alien for him to be received into it. Johnson is a native who likes white men's possessions, he embezzles, steals, commits fraud, and finally murders. Yet he remains an innocent, a pawn in the hands of a European culture which makes use of him, and then after having tempted him must kill him.[6]

This view ignores Johnson's close affinity to Charley Brown, Gulley Jimson and Chester Nimmo. These, the greatest of Cary's heroes, illustrate various aspects of the author's theme. They are all criminals in a conventional sense but all innocents who command our sympathy. If Johnson commits the capital crime of murder, it is to Cary's credit that the murder is made an integral part of his art so that in the end we do not recoil in moral indignation but feel profoundly disturbed--as only great art can disturb us--over the catastrophe.

Nor is it true to describe Johnson as a pawn of European culture. He is, like most of Cary's heroes, larger than life, master of his own fate, possessed of the unique power to inspire others and show them that there are things to enjoy in life if only we have the imagination to find them. Cary says that "Johnson is a young clerk who turns his life into a romance, he is a poet who creates for himself a glorious destiny" (Mr. J. 5). This fact is so fully communicated that to ignore it is to distort the picture of life the author creates for us. That life is the life of the imagination which is at the other end of the pole from the real world in which Johnson lives and moves and has his being. The perennial conflict between appearance and reality is given a vital twist. The humour in *Mister Johnson* is so pervasive and so broad in some places that we find ourselves occasionally laughing with complete abandon. But Cary never allows the reader to forget the bitter core of life as he repeatedly shows Johnson alternating between long periods of elation and gay abandon during which he celebrates his imaginative triumphs and the brief but acute moments of despair which seize him whenever the real world impinges on his dream world of romance.

This alternation between elation and despair is captured in one of its most vivid forms near the beginning of the story. Johnson has just seen Bamu, the young and beautiful girl who is assisting her father at the ferry over Fada river, and decides to marry her. For several hours afterwards he is seething with pleasure as he celebrates in imagination his marriage to the most beautiful girl in Fada. But the real world from which Johnson escapes in his imaginative flights is waiting in the background. It is a world which includes human malice and envy personified in the gloomy store clerk, Ajali, and irrational hate, manifest in the conservative old District Officer, Blore, under whom Johnson works as a temporary clerk. Thus when Ajali hears of Johnson's plans to marry and pay an exorbitant bridal price, he informs his many creditors and then goes to his house to suggest with characteristic malevolence that Johnson might find himself in trouble with Blore because of his irregular attendance at the office. Cary captures this simple child of nature in the very act of creation as he reacts to Ajali's information and transforms his intuition of human beauty into lyric poetry:

> Johnson, rushing to the office, is in a panic. But his legs, translating the panic into leaps and springs, exaggerate it on their own account. They are full of energy and enjoy cutting capers, until Johnson, feeling their mood of exuberance, begins to enjoy it himself and improve upon it. He performs several extraordinary new and original leaps and springs over roots and holes, in a style very pleasing to himself. He begins to hum to himself a local song, with his own improvements.
> *'I got a lil girl, she roun' like de worl'*
> *She smoot like de water, she shine like de sky.*
> *She fat like de corn, she smell like de new grass*
> *She dance like de tree, she shake like de leaves*
> *She warm like de groun', she deep like de bush* (Mr. J. 19).

Arriving at the office, he finds his creditors waiting for him and while trying to placate them, Blore shows up, throwing Johnson into the depths

of consternation and despair. He takes refuge in the office and cries: "Oh, Gawd! Oh, Jesus! I done finish--I finish now--Mister Johnson done finish--Oh, Gawd, you no fit do nutting--Mister Johnson too big dam' fool--he fool chile--oh, my Gawd!" (Mr. J. 20). But the fool is also a poet. The brief spells of gloomy despair that seize him are a necessary reminder that life is not all sweetness and lyric beauty.

Johnson's creative vitality is shown in the presentation of the revolution that is sweeping through Fada. That revolution makes him at once a hero and a villain of immense proportions. He mediates successfully between primitive and civilized man without being either. His great imagination enables him to grasp the creative requirements of any given situation. Cary is careful to distinguish between the competent practical worker in a routine situation and the creative mind which can establish relations between things and events and find inspired solutions to problems which baffle the routine worker. This distinction is both internal and external. Internally, Johnson's fumbling incompetence as a practical worker is set against his incomparable genius for finding ways of circumventing obstructive regulations. Externally, Johnson's imaginative work is contrasted with the vastly superior practical competence of Tasuki, the great bridge builder in *Mister Johnson*, and District Officer Rudbeck, the obsessive road builder, who can neither inspire official support for his roads nor find a way of beating the obstructive system under which he works. Both men depend on Johnson for the realisation of their goals; without him they cannot function because they are only too willing to suffer under the limitations imposed on them by what Rudbeck repeatedly refers to as "Service conditions."

Cary's view is that the duty of the creative mind is to free itself, when necessary, from the limitations of "Service conditions," whatever that abstraction may mean. In a discussion of the lack of policy in the colonial administration between Rudbeck and Bulteel, the genial and fatherly Resident, Cary combines his humorous attack on colonialism with serious comment. Rudbeck's complaint about the lack of policy forces Bulteel to make a niggling distinction between the Secretariat, the main policy-making body of which he is a part, and "Service conditions" which he claims are responsible for the lack of policy. And when Cary reports Rudbeck's reaction to this piece of casuistry, we see at once the District Officer's habit of resigning himself to rules and the castigation of those constricting rules which are euphemistically called "Service conditions."

> Rudbeck perfectly understands this phrase. He accepts it as a reasonable explanation of the fact that *obstacles stand in the way of every constructive plan. He understands that people in themselves, full of goodwill and good sense, can form, in an organization, simply an obstructive mass blocking all creative energy;* not from any conspiracy or jealousy, but simply from the nature of rules and routine, of official life. He accepts this cheerfully and says to Bulteel, 'Ours not to reason why' (Mr. J. 168, italics added).

The tragedy of a creative individual like Johnson is that he cannot, like Rudbeck, cheerfully accept the limitation of his freedom to create in spite of rules or obstacles. In an age of increasing regimentation when man is forced to behave like a robot or a rubber stamp which reproduces predetermined and fixed designs, Cary rightly insists on man's freedom and creativity. The scientific determinism of the twentieth century locates reality in measurable objects and, by its collective institutionalisation of man, tries to make him a part of that constant reality. Cary's contribution to the dialectics of the age

is to show that man has a *power* which is not measurable or pre-determined and is, above all, free and creative. The political treatise, *Power in Men*, opens with the clearest formulation of this view:

> The weakest child has power and will. Its acts are its own. It can be commanded, but it need not obey. It originates each least movement. It is an independent source of energy which grows with its life and ends only with its death.
>
> This power is creative. In man it has created all the machines, all the states, the wealth, arts, and civilization in the world.
>
> A man's power is different in kind from state power. A nation is more than living men, but without living men it would not exist. Men existed before nations. The power in the man is real, but the power of a nation is derived. It is the creation of men.
>
> This creative power is free. It can be encouraged, strengthened, and directed, but it cannot be treated like mechanical power.[7]

The application of this principle to society leads Cary to his distinction between the captive and the free. The captive is the upholder of tradition, the defender of institutional or state power and a conformist by nature. The free and creative individual is a nonconformist whose life is full of peril because he puts himself on a collision course with the defenders of state power as well as other creative individuals. The value of this creative individual, of whom Johnson is one of the best examples in Cary's fiction, is that he not only insists on pursuing his freedom, but has the capacity as well to inspire others and transform their potential power into actual productive energy.

This is the essence of the relationship between Johnson and Rudbeck. Johnson is the conscious creator who "can turn the crudest and simplest form of fodder into beauty and power of his own quality" (Mr. J 92). For Rudbeck, on the other hand, to be creative is to do something inspired by others after you have been convinced of its value in the existing scheme of things. Thus from the first District Officer

under whom he worked, Rudbeck picked the notion that roads are extremely important in the development of primitive people. But once he is in a position to translate that idea into action, he finds himself hampered by official regulations until Johnson comes up and shows him how to bypass those constricting regulations. For all his limited imagination, however, Rudbeck is extremely valuable in the creative process because "he has a strong will of his own. He doesn't change his mind easily, after he, or somebody else, has made it up for him" (Mr. J 46). This is the quality of power which Cary sees as a defining characteristic of man. It sets him above the machine and makes him a potential creator even where, as in Rudbeck's case, his imagination is so obviously limited. In fact, it is the combination of Johnson's imagination and Rudbeck's strong will that makes possible the creation of the road which is a manifest symbol of twentieth-century civilization cutting through the forests and rubbish heaps of Fada. Characteristically, Cary shows each of these creative individuals in conflict with authority.

Johnson, less than half-educated, must contend with the attitudes of white officials ranging from the outright hatred of Blore through the antipathy of Tring and Rudbeck's own mild indifference. Rudbeck, for his part, must adopt measures that will introduce an element of dynamism into the static system that binds him.

In working out that conflict Cary returns to the stereotypes of *The African Witch*. Blore, like Rackham, hates Johnson because he is a clerk in European dress rather than a messenger in a turban. But since Blore is also a deeply conservative man, Johnson's creative vitality, his spontaneous enjoyment of life, his exuberance, make him

an object of fear because his very existence poses a threat to old and established things which are so dear to Blore. He also dislikes Rudbeck's enthusiasm for roads because for Blore, motor roads are "the ruin of Africa, bringing swindlers, thieves and whores, disease, vice and corruption, and the vulgarities of trade, among decent, unspoilt tribesmen" (Mr. J 46). These prejudices make Blore the inveterate enemy of all innovators whom he equates with disturbers. And while the conventional view of the novel locates Johnson's problems with officialdom in his own personal maladjustment, Cary is unequivocal in stressing that the early difficulties which force Johnson to commit the serious crime in the end stem from the prejudices and misconceptions of people in authority. These are of the same nature as the prejudices and misconceptions that confine Charley in a reform home and hurl Gulley Jimson from the scaffolding where he is desperately trying to complete his painting of the Creation and send him into a hospital from which we know he will never emerge alive. Moreover, the alleged "crimes" of these creators are either completely excusable or extenuated by the incomprehension of society. Thus the charge of embezzlement for which Blore sacks Johnson, real as it is in one sense, is made to look like the suspicious official's excuse for disposing of a hated worker. The note of triumph which characterises his examination of Johnson is conveyed to us in this report of the official's quiet but malevolent pleasure over the difficulties of his clerk: "Blore's voice is cheerful and he shows no anger against Johnson. In fact, he feels none. He is sure that Johnson is done for. He is conscious of power in dealing with him; the force of law is on his side" (Mr. J 48).

But by now Cary's control over his material is so firm and complete that he quietly removes the malicious Blore before he distorts the picture and replaces him with Rudbeck whose predilections make him Johnson's ally. But before going into the details of that creative alliance (in which Johnson is the unmistakable master), it is necessary to refer to another matter: that of Johnson's fondness for Rudbeck, which some critics see as an extension of his fondness for things European.

This view is misleading and ignores Cary's own clearly stated reason for making Johnson an affectionate character. One of the remembrances that came to his mind during the writing of *Mister Johnson*, Cary tells us in the preface, was "something I had noticed as a general thing, the warmheartedness of the African; his readiness for friendship on the smallest encouragement" (Mr. J 7). When Johnson, therefore, repeatedly refers to Rudbeck as his friend; when this assumption is undermined by the reader's private knowledge that Rudbeck who is "not very good at distinguishing one black face from another" has barely treated Johnson "with the ordinary politeness which would be given to a butler or a footman at home" (Mr. J 23); when in the moments of crisis Johnson appeals to Rudbeck's sympathy by calling him "father and mother," it is necessary to see in these instances something more than one man's failure to understand another or a different social system. For beneath the humour of these moments is Cary's tribute to man's generous spirit which, in the great final moment of the novel, leads Rudbeck to recognise a part of himself in Johnson.

It is equally pertinent to remember that *Mister Johnson* is dedicated to Musa, one of the Africans who served under Cary while he

was a District Officer in the Nigerian service. The reason for the dedication is given in the quotation under Musa's name: "Remembered goodness is a benediction." One of the glories of Johnson's life is that he can always remember goodness but cannot harbour malice even against Ajali, his most persistent and most obstinate enemy. Possessed of a frank and charitable disposition, uninhibited by the petty fears and suspicions of those around him, lacking in circumspection and always ready to forgive a wrong, Johnson remembers in the end all the happiness but none of the bitterness of his brief, exciting, crowded but totally unenviable life. Critics who see him merely as the victim of the white man's justice ignore the fact that Johnson suffers far more undeserved abuse at the hands of Waziri (Vizier), the corrupt and only visible member of the native administration. By the time he wrote *Mister Johnson*, Cary's moral vision was sufficiently clear to recognise that there are virtues and vices in every society, that treachery and injustice are an inescapable part of man's existence everywhere. If Johnson is publicly executed by the white man for a real crime, he also suffers a murderous attack from the Waziri's gang for no other reason than that, having fallen from the favour of the white man, he could no longer obtain the colonial administrators' secret plans which the native administration needs in order to thwart innovations that affect its power. Nor is there the slightest suggestion of insincerity or hypocrisy when Johnson, with the certainty of death only minutes away, dictates a message of thanks to Bulteel for his "kindness" and ends by saying: "I bless you and Judge Rudbeck for my happy life in de worl" (Mr. J. 222). If there is any irony here, it is directed against those

like Rudbeck who accept Blore's perfunctory assessment of Johnson as a merely dangerous man.

When we turn to Johnson's links with the native and European systems, it becomes obvious that though he is not integrated into either of these systems, he is not simply thrown into a no-man's land. His creative inventiveness enables him to straddle--even if awkwardly--the two systems and derive great personal satisfaction from them. It is true, of course, that much of the comedy of *Mister Johnson* arises out of the hero's attempt to find his place in the two cultures which have rejected him because his scanty mission education has disqualified him from membership in either society. But it is important to recognise the tensions that underlie the comedy and lead ultimately to tragedy. A good example of Cary's subtlety occurs at the beginning of the novel where Johnson, having fallen in love with Bamu, keeps returning to the ferry to woo her.

> He comes again to the yam field and asks her to marry him. He tells her that he is a government clerk, rich and powerful. He will make her a great lady. She shall be loaded with bangles; wear white women's dress, sit in a chair at table with him and eat off a plate.
>
> 'Oh, Bamu, you are only a savage girl here--you do not know how happy I will make you. I will teach you to be a civilized lady and you shall do no work at all.'
>
> Bamu says nothing. She is slightly annoyed by his following her, but doesn't listen to his words. She marches forward, balancing her load of yam.
>
> Two days later he finds her again in the ferry with her short cloth tucked up between her strong thighs. He gives her a threepenny piece instead of a penny; and she carefully puts it in her mouth before taking up the pole. . . .
>
> The dugout reaches the bank, and Bamu strikes the pole into the mud to hold firm. Johnson gets up and balances himself awkwardly. Bamu stretches out her small hard hand and catches his fingers to guide him ashore. When he comes opposite her and the dugout ceases to tremble under him, he suddenly stops, laughs and kisses her. 'You are so beautiful you make me laugh.'
>
> Bamu pays no attention whatever. She doesn't understand the kiss and supposes it to be some kind of foreign joke. But when

> Johnson tries to put his arms round her she steps quickly ashore and leaves him in the dugout, which drifts down the river, rocking violently. Johnson, terrified, sits down and grasps the sides with his hands. He shouts, 'Help! Help! I'm drowning!'
>
> Bamu gives a loud, vibrating cry across the river; *two men come dawdling out from a hut, gaze at Johnson, leisurely descend and launch another dugout.* They pursue Johnson and bring him to land (Mr. J 11-12, italics added).

Here we have an example of Cary's "comedy of freedom" at its best. The world of fantasy and imagination in which Johnson lives most of the time is brought to life. We learn soon afterwards that far from being powerful and rich, Johnson is a temporary clerk who has accumulated, in six months, a large number of debts including some pretty dishonourable ones. We also learn that his notion of a civilized marriage, derived from store catalogues and the observations of missionaries, "is a compound of romantic sentiment and embroidered underclothes" (Mr. J. 13). These facts are important because they expose Johnson's pathetic failure to understand the civilization he aspires to and from which he derives some of the most cherished notions of his greatness. They also throw into bold relief his dilemma within the two systems. The civilization he claims is one in which cash values are respected; Johnson's prodigality which is necessary to keep alive the "great and civilized" Johnson of his imagination makes future trouble unavoidable. But that very prodigality makes him an exploitable target within the native system so that notwithstanding doubts about his sanity (the village children conclude after observing his strange manners that he is mad), he is accepted when he offers an unusually large bridal price for Bamu.

The episode also shows the difference between the illiterate natives and the so-called educated Africans. The natives are aloof

and indifferent to the pretensions of greatness and civilization by men like Johnson. On the other hand, Johnson and his type treat the uneducated natives with open condescension or outright rudeness. But the central contrast is between the poised and assured manner of Bamu within her own world and Johnson's perplexity and uncertainty in that same world. The contrast reaches a climax when Johnson, left alone in the dugout, cries in terror and calls for help while the two men summoned to his aid *dawdle* from their hut and *leisurely* descend to the rescue. Their unhurried confidence and sense of security make Johnson's fright seem absurd and funny. In fact, we are in a topsy-turvy world where the romantic wooer must be guided and protected by the young maiden he seeks. But we are quite willing to suspend disbelief because Johnson's power is such that like the Pied Piper, he can move us to song and laughter or lure us to the brink of disaster at will. Bamu's indifference to Johnson's pretentious claim to greatness and power heightens its insignificance in the real world. But Johnson's fantasy commands our sympathy and respect because it is a valid criticism of the stale and familiar world of routine.

It is a world where dishonest but self-righteous men like Ajali or educated but unimaginative clerks like Benjamin perish of boredom because they can only see the ugliness of their surroundings. By contrast, Johnson's creative ability and poetic imagination enable him to recognise the vastly superior civilization that is invading Fada and to pursue it with a steadfast determination while retaining his capacity to enjoy indigenous beauties and festivities. In fact, each of those two men is used as a foil to enhance the vitality and spontaneity of Johnson and in each case, the contrast is direct and sharp.

Ajali's malicious disposition towards Johnson stems from an exaggerated sense of justice, general discontent with his own lot and a feeling of insecurity. His identification with a scorpion and a crab marks him out as an insidious and deadly enemy. For that reason he succeeds in doing what no one else can do--goad Johnson to real anger.

Johnson, who has just been introduced to Tring, the new District Officer of Fada, as the right-hand man of the station, is full of expansiveness and good nature and goes to Ajali to tell one of his embroidered tales about the meeting. But Ajali, as usual, greets the narrative with queries, doubts and suspicions, thereby arousing Johnson's anger and forcing him to expose another ugly side to the store clerk's character--the low, creeping, contemptible creature that cannot rise above its earthy origins:

> "'What I want to tell you, Mister Ajali, that I only tell you one little bit of truth because I know you can't hold more'n a small piece without it give you a pain. The big whole truth don't agree for dirty little house lizards like you. If I tell you all ting Mister Tring say for me, you just swell up like a dead goat, bust in tree halves'. . . .
>
> Johnson's indignation is growing as he realizes it. He goes off saying to himself. 'You show um a diamond, he tink um broken bottle-- . . . you bring um beautiful girl, he say she little dirty goat--he creep on his belly all over everyting like house lizard--he say all ting made of dirt'" (Mr. J 105-6).

Here is Johnson the poet at his best: articulate, eloquent and perfectly capable of turning the spontaneous overflow of his powerful feelings into instant poetry. All the wide ranging images he uses, including those of a stink bug and a venomous snake, have the same earthy quality that so appropriately sums up Ajali's character.

Benjamin, though an infinitely superior man to Ajali, is not above reproach. He suffers from a conservative nature and an exaggerated regard for the sanctity of civilization. His "good education"

has turned his whole life into a virtual prison, making him stiff and unnatural in public because he puts a high premium on appearances. He can feel the pleasure and excitement of love when Johnson communicates it to him, but he cannot marry any of the local girls because, in his own words, "these native bush girls are so ignorant and dirty. It is no good till they have some educated girls" (Mr. J 30). The result is that in a society that radiates friendliness, Benjamin is incurably lonely and bored to exasperation. He comes alive only when animated by Johnson whose poetry and music can stimulate even the dull sensibilities of Benjamin and turn him, if only briefly, into an artist. In one of Johnson's lavish parties, Benjamin, under the liberating influence of drinks and music, sheds his sadness and takes to the dance floor to contribute to Johnson's gift of laughter to the pagans and achieve a natural dignity of his own. "For though he dances, he has lost not dignity, but only his stiffness, something foreign and pompous. His new dignity is graceful, strong and afraid of nothing, like all great art" (Mr. J 192).

But Benjamin does more than act as a foil to Johnson. He is also a prime example of the gaping disparity between appearance and reality. His devotion to duty, his attention to details, and his reliability which the less meticulous Rudbeck had assumed, prove deceptive when the more routine-minded Tring takes over, checks Benjamin's post office and discovers discrepancies and a cash shortage. The formal correctness is one of outward appearances and Rudbeck's assumption that Benjamin is as dependable as the Bank of England is an illusion.

There is, however, another and probably more important side to Benjamin's character: his acute moral sensibility, his strong belief

in the insecurity of things and his sense of tragedy. These characteristics are commonly ignored probably because of Benjamin's own purely momentary lapse. But they remain important because Benjamin's repeated warnings to Johnson that civilization cannot survive if everyone pursues his own creative impulses with the same bravado, the same reckless disregard for the rights of others, constitute a serious moral concern which is missed by those who see only the humorous side of *Mister Johnson*. It is likely, therefore, that Cary intends this solemn and meditative character to be an objectification of conscience which is lacking in the unreflective and light-travelling Johnson. Benjamin does not only become more formal and correct after the discovery of his moral slip, but his pronouncements also assume a greater meaningfulness and a sense of foreboding as we follow Johnson's inexorable march to disaster. To his earlier warnings that it is always dangerous to engage in robbery, Benjamin adds a new element when Johnson announces his intention to steal from the local store by reminding him that Sergeant Gollup, its ex-soldier owner and operator "is an illegal man " (Mr. J 134). There is a distinctly ominous note as Benjamin ends his plea with characteristic solemnity: "I think you better be careful of a man like Mister Gollup--it is all simply stupid and senseless if a savage man like that can spoil your good health. For then you are done for" (Mr. J 135). Johnson's refusal or inability to heed these warnings leads him in his illegal actions to confront the illegal man and resolve the conflict in the only way possible in their situation--final arbitration through violence.

For Gollup, it must be remembered, is a creator of a very different kind from Johnson. The old soldier brings into his civilian

life the military discipline of his past so that there is a palpable pattern even to his drunken debaucheries and murderous attacks on his employees. There is, in fact, an outward mechanical consistency to Gollup's behaviour as he sets about upholding and enforcing his own peculiar conception of discipline and order. But the outward consistency is deceptive. He emerges every morning in clean clothes, a waxed moustache and neatly groomed hair, but "he will inspect his store and compounds in cotton drawers . . . and take an afternoon stroll in purple and green pyjamas . . . " (Mr. J 122). Here Gollup, like Malvolio, is portrayed with that incongruous mixture of earnestness and buffoonery which is both ludicrous and pathetic.

Inner contradictions are also evident in Gollup the man whose national and class prejudices leave him with "an easy condescension to all the world" (Mr. J 122). He can speak with passionate feelings about the military men who have laid down their lives for freedom and empire--"the Empire of the free were the sun of justice never sets," (Mr. J 130)--or lament over the cost of maintaining the same empire while consoling himself with the thought that it is the Englishman's divine mission to sustain the empire so that the "Pax Britannia" can reach the savages of the earth: "I ain't complaining--it's a duty laid down upon us by God--but the Pax Britannia takes a bit of keeping up--with 'arf the world full of savages and 'arf the other 'arf just getting in the way" (Mr. J. 130). His class prejudices are equally strong and wide. "Gollup has the usual hatred of the old soldier for the rich and their women, and in fact for all those who live easy and self-indulgent lives without risk or responsibility . . ." (Mr. J 129).

As we pursue Gollup through his systematically arranged and clean compounds, we recognise beyond the orderly facade a man in conflict with himself and the world: he condescends to the world, but is polite to his own servants and yet capable of inflicting the most savage physical violence on them without provocation; he admires the "Pax Britannia," but hates the wealthy who promote and maintain it; he loves order, but his behaviour towards other people continually threatens the social order; he sympathises with Johnson for not belonging to "one of the higher races," but must be saved from committing barbarities by the same Johnson who is shocked by the savagery of his master. Indeed, the presentation of Gollup is so ironical that he can only attain in his drunkenness what is inherent in Johnson: the complex duality of destructiveness and creativity. For Gollup, though not without affection and generosity, is more murderous than creative in his sober moments. Like Johnson, he acts without premeditation. Unlike Johnson, however, Gollup's prejudices and his apprehension of reality have placed him permanently outside the main stream of human society. Even in his drunken moments, when Gollup becomes poet and dreamer and attains a form of spiritual communion with Johnson, he remains an isolated man. "In that exciting atmosphere of gin and poetic sympathy which belongs only to artists and drink parties, Gollup and Johnson often pursue their own creations simultaneously" (Mr. J 128).

But the simultaneous creations remain permanently divergent. Gollup's insistence that discipline within his compounds must remain inviolable in spite of the violence he inflicts on his employees runs counter to Johnson's riotous parties which border on social anarchy, just as the merchant's determination to maintain the extortionate level

of his profits makes him the natural enemy of Johnson, the profligate spendthrift who sees his employment in the store as an opportunity to gratify his desire for nightly parties and provide his wife with expensive gifts that would be commensurate with the inflated but totally unrealistic notion of his greatness. These are some of the problems that are inherent in the relationship between Gollup and Johnson and make the clash between these two creative beings as predictable as it is inevitable. But it requires the intervention of the forces of traditional order, from which Gollup and Johnson are estranged, to set the conflict between them in motion.

The manifest symbol of that order is Tring whose preference for established practice over creative innovation makes him yet another of Johnson's adversaries. By sacking Johnson for complicity in the illegal use of government funds to construct the road which he and Rudbeck consider a necessary innovation in Fada, Tring puts Johnson directly at the mercy of the unscrupulous Gollup who employs him to do a clerk's work at a cook's wage. When Johnson finds a way of offsetting the inequity by buying hides for himself and selling them to himself at a profit, he moves a step closer to the conflict with Gollup.

Tring's search for traditional symbols of power also pushes Gollup and Johnson towards their first violent public encounter. For Tring has, in addition to the indifference and aloofness of Cary's typically unimaginative and unproductive District Officer, an insatiable thirst for power. After only a few months in Fada where, as part of his search for power, he has been doing officially popular things instead of desirable tasks, Tring is already thinking of moving to a wider station which would give greater scope to his ambitions.

"Meanwhile, he wants to squeeze from the bush all that it is capable of yielding to an ambitious young man, including a lion" (Mr. J 137). When by his firmness Tring drags with him to the hunt a reluctant Gollup who is compelled to leave Johnson in complete control of the store, we can sense the disaster in his parting warning to the clerk. For the replacement of Gollup by Johnson is the replacement of social order by social anarchy. The explosion which results from this dislocation comes with the force of a natural disaster. As Johnson fills the compound on the very first night with riotous revellers, "a tornado breaks. There is a clap of thunder that shakes the face of the ground, lightning like the explosion of the hot sky; rain like a burst dam" (Mr. J 138).

Cary's artistic maturity enables him to blend these obvious and rather melodramatic portents of disaster with the turbulent passion of the revellers until it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between the elemental and human rumblings that fill the store where everyone has been forced to take shelter. When Gollup bursts into the middle of all this with the mad frenzy of a bull, we have a conflict of two savages for whom rage is the better part of valour. There is some significance in the fact that the fight between Johnson and Gollup takes place before a crowd of people who have some knowledge of the two men. When it is all over and they review the situation, it becomes evident that each man has fought to preserve his own creation. For Gollup, the mad revelry in the store is a desecration of the inner shrine of the world of his daily routine. The Procrustean order of that world has been invaded and shattered by the boundless and unbridled pleasure of Johnson. On the other hand, the Johnson who can take the humiliation of a beating in the privacy of the store is compelled to

respond violently when Gollup attempts to destroy in public his own carefully nurtured image of himself as a wealthy and great man.

But there is more to the conflict than the fact that Gollup is knocked down and humiliated in public by his servant or that Johnson loses his livelihood and the company of a man who admires and respects his talents. The real tragedy is that neither Johnson nor Gollup learns any vital lessons from the encounter. Gollup moves quickly to restore the order that has been violated by removing Johnson from his staff. The order is of his own creation and can be maintained only by his own methods. When Tring tries to intervene with the force of the law, Gollup refuses the intervention because it will permit an outsider to penetrate his private world:

> "'I don't 'old with washing the company linen in public, and it wouldn't be fair to you, neither, Johnson. I know it was a haccident--you couldn't 'ave done it if you 'ad meant it. But you understand that I can't 'ave that sort of thing 'appen without taking notice. *I got to keep discipline 'ere, or where should we be. It was a fracass, whatever say, and in public too'.*" (Mr. J 140, italics added).

One of the interesting things about this appraisal of the clash is its revelation of an important point of similarity between Johnson and Gollup: their magnanimity, their readiness to forgive a wrong. There is no trace of bitterness here and the speech ends with Gollup making the tribute of one warrior to another: "you never was afraid of me," he said. To which Johnson replies, "No, . . . I never was 'fraid of you, Mister Gollup " (Mr. J 140). So the courage which Gollup always attributes to Johnson is confirmed. But it is mere physical courage without a moral sense--the same attribute which Gollup has in abundance. More important is Gollup's refusal to permit any interaction between the private order he has created, and the public order which Tring

represents. This separation is partly responsible for the tragedy which overwhelms Johnson and Gollup in the end.

The most important relationship in *Mister Johnson*, however, is that between Johnson and Rudbeck, which must now receive our attention. It is a relationship of two very different but complementary creators with Johnson finding the ways and Rudbeck providing the means to their joint creative endeavours. Cary underlines Johnson's leadership by emphasising the tremendous human obstacles he has to overcome in order to bring modernity to Fada. He is therefore conceived on a vast scale, almost in the guise of an elemental force in nature itself. "Johnson is creative stream, inspiring the creators, and angering fools, the duds, the *stuck*. . . . The man inspired--i.e., Rudbeck and the road. Johnson shows him how to do it--gets the men etc."[8] Rudbeck's importance in the novel, in addition to his creative potential, is that he repeatedly takes Johnson back into the centre of life in Fada when the fools and the duds cast him away.

With stark realism, Cary portrays the vastness of the problems of bringing change to Fada by showing not merely a village in stagnation, but one that has suffered and is suffering deep physical and human decay.

> Fada is the ordinary native town of the Western Sudan. It has no beauty, convenience or health. It is a dwelling-place at one stage from the rabbit warren or the badger burrow; and not so cleanly kept as the latter. It is a pioneer settlement five or six hundred years old, built on its own rubbish heaps, without charm even of antiquity. Its squalor and its stinks are all new. Its oldest compounds, except the Emir's mud box, is not twenty years old. The sun and the rain destroy all its antiquity, even of smell. But neither has it the freshness of the new. All its mud walls are eaten as if by smallpox; half the mats in any compound are always rotten. Poverty and ignorance, the absolute government of jealous savages, conservative as only the savage can be, have kept it at the first frontier of civilization. Its people would not know the

> change if time jumped back fifty thousand years. They live like mice or rats in a palace floor; all the magnificence and variety of the arts, the ideas, the learning and the battles of civilization go on over their heads and they do not even imagine them (Mr. J 99).

This is the setting into which Johnson and his fellow creators must introduce change and civilization. It is a place where the relentless march of time has been permanently halted. E. M. Forster's clock which ticks the minutes away in every fictional world is annihilated. Time past and time present are fused and immobilised by the absence of a creative force in the community. There is not a single creative monument to testify to man's inventiveness. But there are piles of rubbish heaps offering concrete evidence of continuous physical dilapidation and human decay. Infinite boredom, crooked languor, disgusted resignation and languid crippled movements express the paralysing malaise that grips its inhabitants. Fada is Cary's timeless symbol of physical, social and moral stagnation. It is his objective correlative for the physical disintegration and the frightful waste of human potential under the crippling limitations of isolated village life. For at the end of this terrifying description, the mind goes back to the opening sentence of *Mister Johnson* where the beauty of Fada women is acknowledged, and forward to Tasuki, the ingenious native bridge builder who completes, without the knowledge of a confused Rudbeck, the last bridge that finally links Fada to the civilized world from which it has been cut off for centuries.

As Cary sees it, man is himself the biggest single obstacle to creative action in this or any other kind of location. I have already referred to the existence of obstructive rules which pass under the euphemism of service conditions. By setting the routine-minded Tring

against the unorthodox but innovative Rudbeck, Cary shows another of the tragic dilemmas that continually threaten the creator. He must either submit to the treadmill of unproductive routine or innovate at the risk of clashing with the lovers of routine. A prime example occurs when Tring takes over Fada station from Rudbeck, checks his cash balance and finds it to be correct, examines his accounting system and discovers that it is hopelessly confused and inaccurate, talks to his subordinates and discovers his illegal use of government funds to build his road. Here is the perfect bureaucrat at work. For him there are no complications in this kind of situation, but simple and ready answers. He sends a hastily prepared report to the Resident's office, charging, among other things, embezzlement and forgery; he also sacks Rudbeck's assistants, including Johnson.

Cary denounces this kind of bureaucratic fervour by the disclosure that in the matter of real substance, the cash, Rudbeck is irreproachable. By contrast, Tring's charges are based on legalisms that are merely obstructive. Furthermore, Cary brings in the kindly Bulteel to argue the case for unorthodoxy. Against Tring's insistence that his report is necessary because Rudbeck has so obviously ignored regulations, Bulteel makes the uncompromising answer that regulations are made to be broken, provided one takes essential precautions. The inadequacy of regulations as a guide to useful service is stressed in this remark of the experienced Bulteel to the ambitious and self-centred Tring:

> "'What I mean is that all these regulations meant to keep a check on every penny of expenditure are a bit of an anomaly. Anyone who wants to swindle the Treasury could make a fool of the rules any day--and as for the honest ones, they only find 'em in the way of real honest work--as here with poor Ruddy's road.'"

Then seeing the effect his remarks are having on the young District Officer, he adds:

> "'Tring we've got to be trusted or the whole thing would come to bits. I know we wouldn't have had even the Dorua road if we'd stuck strictly to the rules'"(Mr. J 114).

It is important to note that Cary's objectivity is such that he concedes to Tring what is due him under the circumstances--efficiency in a general sense. He has chosen, as Bulteel remarks to himself before leaving the young man, the easy path to personal advancement. In Cary's world of creative freedom, Tring is fulfilling his role as the "ideal" district officer in an administration where, as Blore's attitudes so clearly demonstrate, original ideas are at best suspected and at worst liable to censure by senior officials. By the mere juxtaposition of Tring and Rudbeck Cary shows quite poignantly the factors that inhibit creativity in every organisation. Yet for the truly creative individual, the attempt to stifle the imagination is often futile. Later, as if to reaffirm Bulteel's view that it is always easy to fool the Treasury, Cary shows Rudbeck, under the inspiration of Johnson, getting easy approval for several vouchers made payable to a fictitious and non-existent Suli. But as Bulteel reminds Rudbeck again, this unorthodox approach, for all the positive results it can achieve, never pays anyone. "Stick to the rules, as near as you can. That's the way to get on in the service, my boy, and you know you want to get on. As a family man" (Mr. J 145). So the choice is clear: either disinterested service that is productive but gets one nowhere, or conformity to preserve the *status quo*.

Johnson's personal problems are not so arduous because, as the "creative stream" that sweeps the other characters along his path, he

has no time to reflect on the difficult choice which Rudbeck has to face. He has, however, to overcome human obstacles that are as obdurate as anything Rudbeck has to contend with. The native administration opposes the road because it will introduce forces that will erode native power. The irreconcilable opposition between the dynamic creator and the static native administrator is evident in this dialogue between Johnson, the advocate of civilization, and Waziri, the feckless and corrupt spokesman for the native system:

> "'Ah, that road--what a misfortune.'
> 'A misfortune!' Johnson laughs. 'Why, it is the finest work in Fada--it will bring wealth to the whole country. The motors will run through Fada from end to end.'
> Waziri shakes his head. 'That's what will make all the trouble. The Emir is very angry about this road.'
> 'The Emir is an old savage fool--he has no idea of civilized things. Roads are a most civilized thing. When this road is opened, Waziri, you will be surprised' . . .
> 'I won't be surprised.' Waziri says. 'I know what your road will do--I've seen it before--everything turned upside down, and all for nothing.'
> Johnson laughs at this pessimism. 'You are not civilized, Waziri. You don't understand that people must have roads for motors.'
> 'Why, lord Johnson?'
> 'Because it is civilized. Soon everyone will be civilized.'
> 'Why so, lord Johnson?'
> 'Of course, they must be--they like to be,' Johnson says. 'You will see how they like it. All men like to be civilized'" (Mr. J 85-6).

This is where Johnson's real value lies--in his commitment to and understanding of the value of civilization in the life of man. The question about whether or not he is himself a civilized man is peripheral. It is interesting only because it provides the hilarious comedy that is a part of Cary's vision of man in society. His argument for civilization, though lacking the cogency and sophistication of Cottee's in *An American Visitor*, has a compelling urgency of its own because of the permanent decay and continuous disintegration of the Fada setting and the

feeling of helpless entrapment that grips its people. In addition to Johnson's monopoly of the ideas that turn potential to actual creators, he is invaluable precisely because he is the only man who can free the Fada natives from the prison of their villages. At a time when Rudbeck is prepared to suspend the construction of the road because he has exhausted every penny that could be extracted from the administration, Johnson informs him that there is enough money to be collected from the roadside inns which they have constructed to accommodate the increasing number of traders that are already passing through Fada. But there is still the problem of getting the frightened and suspicious natives to move out of their villages and join the construction gangs on the road. The immensity of the problem is conveyed in swift, sure strokes as Audu, Rudbeck's cashier for the road, tries and fails to arouse the interest of the somnolent villagers for the road:

> Audu speaks first of the importance of the great road which will make them all rich. It will bring every day traders to the village wanting shelter from the men and food from the women. Along this road motors will come to take them and their produce to market. But to make the road all must work, not much but a little.
>
> The young men languid with their sore heads, lean against each other, draw pictures in the dust and think of nothing. Their brains are asleep. Their bodies enjoy the pains, bruises and a languor, which are part of their holiday, of peace, of do-nothing. They know that soon there will be more hunting, meat, beer, songs, dances and love (Mr. J 156).

This is the portrait of a people suffering from deep mental atrophy. Their minds have become habituated to boredom and monotony. They look forward to the same simple and unvaried pleasures of their lives. Even the jigging refrains of Johnson's music fails to stir them out of their stupor. But when Johnson holds out the promise of immediate reward to their leaders, the villagers are sent on the road. It

is at this point that the revitalizing power of Johnson's creative energy goes to work. The villagers are transformed under the spell of his pulsating music and lyric fervour. The sullen villagers become the gay and boisterous workers, swinging their matchets and yelling as if they are under the influence of intoxicants. They are, in fact, experiencing the intoxication of a new birth and a new freedom:

> They have already, in five hours, forgotten their dread and contempt of the stranger and their resolve to keep themselves to themselves. In one afternoon they have taken the first essential step out of the world of the tribe into the world of men (Mr. J 160).

Johnson's power over men lies in his capacity to give roundness to half-formed ideas and lend purpose and a sense of value to vacant minds. He has vitality, abundant energy, courage and an extraordinary capacity for enjoyment. He is, above all, a leader and inspirer of men. Having shown Rudbeck how to cut official red tape by drawing money from the cash bank in Fada station in anticipation of the road grant for the following year, Johnson moves with the certainty of an animal guided by a sure instinct to inject some of his own vitality into the dormant creatures that inhabit its villages. He animates the workers with his music and multiplies their productive capacity several times. His commitment to the creation of the road, which is also the creation of the civilization he adores, is complete. It is a task which gives supreme personal satisfaction not only because it brings nearer Johnson's dream of paradise on earth (Mr. J 162), but also because it is his special offering to his god, Rudbeck (Mr. J 225). As a result, he brings to his task the zeal of "a witch doctor possessed by the spirit:"

> Johnson, in fact, has no notion that he is tired. He doesn't feel anything except music, noise, the movement of work, the

> approbation and nearness of Rudbeck and Rudbeck's triumph, which is his own. He lives in this glory, which is expressed in every yell, in every obscene joke, kick, jump or swing of the matchet. He does not need to think, 'Rudbeck's road, the great, the glorious, the wonder of the world, is about to be finished and I have helped to finish it. He knows it in every muscle. . . . He sings like a defiance to the forest:
>
> *'Bow down old lords of the world,*
> *Put your green heads in the dusk.*
> *Salute the roadmen, children of the sky;*
> *Come, sun and moon, walk now in the dark wood,*
> *Walk in Rudbeck's road with your long shining feet.'*
> (Mr. J. 161-2).

It is not surprising therefore that in an unguarded moment, Rudbeck concedes what we already know by telling Bulteel that Johnson is "the man with the ideas. . . . He keeps us all merry and bright"(Mr. J 150). This unpremeditated tribute is true of Johnson the creator. He offers to all men in Fada the double gift of ideas and merriment. It is a tribute which gives the lie to all the simplistic evaluations of Johnson as a merely dangerous man or a quaint little creature that can be summed up in a tepid little word like "wog".

One of the central ironies that pervade the creative partnership of Johnson and Rudbeck is the limited awareness of both men about the effect their creation would have in Fada. For Johnson, the road is an artery of civilization, of wealth and personal glory, of new friendships and fresh enjoyments. For Rudbeck, the road holds the promise of "a golden age for Fada" (Mr. J 165). Johnson realises that the road marks the beginning of a new era in Fada, but neither he nor Rudbeck is aware of the new tensions and new conflicts it will generate. Rudbeck himself, feeling the pressure of a swelling crime wave in his division, ruminates over the words "confusion," "chaos," "breakdown of civilization" which he and his friends have tossed about without reaching a conclusion. With characteristic good humour, Cary gives us a further

insight into the barren colonial system as Rudbeck discusses the problem with Bulteel:

> He has said to Bulteel, 'But, sir, if native civilization does break down, there'll be a proper mess one day.'
>
> Bulteel takes off his hat, lifts it in the air in a line with the sun, and then at once puts it on again. They are taking their evening walk along the river road at Dorua.
>
> 'Ah! That's a big question.' Bulteel hates talking shop out of office hours.
>
> 'We're obviously breaking up the old native tribal organization or it's breaking by itself. The people are bored with it?'
>
> 'Yes, yes, and I'm not surprised,' Bulteel says.
>
> Rudbeck is greatly surprised. 'Don't you believe in the native civilization?'
>
> 'Well, how would you like it yourself?' Bulteel smiles at him sideways with a kind of twinkle.
>
> 'Then you think it will go to pieces?'
>
> 'Yes, I think so, if it hasn't gone already.'
>
> 'But what's going to happen then? Are we going to give them any new civilization, or simply let them slide down hill?'
>
> 'No idea,' Bulteel says cheerfully (Mr. J 167).

This lack of policy and the piecemeal approach to problems are partly responsible for the catastrophic denouement in *Mister Johnson.* For, as Cary puts it, "Rudbeck himself has jump *though only for the one game; the one idea that has been given to him, the Fada north road*" (Mr. J 83, italics added). The completion of the road therefore leaves him with a feeling of emptiness as he returns to his office routine dejected and brooding "as if his burden of confusion and blind treadmill effort has turned into a physical weight on his back" (Mr. J 169). But the real disaster is that, lacking any original ideas of his own, Rudbeck adopts the views of Blore and the methods of Tring, checks on Johnson and discovers the illegal levy he has been collecting from users of the roadside inns to provide beer for the workers and extras for himself, and sacks him at once.

> The injustice of this is glaring to the reader. Apart from some confusion over what belongs to him personally and what belongs to the road fund, Johnson's methods of getting beer for the road

> gangs have been no more reprehensible than the ways Rudbeck found for financing the road during his previous tour. Accordingly, when Johnson after this last dismissal goes entirely to the bad, kills Gollup in the course of a robbery and is condemned to death, Rudbeck is burdened with a sense of guilt.[9]

The murder itself, like all of Johnson's actions, is unpremeditated. The robbery which leads to the murder stems directly from his dismissal which deprives him of the means to sustain the Johnson of his creation: rich, powerful and glorious. These events are themselves a part of the conflict between the established order of society and the free world of the imagination. The absence of any malice or evil intention on the part of Johnson preserves his image as the innocent child (he is only seventeen) whose powerful reflexes can move him with the same compulsive drive to the creative or destructive act. In fact, Cary uses this capital crime to discuss the problem of injustice in the world. According to Ajali, Gollup had unnecessarily murdered one of his former clerks (Mr. J 120), but did not even have to stand trial for that wilful murder while Johnson is to be hanged for his unpremeditated crime.

Cary's vision of Johnson is so clear and steady that in the confinement of prison where he is awaiting his execution, he remains the same man we have always known: buoyant yet despairing, generous and inspiring, and, above all, originally creative and master of his own destiny. He led a thoroughly unorthodox life and carried Rudbeck with him part of the way. When Rudbeck reverts to and judges him by the standards of the mundane and the orthodox, Johnson saves him from becoming "a robot who submits gracefully and carries out instructions to the letter" (Mr. J 209) by asking to be shot rather than hanged. After listening to the outpourings of Johnson's generous spirit and

his quiet dignity in the imminence of death, Rudbeck, recognising a part of himself in the boy, shoots him and tells his horrified wife: "I couldn't let anyone else do it, could I?" (Mr. J 227).

The significance of this death is missed by critics who continue to look at Johnson as a racial symbol.[10] This view is expressed in one of its extreme forms by Arnold Kettle who claims that

> Rudbeck shoots Johnson as he would shoot a suffering dog to whom he feels a special responsibility and although the horror of this act is conveyed it is somewhat blunted by the underlying paternalism of Joyce Cary's own attitude.[11]

The difficulty about this view is that it is posited without a shred of supporting evidence. The fact is that Cary's paternal attitude towards the African ended in his fiction with the publication of *The African Witch* where the irrational and the psychotic are the distinguishing marks of the black man. In *Mister Johnson*, Cary's racial consciousness no longer interferes with his cosmic view of man. The problems he tackles here are the major problems of his fiction: the conflicts in a world of free and creative individuals, the disruptive chaos of a continuously changing world and the injustice that man visits on his fellow man. The manner of Johnson's death is important because it underlines the fact that objective justice is impossible in a world where the judges are as guilty as the men they must judge. An appropriate epigraph to the closing sections of *Mister Johnson* might be the Biblical injunction: "Judge not lest ye be judged." For we know, even as Rudbeck moves to the window to blow out Johnson's brain, that he is guilty of serious infractions against the "civil" law for which he escapes punishment. Far from being paternalistic, Cary captures in the death of Johnson one of the tragic absurdities of the

human condition. The problem of justice in a world of imperfect beings plunges us into an infinite regress from which we can escape only by a bold resort to the unjust but palpably human solution which Rudbeck adopts here under the instigation of Johnson. The release which Rudbeck feels is not that of a sadist, but the release which comes to a perfectly normal man with the discovery of a profound truth. That truth comes with the realisation that the Blore formula on Johnson--"he's the worst type--probably dangerous, too--a complete imbecile, but quite capable of robbing the safe" (Mr. J 24)--which Rudbeck adopts in his lassitude and dejection after the completion of the road, is so utterly inadequate. In the end, he shoots Johnson because he has transcended this jaundiced view and sees in Johnson a man who commands and deserves respect in his own right.

In the preface to *Castle Corner*, published a year before *Mister Johnson*, Cary reveals the questions and answers (never realised in *Castle Corner*) that were to dominate his mature fiction:

> I meant to raise such questions as, Is there a final shape of society, to be founded upon the common needs and hopes of humanity?
> The answer was that the final shape, if it ever arrived, would be one not of peace and justice, security and comfort, but of limited insecurity, limited physical misery on the one hand, and on the other, richer possibilities of experience, both in fulfilment and despair. The tragic dilemma of freedom is incurable; that it can't have either security or justice, which belong only to robots, to machines, that because it has the power to know goodness, it must also suffer evil. In fact, those who have the keenest intensity of happiness, in love and achievement are those most exposed to suffering in loss and defeat (CC 7).

There is no other work in which Cary tackles these questions and proffers these answers with greater vigour and clarity than he does in *Mister Johnson*. The proffered answers constitute the tragic vision that underlies Cary's comedy of freedom. The heroes who answer most

fully to the demands of "the tragic dilemma of freedom" are Johnson, Charley Brown, Gulley Jimson, and Chester Nimmo. This is the "august" company to which Johnson belongs; to take him out of it and charge Cary with prejudice is not only misleading; it suggests a failure to discern the thematic unity of the author's mature fiction.

With the completion of *Mister Johnson*, Cary finally leaves the African scene, although he continues to write about it in a non-fictional vein. But Africa remains a seminal influence. Its importance in the evolution of his ideas and the development of his novelistic technique has been carefully recorded by M. M. Mahood, who, in an article which preceded her book on Cary, sums up the African influence on the novelist in these words:

> There is much more than the raw material for the events and situations of his early novels to be found in the official records which Joyce Cary kept in Borgu and in his daily letters to his wife from Nigeria. The real interest of these papers is that they reveal a process of inner exploration during which Cary experienced, though he could not yet distinguish, the *sens* as well as the *matière* of his future novels: a *sens* which is the constantly varied recurrent theme of his two trilogies, and which might be defined as the theme of tribal loyalty and creative freedom.[12]

The powerful evocation of tribal loyalties among Africans and Europeans on the African scene also provides Cary with most of the material for the tragi-comedies he set in Africa, especially the first three. These tribal loyalties play only a marginal part in the main events of *Mister Johnson* and most of the European novels. *Charley is My Darling* and *A House of Children* are the only novels of Cary's mature period in which tribal loyalties play a significant part. But that will be part of my concern in the next chapter.

PART II: The Novels of Childhood

CHAPTER III

The Captive and the Free: A Composite Picture of Childhood

I. *Charley is My Darling*

With the publication in 1940 of *Charley is My Darling*, Joyce Cary began the exploration of his theme of man's creative freedom and its conflicts in a European setting. The move was propitious because coming at a time when Cary had already achieved maturity as a writer, it gave his creative powers full scope without the distractions and distortions which arose out of his own assumptions about the particular demands of the African setting or the peculiar psychology of his African characters. If any thing is needed to invalidate those assumptions, it is the complete credibility of Johnson and Charley, the two precocious, imaginative, free, gay and self-willed boys (Johnson is seventeen and Charley is fifteen), who suddenly find themselves as strangers when they are dropped in unfamiliar surroundings, but quickly assume leadership by the sheer force of their imaginations. We witness curious manifestations of the childish and the child-like as each of these boys moves from action to action, propelled by the powerful thrust of their imaginations, always looking for the extraordinary deed which will both startle their admirers and enhance their reputations as audacious characters, until, finally, they run against the constants of the moral world and are crushed or subdued. Charles G. Hoffman finds the two boys identical both in their natures and the manner of their presentation:

> Charley Brown is the soulmate of Mister Johnson. Both are described in the present tense because both live for the moment, enjoying the freedom they create for themselves, yet trapped by the consequences of actions which made them free; the very style links them together as free individual spirits, poets of the moment, improvising imaginatively the actions which become the pattern of their unhappy destinies.[1]

The only difference between them, which provides rich comedy and deep pathos, is that Johnson, having by his marriage and employment accepted the responsibilities of adulthood, is placed in and treated as a member of the adult community, while Charley Brown, deceptively undersized, finds himself among children and is treated as a child even after he has given clear proof of his physical maturity.

Charley is My Darling opens with a crucial event. Charley, the boy from a London slum who has been evacuated along with other children into the small West country hamlet of Burlswood, must have his head shaved and his nice suit thrown away because he is lousy and dirty. The evacuation itself is made necessary by the events of the Second World War which does not, however, directly affect the story beyond this initial stage. But the simple act of deprivation which Charley suffers and which seems insignificant to Miss Phyllis Hawes, the assistant billeting officer who performs it, nevertheless reduces the boy to a level which makes self-assertion both urgent and imperative. The "cleansing" process has taken a part of himself and when he appears in an assortment of clothes which, because they are either too tight or too large, only accentuate his smallness, it is evident that Charley has undergone more than a simple change of appearance; he has suffered a change of being. The new Charley Brown, with his physical features grotesquely distorted, has to face the mockery of the other children without the assistance of the adults who are unaware of the transformation they have wrought on the boy. Here is part of Cary's description of the new Charley and the reaction of the well-meaning but uncomprehending adult who made the change:

> He is changed from a respectable looking young citizen in a brown suit, to something between the convict of history and the kind of street Arab represented in old comic papers. Phyllis looks at him with calm reflection and says: "They arn't too ba-ad, are they?" (CMD 15).

Affection without understanding of the adolescent's sensitivity to anything that will expose him to the ridicule of his peers: that is one of the failures of the adults in Burlswood to measure up to their vital responsibilities to the evacuees.

Indeed, the first chapter of *Charley is My Darling*, narrated with superb skill and economy, shows the conflict between the fixed world of the adult and the shifting, continually changing world of the child. The sensitivity of the children is set against the insensitivity of the adults, represented by Mrs. Hawes, the mother of Phyllis, whose simple and unchanging views about children represent a common tendency. Typical is her evaluation of Bessie Galor (variously referred to as Lizzie or Liz), the partially deaf, odd-looking girl with the responsible expression who understands the operations of the adult world better than any adult seems to understand the requirements of childhood. For Mrs. Hawes, the girl's slight deformity is the determinant of her real character. When Bessie, bewildered by Charley's hideous grimaces (which none of the adults see), begins to handle objects clumsily, she is chided by Phyllis. But for Mrs. Hawes, the effort to correct Bessie is wasted because, as she says, "She can't ear ee," the mother chants in rich compassion, "and wouldn't be no good if she did, poor thing. She's too foolish" (CMD 14).

Cary's subtle irony is evident here. We feel the tension between the "rich compassion" and the ease with which the girl is dismissed as a foolish human being. It is the compassion we feel for a

fellow creature who is beyond hope and beyond redemption. Part of the irony is that the girl *does* hear these remarks, against which she creates her own defence in obstinacy and further alienation from the adult world. As the story develops, it becomes clear that Mrs. Hawes's judgment is misleading. The real clue to Bessie's character is given by her responsible expression, and not by her defective ear. The conflict between the adults and the children in Burlswood arises not so much from a lack of affection or compassion, as from a lack of knowledge and understanding. This lack of knowledge and the tendency of the adult to assume that the child is incapable of understanding the underlying significance of a complex moral situation are important factors in the downward slide from mild delinquency to serious crimes among the evacuees.

The importance of knowledge in the leadership of children is in fact a major theme in *Charley is My Darling*. For Cary, like Wordsworth, believes that "the child is a born creator" (CMD 8). Like Wordsworth also, Cary believes that this creativity is rooted in the child's insatiable lust for adventure and exploration. And this is where the problem of leadership comes in. For, as Cary sees it, the child is endowed with a strong imagination and weak controls; and while he can *feel* the need to preserve the moral structure of the world he explores, if only for his own comfort and security, the child nevertheless lacks "the experience and judgment necessary" to keep it inviolate:

> For this purpose nature has provided him . . . with parents. And if they refuse the duty of making the situation clear to him he will suffer. I am ready to bet that a good deal of what is called neurosis and frustration among young children is due to nothing but the failure of parents and teachers (often the most conscientious) to do so, that is, to give a clear picture without uncertainties (CMD 9).

The failure of parents and teachers to give a clear picture without uncertainties leaves the children with the problem of constructing their own moral order out of the chaos of the world. Miss Lina Allchin, the billeting officer in charge of the evacuees, has an admirable sense of duty, is capable of affection, even of doting on an able and intelligent boy like Charley. But she is distracted, uncertain and fumbling because she, like the children, lacks the necessary experience and must therefore rely on theory. She dithers and frequently postpones essential action for lack of knowledge or fear of mistakes. Her mixed feelings of attachment to and compassion for Charley, not altogether recognised by herself, interfere dangerously with her duty to the boy. To Lina, Charley is an example of a poor boy who has been unjustly treated by the world but whose good nature allows him no time for malice towards people in comfortable circumstances like herself. This is a failure in recognition, however. For the real Charley is not simply a poor boy who has been displaced by a war about which he knows nothing. He is also an intelligent, energetic, courageous and restlessly creative boy who is looking for certain guidance which no one in Burlswood can offer.

Charley's imagination remains starved because the teachers are either inefficient, or pretentious and indifferent to the needs of their pupils. The classroom itself is a kind of prison. Charley is bored to distraction as he listens to the monotonous chant of familiar place-names in Britain. And his last hope of escape from boredom through artistic immersion is dashed when he meets and listens to Mr. Lommax, the artist. For Mr. Lommax is the eternal humbug: vain, garrulous and mentally inert, he hides the fuzziness of his ideas in a morass of

words and insists that artistic knowledge can never be imparted through instruction. When Charley, who has already attempted a few ingenious sketches of his own from very poor materials, is presented to him as a pupil of great curiosity, Lommax rejects him and explains: "Ah never take pupils, Jimmy; Ah haven't sunk to that level. Ah'm a fraud but not an abortioner" (CMD 161). The truth is that he is both a fraud and an abortioner of human potential and deserves all the scorn and derision which Charley pours on him. The children feel a sense of betrayal and in their helplessness flee from it all, muttering obscenities at the uncomprehending and incomprehensible adults. The whole scene shows the characteristic Carian fusion of humour and pathos. And when in the end Lommax, along with his captive listener, approaches Charley and his friend still mouthing his pompous abstractions,

> The boys dart away and as Charley rushes after Ginger up the corridor, he says: "Ah doant bulleeve in genius, Jimmy, but if the worrd as a meaning, it means bullockshit." He wants to abuse the grown-ups in the rudest possible words, to make fun of them and all their ideas. What else can he do with them since he can't get hold of their meaning? (CMD 162).

By the time of his meeting with Mr. Lommax, Charley had of course already drifted into mild forms of delinquency. But it is necessary to trace the main outlines of the background of adult misunderstanding, confusion and outright irresponsibility which led the evacuees and the local children they attracted to themselves from childish mischief to delinquency and from delinquency to crime.

Left to themselves without guidance or stimulus to their imagination, the children become confused and bored. At first they try to escape from their confusion and boredom by engaging in little pranks that are annoying to the busy adults but remain essentially

harmless. But to one boy at least, even the early mischiefs, such as the children's decision to let loose farmer Wickens's bull, have an underlying seriousness. When Charley opens the bull's stall and frees the animal to the amazement of the other children, he is doing something more fundamental to himself than looking for simple excitement. With his hair shorn and suffering a personal loss of dignity, Charley's bold enterprise is a part of his search for self-discovery. And with the other children frequently mocking at him with chants of "baldy" and "lousy," Charley's "fight" with the bull is calculated to bedazzle his surprised onlookers and instil in them a sense of his inventiveness, temerity and raw courage, the very qualities of leadership which the children want in their present mood of frustration. They drift aimlessly from one adventure to the other and Charley, unconscious of the need for self-assertion which is at the bottom of his present enterprise, is ready to act on any new reckless suggestion from the other children. When he asks the other children to go and have a "booze" of cider with him and hears his ideas ridiculed, he willingly accepts the challenge to steal beer, the real booze, from the farmer's kitchen. He returns from the theft with the elation of success. But when he is asked if he had stolen things in the past, his reaction betrays the unconscious motives already operating in his mind:

> Charley is trying to control his breath. He looks still more dignified. But he doesn't know what to say to Harry. If he speaks the truth and says that he has never before stolen anything except lumps of sugar or spoonfuls of jam, he will no doubt strike all the boys with astonishment at his cleverness. But if he claims to be an old hand, a real thief, he will set himself on a superior plane. He will command their respect. Since they are strangers and know nothing about his past, he has a free choice. He can make for himself whichever position he chooses (CMD 30).

Charley's choice is predictably simple. He has to choose that which will place him on a superior plane because his recklessness stems from his desire to regain the lost leadership which he had won so handily by his initiative and his ability to solve the problems of the confused adults and querulous children on evacuation day. But Cary also stresses the wider implications of Charley's problems which are the problems of leadership everywhere. How does one win the leadership of a people who have, at best, only superficial knowledge of one's powers? How does one retain such leadership? Is good nature alone sufficient to ensure the loyalty of the ruled? How does the leader deal with the continual threat to his supremacy by those who wish to supplant him in office? What is the proper response to the sneering cynicism of the leader's detractors?

These are some of the questions which Charley has to face in his determined bid to dominate the evacuees and assume the position of undisputed leader. And it is part of Cary's realism that instead of the muted hostility of the future challenger to the leader in the election scene in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the children in *Charley is My Darling* show all the passion, the violence, the cut and thrust of real politics before Charley, who combines the impetuosity, the cunning, the public charity and occasional cruelty of the typical politician, is installed as leader. The brute courage he demonstrated earlier in his handling of the bull has to be tested again in the contest for power which is a "kind of human bull fight" (CMD 38). In this human bull fight, Charley musters the necessary courage and fury but is discomfited by the superior strength of Bill and flustered by the persistent mockery of Walter, a humorist and challenger who knows

the potency of his weapon against a boy who has been made self-conscious and nervous. With his malicious humour, Walter breaks the brave mask which Charley wears in public and exposes him for what he is: "a frightened, breathless small boy, smaller than any of them, who, in some extraordinary way, has imposed himself on them" (CMD 38). But the secret of Charley's dominance is evident enough. He is tenacious, resilient, resourceful, willing to take risks which frighten others out of their wits, bide his time with calm dignity when he suffers set-backs at the hands of his opponents, and hit them a decisive blow when he has the advantage.

The combined pressures of the adults and children force Charley to withdraw into himself. The threats of farmer Wickens cause him great misery while the constant harassment and ambushes of the other children force Charley to accept the equally painful position of out-cast. But even home cannot provide the sanctuary he needs. In the billet which has become "home" for the boy, he is simultaneously pestered by irascible old women and pampered by a doting and over-protective young stepmother. The result is bewilderment for the boy. His attempt to seek refuge through artistic creation brings only agony and a sense of futility.

Poverty has deprived him of the opportunity to feed and develop his rich imagination. There is real pathos as the boy, armed with only a few bottles of ink and cheap paper, tries desperately to convert his simple ideas into art. But even as he struggles in the throes of creation, the subconscious rage he feels against the injustice of the world remains dominant. The one creation that fascinates and tortures

him at once is his drawing of a bull with flaming red horns and red circles for eyelashes. It is his symbol of blind fury and indomitable strength--the very forces he wants in his fight against an unjust and indifferent world. But Cary captures the futility of it all as Charley, enchanted by the horror of his own creation, continues to add new and more terrifying dimensions to his bull until the ink begins to run and the paper finally bursts under his tongue as he tries to save the picture by licking the excess ink. We can feel with the boy the bitterness of defeat as he reacts to his misfortune:

> The sodden paper tears under his tongue. He is in tears of rage and disgust. He looks at the paper on the ground and says: "Wy, it's rotten--just rotten;" he has lost all confidence in himself. He is sure that he, Charley Brown, could never do a good drawing. "Ere, wot you bin playing at, you bloody fool--you ain't a bleeding kid." He leaves everything where it lies and goes off, slouching with disgust, his hands deep in his pockets (CMD 49).

Here Charley betrays all the characteristic responses of Cary's typically creative man: the power to lose himself in his work; the ecstasy of joy which follows the recognition of beauty or significant meaning in the created work; the feeling of disenchantment which comes with the completion of the work; and the tendency to self-reproach without self-pity whenever things go wrong. These are also the responses of Johnson and Gulley Jimson.

In his mood of frustration, Charley returns to the only company where he can carve a satisfactory position for himself--to the vagrant children who taunt him so mercilessly in his new shrunken state. In this company he can assume leadership by the force of his personality. But the right to leadership carries with it the responsibility of satisfying the needs of his followers. Part of the responsibility can be met from his own creative resources alone, from the captivating stories he

spins out in embroidered tapestry for the other children. This narrative power wins the hearts of the children, especially the native children of Burlswood whose imaginations are so badly starved. It is this power which wins over Lizzie who has, contrary to popular belief, a receptive mind that does retain the essential details of an *interesting* story. Her keen interest in movies, like the interests of most of the children of Burlswood, remains unsatisfied. The stimulating stories she hears from Charley meet a vital need:

> For her, Charley was as good as the movies; he was the source of ideas so exciting, so engaging to her mind, that she listened to them as to revelation. Her serious concentrated expression while she followed the histories of Diamond Eye, Jimmy the Chink, the dope doctor, or Ally the Phone, was like that of a devotee in church or the smallest children at a pantomime. Lizzie, from want of reading, had the same freshness of mind and power of intense enjoyment (CMD 72).

But Charley's stories offer more than emotional satisfaction and stimulus to a starved imagination. They also offer the temptation to escape from the drabness of a home where her well-meaning mother would sometimes "like to say something tender and consoling to Lizzie, but has lost the art for lack of practice" (CMD 213). So the girl joins the gang of evacuees to share in the excitement of new stories, new adventures, and bask in the spontaneous and tender love of Charley.

One of the main differences between *Charley is My Darling* and *Lord of the Flies* is that Cary does not, like Golding, presume the existence of innate evil in children. Instead Cary assumes "that every ordinary child is by nature a delinquent" (CMD 5). But the child also has a delicate moral sense, and what turns the delinquent into the criminal is the failure of parents and teachers to give clear guidance and knowledgeable leadership which will save it from boredom and

confusion, "the two prime sources of childish wickedness," that is, "real wickedness which goes beyond mischief, the willed cruelty, the malicious damage" (CMD 8). Of course, Cary does recognise the existence of the wilfully perverse child. Morton is the exact counterpart of Jack. Like Jack, Morton would have murdered Charley if it were not for the determined and courageous rescue effort of Lizzie, just as Ralph had to be saved from certain death by the arrival of the naval officer. But against the pessimism of Golding, who assumes that only superior force can disarm such characters as Jack, Cary offers the less frightening view that the Mortons of this world can be contained by foresight (Lizzie) and vigorous and determined leadership such as that which Charley provides for the gang.

In *Charley is My Darling*, Cary is mainly interested in exploring

> the complex motives at work already in a child's mind; forces that are not different in kind from those that move a grown-up. The suddenness of temptation or, rather, inspiration, which (like many that come to an artist) is so quick that he doesn't even notice it, it leaves no moment for reflection. The imagination sees its opportunity, its prey, and instantly leaps upon it (CMD 7).

Temptation is a key word in this statement. For Charley's early crimes, like those committed by Johnson, are unpremeditated. They are crimes committed to satisfy the needs of the moment. When Charley returns to the gang (with a shilling donated by Lina Allchin) to try and re-establish his self-respect, he has no idea what demands his followers will make on him or how he is going to meet those demands.

There is also the problem of Walter. His derisive humour is losing its edge with the passage of time, but he poses a new threat to Charley's self-respect and his effectiveness as a leader by demonstrating

superior physical strength over Charley whom he knocks into a ditch with one blow. For a moment there is a real danger of the children splitting into two rival gangs led by Walter and Charley respectively. Then Charley's imagination goes to work. He knows how keenly the children miss the pictures and so comes out of the ditch shouting: "You come along with me, Arry, and we'll--we'll go to the pictures" (CMD 66). The uncertainty about what to offer is evident in the half-hesitant announcement. But the imagination has seized on its prey by offering an irresistible bait. There is no time to reflect on the problems of fulfilling a promise which requires money and transport to Twyport, the nearest city that shows pictures regularly. But Charley could not be bothered by these details because,

> Like others who hold power by the force of imagination he never asked himself how he would fulfil promises. He allowed his imagination to gallop away with himself and his friends; relying, for the solution of all his difficulties, as they arose, on more imagination (CMD 72).

So, under the importunate demands of his followers, all of whom are starved for pictures, Charley, without resources of his own, solves the problem in the only way possible: by stealing a splendid car and ordering Ginger who has been driving farm machines, to drive the children to Twyport. In Twyport he solves the problems of feeding his followers and taking them to the pictures by snatching a purse containing four pounds in currency notes.

The trip to Twyport marks the beginning of a new and more dangerous phase in the life of Charley and the children who follow him. It is the first step in the downward march from mischief to willed cruelty and finally malicious damage. But as Cary sees it, the adults are more blameworthy for the lapse. The children's moral sense, even

when they are engaged in serious crime towards the end, never completely deserts them. In Twyport, for example, they make a distinction between stealing a car which is returnable, and snatching a purse which is not returnable at all. The full horror of the latter action is conveyed as the children surround Charley with scandalized and solemn faces, with "expressions of that deep apprehensive gravity seen only on children's faces on awe-full occasions, such as a first communion, a visit to a death-bed, a first dance" (CMD 82). And the two children, Harry and Lizzie, who continually remind Charley and his more audacious followers of the dangers of transgressing against the moral law, could not conceal their disapprobation of their leader's action in spite of their growing admiration for his nerve. Nor is the essential incorruptibility of the majority of the children affected by the trip to Twyport. When Charley leads them into a jeweller's shop to buy them various presents, Lizzie rejects the temptation of a "diamond" necklace despite her appalling poverty.

To Charley, however, the trip is a great personal triumph. It satisfies his need for self-respect and restores his confidence in his creative powers. He cheers the frightened children with his songs and stories until

> All are convinced that Charley is a genius who can do anything. They do not even thank him for their presents or for lunch. They take them as gifts from God, from luck.
>
> Gratitude is replaced in the boys by dependence and confidence; by affection in Liz, who when they reach the darkness of the picture-house, at half-past two, pushes past Ginger in order to sit between Harry and Charley (CMD 92-3).

Lizzie's choice of place between Harry and Charley is significant. Harry, with his strict up-bringing and severe moral code, represents the adult viewpoint which the competent and responsible part of

Lizzie always wants to respect; Charley, with his dissolute manners resulting from lack of parental control and proper adult supervision, represents a childish temptation to which "the second Lizzie, tender-hearted and confused in mind" (CMD 100), will ultimately yield because of the failure of her parents to meet their responsibility to her with compassion and knowledge.

Cary's ironic criticism of society is so skilful that after a day of criminal activities, the children spend their last few minutes together discussing the cruelties of the world, and still command our attention and our sympathy. For Twyport has not only proved to be a mere extension of the insensitive adult world from which they seek to escape; its people have greeted them with the cold sympathy reserved for children who go under the collective designation of "vackies", and the cheap vulgarities of the picture-house have irked the moral sensibilities of the children. Furthermore, the frightening prospect of returning "home" suddenly makes the warmth of the picture-house, for all its attendant ugliness, seem preferable. Nor is this simply the reaction of the child in his feeling of helplessness against the adult. For the children have a clear conception of merited and unmerited punishment. Their conversation glides naturally from child beatings to the fatal beatings of Jews in Germany and other forms of foreign torture. The effect of the conversation is to forge a bond of sympathy between them as they communicate to each other through their short clipped sentences their profound feelings of defencelessness against the injustice of the world. The journey to Twyport thus assumes tremendous significance as it ends in a brief moment of inner exploration that binds the children together and widens the breach

between adult and child in Burlswood. It also confirms the illusion in Charley's mind that he can live a life of magnificent ease and luxury with his gang without feeling the full weight of the moral law. The activities of the day, in fact, illuminate the Carian paradox that for children, "'crime' is a moral experiment" (CMD 9).

One of the striking things about the children when they return from Twyport is their determination to create an autonomous and satisfying life for themselves. There is of course no conscious desire to rebel against the adult world. They still want to integrate with society if the adults would accommodate them and show them how. But now, with growing delinquency, the adults are becoming less tolerant and a new hostility is replacing their indifferent or irresponsible attitudes. The result is that the children seek refuge in a "tribal" organisation of their own with a cave as its headquarters, a cave whose darkness is intended to "shut out all Burlswood" (CMD 144) and shelter them from the life outside. Paradoxically, the children are in reality retreating into freedom--the primitive freedom of the cave where they can express their primal feelings without the restraining glances of the adults. They experience in that cave a sense of freedom so complete and so devoid of self-consciousness that they do not even feel "that there is anything remarkable in the force of their wonder, their affection, their hope, *their criticism of the world*" (CMD 144, italics added). In this primitive setting, the children experience the warmth of human feelings and forget the damp cold of the cave.

But if the cave does provide a shelter from an unresponsive adult society, it cannot become a fortress against the vicissitudes of an indifferent universe. Even as the children are resolving to preserve

their primitive happiness by staying permanently away from the adults, the fragile cave crumbles over their heads, burying them in mud and water. They realise, as they scramble out, that there is no alternative but to go back to their homes and suffer the numbing coldness of adult insensitivity. The collapse of the cave is the first reminder, though not yet recognized as such by any of the children, that plans do founder, that their dreams are unreal, that it is impossible to escape entirely from the harsh realities of life.

When Charley returns to his billet, he is confronted by a detective armed with the concrete evidence of stolen items collected from the cave. Charley frankly admits the mischief and theft, thinking that he is creating a glorious personal legend. Lina, moved by the boy's candour, works hard to win him a reprieve. But only a short reprieve. For by taking Charley into her own home as a measure of protection for the boy, Lina in fact hastens his drift into serious crime because her proclivity, like that of the boy's stepmother, is not only to overlook the boy's delinquency, but to protect him also against all possible restraints. In her home, Charley is so idle that he spends his time inventing such fantastic stories that they "all run aground . . . upon some shoal of fact" (CMD 182).

There is always this conflict between the dream and the fact. When in his effort to escape the boredom of Lina's home he returns to the gang, he discovers that even his dream of a heroic place among the children has vanished. In fact, his brush with the law has made him an outcast because even his former admirers now treat him with open disdain. His cherished hope of setting up a happy children's society based on mutual affection and sympathy has also been dashed by the

emergence of the wilfully perverse and cruel Morton as nominal leader during Charley's enforced absence. His return to the gang leads to the inevitable conflict with Morton and the attempted drowning of Charley which is averted by Lizzie's valiant rescue effort.

The rescue episode marks what is probably the most significant turning point in *Charley is My Darling*. The whole episode is narrated with brutal ironies. Lizzie, by her rescue effort, is taking upon herself a responsibility which properly belongs to adults but which they have failed to discharge. With the careless ease of the skilled craftsman, Cary slips the information through Susan (Lizzie's younger sister), that Phyllis Hawes, the assistant billeting officer, had passively watched the attack on Charley, had seen his rescue by the girl, and would now help spread the gossip that Lizzie had gone off with Charley (CMD 211). Lizzie's rescue effort, and Susan's whole night's vigil while she waited anxiously to find out what had happened to her sister, constitute an indirect but stinging condemnation of adult unconcern for the children. It is certainly not without significance that when the children, drenched to the skin and shivering with cold, go to Mrs. Parr's kitchen in search of warmth and shelter, they find the old woman enjoying a hot bath, "lifting her legs into the air with surprising agility" (CMD 197) and obvious sensual enjoyment. She is unaware, of course, that the simple pleasure of a hot bath which she takes for granted is not available to the children even in their hour of great need without recourse to unlawful means. But what indicts her is the totally condemnatory attitude she adopts when she finds the children in the morning locked in each other's arms on her hearthrug with a horse blanket over their heads. As Charley flees with his

clothes in his arms, Mrs. Parr looks down on the girl, crimson with shame and clumsily trying to cover her nakedness and places her at once in one of her "*fixed categories of ideas.*"

> She has placed Lizzie among the lost, the bad, and therefore she considers that she has no right to modesty. Modesty in such as Liz is conceit. She says only: "I can see how you are and I see how that boy Charles was, too. I bant saying nothing. Bant none of my business, thank God. But you better hurry, young missy, if you don't want Mrs. Brown in the kitchen telling all the rest of em at the 'Green Man'" (CMD 210, italics added).

The irony is that she is in fact adopting Mrs. Brown's (Charley's stepmother's) attitude of concealing the delinquent acts of the children. What makes the irony so pungent is that by unlawfully gratifying their sexual passion, the children have, in the view of the adults, gone beyond delinquency. They have made, though without premeditation, a dangerous incursion into an adult domain without the means or the knowledge to face up to its responsibilities. And by refusing to speak up, Mrs. Parr misses the opportunity to help reclaim the children and is therefore guilty of a grave dereliction of adult moral responsibility. Nor is the severe moral judgment she makes against the children entirely justified. For even if the children lost their innocence when they yielded to passion, they did not also lose their moral sense. Lizzie remained, throughout the night of transgression, full of responsible concern for the rights of Mrs. Parr. And after she has surrendered herself to Charley, she begins to feel a keener sense of attachment to and responsibility for the boy which goes far beyond the fleeting moment of passion. Moreover, it is clear from subsequent events that her new connection with Charley makes her the matriarch of the gang. But the matriarch is also a precocious child, and

if the impulsive child sometimes pulls the faltering adult within toward errant behaviour, it is largely for want of stable and certain guidance.

Even Charley is still capable of moral scruple. He feels a strong aversion towards Morton not out of any malice, but out of the clear recognition that he is a dangerous character:

> He did not want to fight Mort. He felt a miserable certainty that Mort would beat him with contemptuous ease and that he would have no mercy on a beaten enemy. Mort was capable of anything. Cruelty, and boys like Mort in whom he felt a ruthless quality, always terrified Charley. His imagination gave him penetration, by intuitive feeling, into the dangers to be feared from those who take delight in cruelty; their persistence, their desire always for greater cruelties, their complete lack of scruple, their enjoyment in giving pain (CMD 216).

Yet in a second encounter with Morton in which he gets the upper hand, Charley suffers from the thought that he might have been too severe on his opponent even though he sustained a head injury in the fight. In fact, Morton offers the sharpest possible contrast to Charley's character. Cruel, vindictive and greedy, his subjugation only adds to Charley's problems with the adult world because Morton is the typical parasite of society. He puts nothing into the gang but wants all that he can squeeze from it. His persistent demands for substantial loot rather than the trifles which Charley steals to provide tokens of love for Lizzie and amusement for himself certainly contributed to the rash of thefts which preceded the raids on Burls House.

It is significant that the second raid on Burls House, the one crime that is *premeditated* and *planned* by the children, was first suggested by Morton out of greed. "The real stuff is in Burls House," he tells Charley and the gang (CMD 225). But the disclosure by Ginger that the house also contains valuable jewels raises doubts in Charley's

mind because he separates purse snatching and minor pilfering, which are childish pranks, from robberies of jewels which for him are criminal actions. The moral sense is there, but the tempting idea has been planted in his mind, and as usual with Charley, the fleeting moment of moral scruple is superseded by a strong desire for the audacious deed. Thus his first climb into Burls House is a typical Charley Brown action, undertaken for the excitement rather than the material reward it brings. But its success makes Charley so recklessly bold that even the certainty of capture by the police cannot deter him. His heedless actions and the fears they cause in the other children have in fact become functional in an important way: they satisfy Charley's half-conscious determination to dominate the gang in spite of Morton.

Of course the motive for action remains hidden to the hero himself because it is Cary's view that man is impelled to action by feeling rather than thought. Thus when on the second and vastly more destructive raid on Burls House Charley is confronted by Morton's charge that he had brought Lizzie along so that they would all be captured, he is unable to explain his conduct:

> Charley himself cannot answer this. He cannot say: "So that I could see Burls House again and play the master of it," because he does not know this answer himself. Even to Charley, it would have seemed fantastic. His game of host seems to him a game, an amusing improvisation, and *not the deliberate act of his real will, long fostered and cherished* (CMD 271, italics added).

In the house itself, he and Lizzie usurp the rights of host and hostess. But when he is drunk, his conduct betrays the deliberate act of his real will which is at the still centre of his desire to play master of Burls House. The deliberate act of the will is centred on an unconscious but long fostered determination to wreak vengeance

on a society which has denied him the right to constructive, meaningful self-expression and self-realisation. His vengeance is directed against Burls House because it is the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Wandle, dilletanti of the arts, patrons and friends of Lommax who, between them, had engaged in the abstract discussion of art referred to earlier while Charley waited in vain for instructive information. We recall the boy's feeling of outrage which he could express only in mimicry and crude obscenities. It is not a coincidence that even in his drunken rage Charley first picks on the most cherished creation by Lommax, his imitation of the Van Gogh corn field about which he had spoken with characteristic vanity: "how it succeeded--how it came off--man, it was a stroke of genius and how did ah do it? God knows . . . And yet, I brought off that corrn--the finest corrn in penting" (CMD 160). But Charley's final verdict on it is that it is "corny" (CMD 280).

It must also be noted that while Charley was still limiting himself to a verbal attack on the dilletantism of the Wandles, it is Bert whose abject poverty puts him permanently at the lowest level of the village hierarchy and exposes him to social ostracism even among the children, who goes on the rampage, smears expensive dresses and bursts the first canvas before he is joined by Morton and Charley. For Morton, the destruction of valuable property is an expression of *Schadenfreude*. For Bert and Charley, the unlawful use, even the wanton destruction of adult property is the ultimate expression of their "rage against beauty and dignity by those who have neither but feel the want" (CMD 10). Bert's feelings against the injustices of society are so strong that during the ominous trip to Twyport, he was the only one who did not feel a twinge of conscience over the theft of the cars and

the purse. On the other hand, Charley's unreflective life leaves him, at the conscious level, with no clearly defined hostilities towards the world. His actions are spontaneous and he is guided solely by the intuitive grasp of the needs of the moment. Thus when Morton sends the first bottle through the picture glass and the canvas behind it, Charley is overwhelmed by feelings of amazement, perplexity, and finally, delight. "He sees what can be done with pictures, expensive pictures, to produce a definite and glorious sensation" (CMD 283). That is to say, Charley has grasped by intuition the method of his revenge against society. He is going through a cognitive process which Cary describes in *Art and Reality* in these terms: "Knowledge by intuition is like a flash between two electric poles. It is only after it has taken place that the mind asks, 'What has happened to me?'"[2] This is precisely the reaction of Charley when he wakes up next morning in the bedroom of the Galor sisters after his symbolic act of revenge against society.

But the action of the children and Charley's further transgressions in the Galor home constitute an affront against the law of society for which there are certain penalties. His capture by Mr. Galor in the bedroom of his daughters and the discovery that Lizzie is expecting a baby by him brings an end to Charley's random search for a meaningful life. The capture of Charley will also bring the irreconcilable conflict between the coexistent but mutually incomprehensible worlds of adult and child to a poignantly dramatic end.

In a powerfully evocative scene, Cary shows what is probably his most dramatic presentation of mutual incomprehension between adult and child when Lina visits Charley in the remand home. For once Lina

is full of adult certitude and cocksureness when she reprimands Charley not for the thousands of pounds worth of damage to Burls House, but for getting Lizzie with child. Here is a part of the touching scene as Lina moves quickly from the damage to the house to Lizzie's pregnancy:

> "I simply couldn't believe it when I saw what you did at the Wandles', that beautiful house, but now they say you were drunk."
> "Yes, miss, that was it," Charley is eager to explain this act, so puzzling to himself. "I had too much at supper and then we began throwing things."
> "I thought you loved the pictures."
> "Yes, miss, I did." He frowns. "I don't know why I did such a stupid thing--cept I'd ad too much."
> "I am glad you are sorry."
> Lina speaks now with a peculiar reserve and stiffness. Charley's nerves, sensitive to every mood in a friend, feel this change, and he looks up anxiously, "I am sorry, miss--it was the drink--I bin a fool, I know--it was a wicked shame wot I done at Burls."
> Suddenly Lina looks directly at him and says in a severe tone: "What I can't understand at all is what you did to poor Bessie Galor."
> "Yes, miss," Charley turns very red.
> "Do you realise the terrible trouble you have brought upon her?"
> Charley says nothing. He feels at once confused. His forehead wrinkles in perplexity.
> "Haven't you anything to say for yourself?" Lina is surprised by the boy's silence and allows her anger to grow. "Do you know what you've done? Do you know she's going to have a baby--and she's not fifteen till next month?"
> "No, miss." He is startled, but he speaks still in a sulky tone. He is amazed by Lina's strange view of Lizzie. He has never thought of her as a poor country girl, unable to defend herself. To him she is Lizzie, a person full of odd and interesting characteristics, physical, moral and mental. He feels resentment against Lina but he says nothing. He does not know how to defend himself.
> "I can't understand it," Lina says, *but obviously she is sure that in this situation, at least, she can't be wrong.* "I didn't think you were like that."
> "Like what?" Charley thought. "What am I like?"
> "It's so cruel and mean--and you don't seem to care a bit."
> Charley is struggling against the woman's mysterious purpose, which he feels to be dangerous. He feels as if she is trying to push him into a dark place from which he will never escape. He has no words to describe a sense of guilt, a conviction of sin, but he feels by nervous imagination what they are.
> "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Charley--not even a little ashamed?" . . .
> "But I didn't--I didn't--it aint like that--" he wants to explain that neither he nor Lizzie are guilty of anything; that

> the same thing has happened to them both. But the idea is beyond him (CMD 322-24, italics added).

The effect of the interview, contrary to Lina's conclusions, is to widen the gulf between adult and child. The light view she takes of the damage to Burls House is in direct conflict with Charley's deep sense of guilt, a feeling he has never experienced before. But Lina's vehement and indignant condemnation of his affair with Lizzie causes a strong feeling of repulsion because, in Charley's view, an affair founded on mutual love is beyond reproach. Far from making Charley repentant, Lina's vehement anger leaves him with a new rage and a new and more cutting disappointment that the one person he has relied on for sympathy and understanding has also failed him. The result is to make him assume an attitude of callous indifference towards the pronouncements of adults. Now they could make him feel angry and anile but they could not reform him. "Since Lina had failed him he had lost confidence in all the world" (CMD 325).

It is with this new feeling of hopelessness and indifference that Charley confronts the magistrates next morning. The vindication of the boy's attitude is that the judicial magistrates, lacking Lina's sympathy, make even shallower judgments because, like Mrs. Parr, they are tied to their own fixed categories of ideas which, among other things, place in a "criminal" group any unauthorized gratification of a child's naturally powerful desires. When the magistrates, for example, notice Lizzie's anxiety to defend Charley and examine reports which describe her as a slow learner and a problem child who is nevertheless physically mature, they ignore their own impressions of her in

court and convict her on the basis of the reports. Cary's comment on this procedure rings with meaning:

> Even if any of the magistrates should realise, as probably all have done more than once, that the varieties of human character are infinite; and recollect, even in their own experience, illiterates whose judgment and wisdom made them sounder advisers, better friends, than many learned men, they have no right or justification to take notice of the fact, or time to attempt better acquaintance with a child, who is, in all probability, just what she is described (CMD 326-7).

But even Cary's objectivity, his willingness to ascribe a measure of validity to the views of the magistrates, cannot deceive us. We know, even before the reports are contemplated, that Lizzie is not what she is described. On the contrary, we know that the very Lizzie whom the tyranny of village opinion has placed in the category of half-wit is the same character who repeatedly makes statements that reverberate with meaning far beyond the narrow confines of Burlswood. In her final conversation with Charley, she captures the ineluctable tragedy of the child in a fixed world: "I want to be like I am and I want ee to be like you are, Charl. But we can't do nothing, can we--when they get hold of us" (CMD 340). They cannot be what they are because no adult has the time, the knowledge or the patience to find out what they are or what they want to be. They cannot do anything to change their place in society because they are so utterly helpless against the static order of the adults. But it is left to Lizzie again to make the poignant final thrust against the partial and unjust assumptions that lead to the condemnation of the adolescents and their final separation: "They didden know about us--how could they if they wurn't us?" (CMD 341). The brutal irony behind these simple utterances is that they create the impression that Lizzie's so-called deafness,

like the blindness of Teiresias, leaves her with a clearer perception of the cruel realities of her society than those who claim full possession of their senses.

In the trial scene, Cary is not questioning the necessity and soundness of the law. What he questions is the inflexible application of the law and the despotism of adult opinions that are invariably derived from very fragmentary evidence. The fact that the magistrates gloss over the question of the damage to Burls House but dwell at length on the ugliness of Charley's "crime" against Lizzie suggests a double standard of justice in which the *moral* law is the primary weapon against adolescent offenders. Charley's defiant reaction to their views underlines the irreconcilable positions of adult and child.

> In two minutes Charley is once more in tears. He can't speak. But now, underneath this violent hysterical emotion, there is fury like steel, a deep resolute anger. It is the protest of all his honesty against a lie, and a defilement (CMD 329).

But even this violent fury against the lie and the defilement is futile. Charley discovers in the last minute what Lizzie knew all the time: that the adults will try to mould them to ensure conformity. As the police push him through the hood of a small car into a small, dark corner of the interior, he recognises the fact of his physical and symbolic entrapment. "'They'll smother me' is the first thought that occurs to him for some minutes. But he submits, patiently and humbly, to be pushed" (CMD 243). This is Charley's final surrender to a harsh reality that has already smothered his creative talents and is sending him to a correctional home from which he will probably emerge a hardened criminal full of rage and vengeance against the world. As one critic remarks, the children

> are doomed not in practice by what they have done but by their age, even though 'we ain't kids now.' Neither is ever self-pitying, but they do feel their own natural dignity, and it is this that is denied them. This is their tragedy and the irreconcilable clash, shown in the unconscious irony and ambiguities of the constable's final remark: 'That's all right--she can't be too particular can she?'[3]

The constable's remark, which ends the novel, is ironic but hardly ambiguous. The remark comes when Lizzie faints, the police believe, because of hunger, and want to offer her sandwiches which one of them thought might be harmful because they contain mustard. The remark is therefore a frank and inconsiderate denial to the child of the right to proper consideration and dignity, thus ending the novel on the same note of deprivation on which it began. The only difference is that the constable's remark is not as good-natured as that with which Phyllis Hawes tried to soothe Charley's wounded pride at the beginning.

It is perhaps a weakness of *Charley is My Darling*, as it is of *Mister Johnson*, that the hero feels hardly any responsibility for his actions. Just before Charley embarks on his serious crimes, some of which are intentionally planned, Cary still maintains that the crimes are not the product of an evil will. Charley is fully aware of the torment and even the agony his thefts were causing his friends and, in particular, Lizzie.

> But the will was not like a partition. It was a tunnel of glass set on an incline, down which he was flying. He knew where it ended, in a police station, but this amused him more than anything else. He made jokes about it in the same tone and manner as his stepmother was accustomed to make jokes about thrashings (CMD 256).

If, as is clearly implied in this statement, Charley is either propelled to action by an inscrutable power over which he has no

control; or that even with the full knowledge of the consequences of his violations he can do no more than show frivolous amusement, then he seems hardly competent to judge his own actions or dispute the judgment of others. For an author who writes on the basic premise that man is a free and creative being, the suggestion that man does act without deliberation, without free choice, cannot but weaken the foundation itself. It is clear, of course, that *Charley is My Darling* has a sharply defined pattern of deprivation, random search, followed by the discovery of an exciting but dangerous means of satisfying one's needs. It is also equally clear that the children always suffer the deprivation while the adults always fail to help and guide when help and guidance are needed. For this reason, we feel greater sympathy for Lizzie because she never loses her moral sense or her self-possession and does what she does in search of the happiness she has never known. On the other hand, our sympathy for Charley is diminished by his nearly complete want of self-control.

In spite of these reservations, *Charley is My Darling* remains an eloquent plea to adults to accord a full measure of respect to children, to recognise that they have pressing physical and mental needs, to temper justice with mercy, always taking full cognizance of the motives behind their actions. The novel is also a searching exploration of the dangers of a starved imagination.

II. *A House of Children*

A House of Children, published directly after *Charley is My Darling*, offers a corollary to its predecessor: that the creative energy of the child can express itself in a positive rather than a negative way provided the adults offer the right kind of leadership. The duty of the adult to the child is both delicate and difficult. He must guide when guidance is needed, guard without being unduly protective, soothe and reassure the child when failure or problems make him nervous and insecure. These are the responsibilities which confront and overwhelm the adults in *Charley is My Darling*. The reasons for their failure are abundantly clear. The billeting officers and the magistrates are educated and well-intentioned, but they rely too much on theory, respect only their own viewpoints, and tend to treat the children as if they possess a collective mind rather than as individuals, each with a uniquely creative mind of his own. Teachers and parents, on the other hand, are either abysmally ignorant, indifferent or over-protective. This situation is reversed in *A House of Children*. The parents are solicitous but not over-indulgent; Pinto, the teacher, is a visionary anarchist who, like Lommax and Gulley Jimson, disparages formal education; but unlike Lommax with his hearty disdain for children, Pinto is at times so childish in his behaviour and yet so imaginatively responsive to the world around him that children find him stimulating and irresistible. Despite the autobiographical foundation of *A House of Children*, therefore, the two novels of childhood are complementary: in *Charley is My Darling*, Cary uncovers the terrifying dangers and the utter waste of human potential

that can result from the failure of adults to provide sustaining nourishment to the child's mental and emotional needs; in his autobiographical novel, we see children experiencing the terrors and the excitements of childhood, improvising and creating in a free world that is firmly under the unobtrusive control of the adults.

In form, however, *A House of Children* is unique in the range of Cary's fiction. Picturesque and idyllic in setting, the novel is narrated in a prose of sustained lyrical quality, stylized in a few places, but retaining its pleasant freshness throughout. But this beauty is largely evocative rather than instructive. In *Charley is My Darling*, the comic descriptions of Charley, of the damp cave in which the children seek refuge, or of Burls House where they express their angry protest against adult indifference, are all central to the meaning of the novel. The descriptions in *A House of Children*, on the other hand, are, on the whole, evocative of the sensuous beauties that surround the children. The few notable exceptions include Aunt Hersey's house, Dunamara, which is the house of children, and Shell Port cave which is an obvious analogue for the shell (poetic lyre) of the imagination. Even so, Dunamara lacks the rich associations of Tolbrook Manor which is either a monument to the successes and failures of the Wilcher family, or a museum in miniature of the rise and fall in English fortunes; nor, for that matter, is it freighted with the ironies of Palm Cottage to which people retire in search of the peace that eludes them elsewhere only to undergo greater torment of body and soul.

The most serious limitation of *A House of Children*, however, is in its narrative technique. We are aware, throughout, of the two voices: the voice of the child recalling and recording his early

impressions and recreating for the reader a vivid picture of the terrors and joys of childhood; and in the background is the directive voice of the adult commenting and lending significance to what was merely a frightful or pleasant experience for the child. Cary is unable in his first use of the first person narrative to blend the two voices or turn the unreflective recollection of the past into a many-sided mirror through which the narrator sees several fleeting images of himself while the reader recognises numerous others that escape the notice of the self-worshipping heroine or hero. In the trilogies which follow *A House of Children*, Cary uses the first person narrative technique with such a rare skill that the two voices are indistinguishable. Tom Wilcher in *To Be A Pilgrim* and Chester Nimmo in *Except the Lord* dwell at length on their childhoods in an effort to explain the strange adults that they are. But in each case the retrospective narrative is given by a man of rich and varied experiences whose meditative and introspective habits make the interpretative and philosophical comment as plausible as it is natural. This dual role of narrator and commentator is never achieved by Evelyn Corner, the hero of *A House of Children*. He evokes the sensuous beauties of childhood and whenever the evocation has a deeper meaning for the child, the author steps in and comments directly. This is necessary because Cary maintains throughout the novel that the attitudes, the responses to experience and the basic concerns of the child are radically different from those of the adult. The difference does not, however, derive from mutual incomprehension as it does in *Charley is My Darling*, but rather from the divergent preoccupations of child and adult.

Cary admits in the preface to *A House of Children* that the novel is autobiographical and that for reasons he cannot explain, he split himself into two characters, Evelyn and his brother, Harry (AHC 7). The division, in fact, represents two aspects of Cary's mature personality: Evelyn shows the artistic temperament, composing, experimenting, elated by success and depressed by failure, gay in one moment and brooding the next and, above all, apprehensive of adverse criticism of his work; Harry, by contrast, objectifies the optimist in Cary, displaying "a passionate belief in all his schemes" (AHC 149), indifferent to criticism and not easily daunted by failure, anxious to respect the laws which govern his life, but ready to break them when they hinder his plans. Harry, in short, represents that complex duality in man, his inventiveness and determination to do things in his own, often unorthodox way, which fascinated and terrified Cary throughout his life.

The autobiographical parallels must not, however, be pressed too far, because Cary is more romantic than realistic in this novel. Opening when Evelyn is eight, the age at which Cary lost his mother, *A House of Children* omits all references to this vital fact and, for that matter, to every other unhappy recollection emanating from his links with northern Ireland where the novel is set. It is true, of course, that the book does occasionally capture the terrors of childhood, but these terrors do not arise, as they do in *Charley is My Darling*, from neglect and uncertainty. They are a necessary part of the child's endless search for novelty and result from his encounters with the strange, and the seemingly fantastic and mysterious in the environment. In fact, these terrors are salutary rather than harmful

because in the spacious, free and secure world of these children, there are always knowledgeable adults in the background willing to explain the "mysteries" and offer reassurance when it is needed.

But the confident and festive tone of much of *A House of Children* represents Cary's own mature response to the problems of existence. The gaiety of Evelyn, the child, is to become the stoic calm of Cary, the adult. This attitude is not based, as it might seem at first, on a desire to escape the ugly and the sad aspects of life. It is a view which Cary sincerely held and which he recognised in the Blakean injunction to man: Go love without the help of anything on earth. This is the philosophy of life which through Gulley Jimson, the articulate spokesman in *The Horse's Mouth*, Cary will recommend to those who oppose the evils of this life with a sad melancholy. Thus in his lonely Nigerian outpost, "amid many vexations and frustrations, he wrote down in his diary that 'life is a birthday present.'"[4] This ability to confront the vexations of life with the cheerfulness of a birthday party is one of the treasured possessions of childhood. He makes the point quite forcefully in one of the many philosophical comments that punctuate the narrative and raise it above the level of a picturesque idyll with a series of pleasant reminiscences:

> The only certain distinction I can find between childhood and maturity is that children grow in experience and look forward to novelty; that old people tend to be set. This does not mean even that children enjoy life more keenly than grown-ups, they are only more eager for experience. Grown-ups live and love, they suffer and enjoy far more intensely than children; but for the most part on a narrower front. For the average man or woman of forty, however successful, has been so battered and crippled by various accidents that he has gradually been restricted to a small compass of enterprise. Above all, he is perplexed. He has found out numerous holes and inconsistencies in his plan of life and yet he has no time to begin the vast work of making a new one . . .

> I think that is the reason for the special sadness of nearly all grown-up faces, certainly of all those which you respect; you read in their lines of repose, the sense that there is no time to begin again, to get things right. The greater a grown man's power of enjoyment, the stronger his faith, the deeper and more continuous his feeling of the waste of life, of happiness, of youth and love, of himself.
>
> But for children life seems endless, and they do not know a grief that has no cure (AHC 66-67).

This astute observation is of course imposed on the consciousness of the eight-year old Evelyn by the middle-aged Cary. This kind of comment has a special value, however. It lends significance and meaning to the remembrance of things past, making childhood recollections timeless because they are instilled with the wisdom of a perceptive adult mind. Moreover, when Cary makes particular rather than general observations about his childhood, his determination to present a balanced and fair picture emerges quite clearly. This balance, this objectivity, is typical of his mature fiction. Thus referring to the early training which prepared him for his role as an imperial administrator, and his reaction to the experience afterwards, he remarks:

> The teaching, too, was little more worldly than that of a nurse, who, for her own sake, teaches the purest Christian unselfishness. It was mixed, of course, with patriotic and imperial sentiments; but all with stress upon duty and responsibility. To be an Englishman was to be born to a great destiny; as warrior and guardian of freedom and justice and peace. . . .
>
> Of course we heard nothing of the other side of the old empire: the gold grabbers; the cotton lords of India; and we had no conception, for our masters had none, of a real freedom. Our idea, like theirs, was abstract and legal, or romantic. We had no notion that poverty came into the question and was, with ignorance, the chief enemy of freedom (AHC 34).

Although this recollection of his early education is accurate, it is evident, as the story progresses, that Cary is interested in creating a world which will correspond not so much with the realities of his childhood as with that delicate refinement and orderliness which

he admired and identified with the domestic life of the middle class in eighteenth-century England. This is particularly noticeable in the creation of Evelyn's father. Combining the rigorous discipline of the classical mind with the tolerance of the twentieth century, Evelyn's father is the direct opposite of Pinto whose surliness and caprice are the symptoms of the present "with its suspicious reaction from anything like a grand manner" (AHC 186). The father therefore emerges as a symbolic rather than a realistic figure. He appears and disappears at will, enforcing, by his own example, the observance of "certain courtesies which belonged to the great age of polite forms and social ease" (AHC 186). He is therefore the centre of social order, directing and stimulating the children at play, charming the fractious Pinto and directing his iconoclastic energies into productive channels and giving to Aunt Hersey the moral support she sometimes needs in caring for the children. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of *A House of Children* is that unlike the many other accounts of childhood in the fiction of Cary, it emphasises not the clash of generations but the harmony between adult and child. What is more, this harmony is achieved not by beating the child into submission but by convincing him that he has a vested interest in preserving order.

To create this kind of harmonious world, Cary does two things. Firstly, he creates a unique group of adults to look after the children: Evelyn's father is energetic and sprightly and brings into the performance of his duties a degree of flexibility and understanding which no other parent in Cary's fiction ever approaches; Pinto is surly and capricious, but, like children, he lives by his imagination and although he makes severe demands on the young, he is a lively, amusing,

and dependable companion whose presence is always reassuring; Aunt Hersey shows the mellow somberness which, according to Cary, is common to adults; yet although she is often anxious when the children seem to engage in dangerous enterprises, she never loses that presence of mind which makes her a centre of hope and comfort in moments of fear and perplexity. The morbidly sad Uncle Herbert is kept at a safe distance from the children so that they can observe his irascibility without being affected by it. Secondly, Cary emphasises the tribal feeling of the children not so much as a protective garb to fend off adult unconcern, as it is in *Charley is My Darling*, but rather, as an expression of autochthonic instincts. The tendency to idealize life in *A House of Children* is less noticeable in the portrayal of the tribal organisation of the children. Evelyn recalls some of the occasions when he is surrounded by members of his tribe, "and all of them, shouting, laughing, weeping, furious or affectionate, are full of impatience"(AHC 13). But beneath that confusion which is also a primitive and natural expression of affection, there is a whole complex of tribal laws and taboos which ensure the proper observance of decorum and etiquette within the tribe (AHC 14).

But for all this, the children in *A House of Children* are not different in kind from those in *Charley is My Darling*. What makes them look so different, in fact, is the attitude of the adults which ultimately determines the relationship of child to adult. Evelyn and his companions show the same reckless daring, the inventiveness and destructiveness, the passionate attachments and the sudden revulsions that lead to fights, as Charley and his band of roving outlaws do. Yet, there is a difference. Whereas in Evelyn's tribe the leaders are

drawn from the same clan so that alliances are easier to make and can survive the occasional feuds, Charley, with his heterogeneous band of evacuees and native villagers, can impose order only by the force of his imagination which gives him a limited authority over his tribe. The feuds are therefore more severe in his tribe and much more difficult to heal. But again the difference is due to the wholesome influence of the adults in Evelyn's world, and the operation of pure chance[5] which deprives Charley and his companions of parental affection and solicitude. Remove this element of chance which makes the influence of the adults on Charley and his companions so largely negative, and you get a picture which is essentially the same as that of *A House of Children*.

Cary remarks that "Among ten children of all ages . . . , you could find enthusiasts for every plan, from tearing out bell-wires by the roots to a prayer-meeting; or to digging for gold pots under the footmark of a rainbow" (AHC 12). This is the view of childhood which controls the atmosphere of *Charley is My Darling* and turns the imaginative youths into delinquents when their excessive desire for novelty is left unchecked. In *A House of Children*, the search for new and exciting experiences is very keen, but that keenness of desire is tempered and controlled by the need to observe "the dignity of a classical order" (AHC 12) which pervades the atmosphere of Dunamara. Occasionally, however, the orderliness and dignity become so boring that the children seek escape through mischievous actions that prove irritating to careworn adults. Thus while sitting at a party in the home of their rich neighbours, Evelyn is easily lured away by a nameless red-cheeked boy and persuaded to climb to the roof of a house. Once on the rooftop

they forget their fear of falling off, and shriek for attention; when no one notices, they send piles of snow through the chimney, ruining a whole dinner and smashing a light and a bed.

The reactions to this piece of mischief are as diverse as they are instructive. Those adults who are embarrassed or depressed by the news induce the same feelings in Evelyn and force him to recognise the seriousness of his offence. There is no trace here of that severe moral tone which adults so often adopt when confronted with the infractions of children in the novels of Cary. In fact, Pinto takes the wind out of the whole affair by arguing that the boy had gone up the roof to change the situation, to escape from the staleness of routine. Pinto's final counsel to the boy is simple: "Don't you let them sit on the safety valve--it'll stop your engine altogether." Cary remarks that this advice is typical of an age in which men believe "that all restraint upon living natural impulse is evil, and that ugliness and unhappiness arise only from restraint" (AHC 78). This typical example of twentieth-century permissiveness might lead to anarchy, as Cary suggests, but it is not without its moral value. Evelyn is already sufficiently impressed with the seriousness of his offence, so that Pinto's advice is not likely to make him indifferent to it, but will ensure that the child is not entirely deprived of adult sympathy and support. The complete loss of such sympathy and support is a major factor in alienating Charley from the adult world. Furthermore, the moral atmosphere of Dunamara is sufficient by itself to chasten the offender. The children, for example, rally to the support of a fellow in distress, but make no attempt to applaud the deed or hold up the doer as a hero. Indeed, the children make no attempt to hide their

disapproval of the offence, although they do not have to go to the other extreme of ostracizing a member to satisfy adult opinion.

Apart from those experiences which help to develop the child's moral sense, Cary dwells at length on the mood of joyful anticipation and fulfilment which characterises the lives of the children at Dunamara:

> We were not the pathetic deceived infants of the story-books, entering step by step the prison shades of grown-up disillusionment, we were confident of happiness because we had had it before. Our several expectations were sometimes not realised, but that was usually because our whole expectation was being renewed every hour. We didn't notice the disappointments because our minds were full of something else, something new, something interesting. (AHC 28).

This ceaseless search for new and interesting experiences is the very heart of man's creativity. In children it is a spontaneous and delightful exercise which has a special value because it teaches the child to learn to live with disappointment or even failure. The decision of Harry and Evelyn to write and produce their own plays illustrates this point. Once the other children join them, it becomes apparent that we are witnessing a typical Carian situation. Each child insists on writing his own part because play-acting is so much unlike the life they lead that they decide to make something meaningful out of the experience: a projection into the future, a creation of those ideal forms with which they would like to identify as adults. Yet when the inevitable failure follows this chaotic procedure, the children are not left to brood and repine; they are encouraged by the doughty Aunt Hersey to look at and appreciate the positive sides of their production. And although the failure is shattering to the self-confidence of the child, its ultimate effect is chastening and wholesome. It turns an

overweening and self-conceited child into a self-reliant adult with a realistic sense of the limitations of his powers. Moreover, Cary notes much later on in the story, the experimental spirit which is fostered in the child by exercises such as play-writing survives and influences his behaviour as an adult (AHC 196).

The incomparable achievement of a richly creative adult mind is set against the schematic experimentation of the child to drive home the vital lesson that artistic creation involves much more than the ability to recall half-digested statements from various sources. *The Tempest*, produced by the imaginative Pinto, disabuses Harry of all his pretensions to the name of playwright and fills Evelyn with the beauty and profundity of poetry and, above all, with its power to shape the moral consciousness. Shakespeare's poetry, with its blend of fantasy and realism, appeals to the children enormously. It also forces Evelyn to *feel* the difference between this highly evocative and instructive kind of poetry and his own early poetic experiments, repetitious, rhythmic, earthy, jingoistic and never able to go beyond the recording of the minutiae of various insects he has observed on the environment. It is a humbling experience which Evelyn never forgets and which, along with the criticisms of his relatives, was to temper his self-confidence with modesty. The anticipation of artistic fame survives the experience, but not without a realistic awareness of personal limitations and the willingness to accept momentary setbacks with a philosophical composure.

All this moral and artistic development in the child is made timeless by deliberately avoiding a strict adherence to a chronological time scheme. In fact, in keeping with his desire to evoke only the

happy memories of his childhood, Cary successfully creates the illusion that we are following the progress of the children through one long spring and summer season. The changes that take place in the life of each child are measured, therefore, not by the passage of so many years, but by the impact of certain events on the impressionable mind. Almost invariably, the change involves leaving the carefree world of children for the world of adults with its responsibilities, doubts, uncertainties and fears. For the girls, there is often no halfway house. They jump straight from the careless freedom of childhood to the onerous responsibilities of adulthood, looking after a home and a husband, and bringing to the performance of their new tasks a surprising degree of maturity. For the boys, there is often some respite and even preparation in a public school. Evelyn observes all these changes with a great deal of surprise and fascination:

> Though I did not notice real changes I was accustomed to the idea that the whole world was changing all the time. I was growing up and I saw in front of me a row of new lives, public school, university, a career, like doorways leading through some place, each room larger and more magnificent than the last. All round me my cousins of all ages were growing up, going to school, getting married; disappearing to the far corners of the world or suddenly appearing before me in uniform wth [sic] large moustaches and stories of some war. I lived in the idea, in the very sense of change, of life flying like the water in the mill leat and throwing up its little dancers, always new, always different, but never going far out of the pattern (AHC 155-56).

Here Cary captures at the level of statement rather than of dramatisation, his belief that change is continuous and ceaseless in the world and that those who live fully and act instead of being acted upon are those who possess a great deal of imagination and creative energy of their own. But the keen sense of expectancy, the high hopes which colour all of Evelyn's vision is caught in the richly

sensuous images of the last sentence--a sentence, incidentally, that is typical of much of the poetic charm of *A House of Children*. Occasionally, Cary returns to the subtle rendering of his ideas. The presentation of a major change in one boy, for example, is used to give Evelyn the necessary mental and emotional preparation for his own entry into a public school. Thus when Aunt Hersey's son, Robert, goes into a public school and appears miserable and dissatisfied with everybody and everything for a whole year, Evelyn secretly suffers with his cousin and wants his problems solved because he realises that they are essentially the same as those he would have to face in a few years. Evelyn follows the search for a solution to his cousin's problems with a keen secret passion, watching Delia, Robert's sister, as she strives to shake her brother out of his dejection. Recalling one of the many emotional debates between Robert and Delia, Evelyn says:

> I had been astonished by the conversation, which, like so many overheard grown-up conversations, had opened new windows for me almost at every sentence. I don't mean that I saw clearly, at that time, the misery of Robert's position, and the fact that such a position can ruin a child's whole nature in a short time; change him from the brave, confident and enterprising boy that Robert had been a year before into a spiteful useless kind of being, dangerous to himself and everybody else. Neither did I form a clear notion of Delia's love, and her desperation while she tried to make some break in Robert's misery (AHC 131).

If we apply these observations to Charley Brown's case, we can see clearly one of the abiding differences between *Charley is My Darling* and *A House of Children*. Instead of the levity of Mrs. Brown or the inexperience of Lina Allchin which leaves Charley with the task of always finding solutions to his own problems, Robert, and by extension Evelyn, can always rely on adults to provide guidance and persist in the search for solutions to those problems which baffle the boy.

Those who sometimes point to Mrs. Brown's youth in defence of her irresponsible conduct forget that some of the most responsible females in Cary's world are girls in their teens. A much more plausible explanation seems to lie in the different attitudes and moralities of the ages in which each novel is set. *A House of Children* is Victorian: the few explicit references to dates are to the 1890's. *Charley is My Darling* is thoroughly twentieth-century and is set in the turbulence of the Second World War. There is therefore in the atmosphere of the former that cohesiveness and great social responsibility, that refinement and thoughtfulness which Cary associated with Victorian England. By contrast, there is a discernible air of fecklessness and feebleness, and a lack of responsible or mature social commitment in the adults who shape the lives of the children in *Charley is My Darling*. This is also the basis of the contrast in *The Moonlight* between the Venn sisters who are Victorians and their twentieth-century children whose levity and general want of purpose make them such poor successors to their parents. Significantly, Pinto who shows these same defects and who, in spite of his imagination, looks so crude and insignificant beside Evelyn's father, is identified as a bohemian romantic of the 1890's (AHC 184), but thoroughly twentieth century in his caprice and lack of good manners (AHC 187). If, therefore, the general atmosphere of *A House of Children*, with its nurses, private tutors and other forms of visible and invisible controls, seems tame or even staid, it is because Cary finds in that tame world the breeding ground for the people of taste and refinement, who are, in his view, so uncommon in the twentieth century.

Taken together then, the two novels of childhood provide a coherent and consistent picture. The various theses which Cary outlines

in the preface to *Charley is My Darling* are amply demonstrated in the novel itself. The child is creative and energetic, adventurous and audacious, but lacking in experience and therefore in need of adult leadership and guidance. Deny him that guidance and the necessary stimulus to his imagination and you turn a potential creator into a criminal. Evelyn is as imaginative and daring as Charley, but his very different situation never permits him to go astray for long without being drawn back into the fold. His cousins show the same tendency to violent disagreement as is evident among Charley's gang; but circumstances never permit the cousins to become too disagreeable to each other.

Cary summarises his views on the nature of childhood in another essay:

> Every child has to create its own idea of the world--how to conduct its own life, how to obtain security, how to realize its ambitions. We hear a good deal about the will to live, but this again is an abstraction. The will to live is, in fact, a will to a certain kind of experience, and it seems that, in mankind, it seeks always richness of experience. The child has an enormous zest for experience of every kind, and seeks to satisfy it by every possible means. But, in fact, it is never satisfied. It demands novelty. And as it grows, so does the desire of novelty grow.[6]

There is much wisdom in that and whether or not we produce Charley Browns or Evelyn Corners, criminals or responsible citizens, depends on our ability to guide and encourage the development of that self-discipline which the child needs to master his environment. This is the central idea that emerges out of the composite picture of childhood which Cary so beautifully creates for us.

PART III: The First Trilogy

CHAPTER IV

Every Man His Own Candle

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate are necessary to Human existence.
From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil.
Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

(Blake: *Complete Writings*, 149)

I

Of the various groups into which Cary's novels fall so naturally, the group of the First Trilogy constitutes his most considerable achievement. This view is widely accepted. But there is some disagreement about, even disparagement of, his technical accomplishment in this trilogy. The controversy centres largely on the lack of unity between the different parts. This is a justifiable complaint, but it seems to me that Cary is not sufficiently praised for his very skilful use of the first person narrative technique in this trilogy. I will, therefore, discuss his narrative technique briefly, in order to point out some of Cary's achievements.

In the preface to the Carfax edition of *Herself Surprised*, Cary refers briefly to the technical problems that confronted him in the writing of the First Trilogy, whose other parts are *To Be A Pilgrim* and *The Horse's Mouth*. The original plan, he reveals, was to allow one character to talk about the other two so that in the end we would have "a three-dimensional depth and force of character."

In practice this scheme . . . did not come off. The centre of the plan was character; the characters of my three leading persons in relation to, or in conflict with, other characters and the

> character of their times; (and beyond that, of course, with 'final' character, I mean the shape of things and feelings which are 'given', and which perhaps have to be so or nothing would exist at all)--the books had to be soaked in character (HS7).

According to Cary, the plan failed because to make Sara "talk about art and history" would have taken something away from "the essential Sara" and leave her a "diluted" character (HS 7). Barbara Hardy thinks, however, that there is another reason for this failure:

> When a major character in one action becomes a minor character in another he becomes an entirely different character. He may retain the given 'characteristics' but he changes his relation to the reader. Such a shift can perhaps be workable only within one novel, . . . or within one play . . .[1]

Attractive as it may appear, this explanation is simply untenable. For if this argument were valid we would feel the same weakness in the Second Trilogy where a major character in one novel inevitably becomes a minor character in another without jolting the reader into the feeling that the emotional continuity of the story has been broken as we so obviously feel when we come to the second book of the First Trilogy. The main reason seems to be, rather, in the dichotomy between the theme of art (art in the wide sense in which Cary frequently uses the term) which dominates *Herself Surprised* and *The Horse's Mouth*, and the theme of historical change which is the central focus of *To Be A Pilgrim*. Sara and Gulley are creative artists in Cary's sense of the term and therefore live in the moment and for the moment. They create and improvise to meet the exigencies of life. They have no fixed or long-term plans and even the short-term plans are subject to revision or even mutations. Wilcher, on the other hand, is chained to the past and lives in the past. He suffers great anguish whenever the present impinges on his ossified and sterile existence.

The past is for him the standard measure against which new moral codes and new styles of living must either be validated or invalidated. And when Cary tries to blend these two diametrically opposed elements of character into one story with two large but quite different themes, we feel the tension and lack of cohesion. On the other hand, the triple exposure of Sara and the double exposure of Tom Wilcher (a major character in *Herself Surprised* and the narrator and hero of *To Be A Pilgrim*), and Gulley, (he plays no significant role in the events of *To Be A Pilgrim*) far from depriving them of anything or making them different characters, gives to each the roundness and solidity that are so much a part of these formidable creatures.

In fact, it is the trilogy form which justifies Walter Allen's assertion that Cary "is 'the one Proteus' of the English novel today."[2] Apart from the wide range and variety of characters in the First Trilogy, Cary demonstrates enough technical virtuosity to dispel any doubts about the modernity of his art. Technically, the three-dimensional view of character, rooted as it is in Cary's belief in the subjectivity of experience and the isolation of the human mind, is, nevertheless, vitally innovative. In *Herself Surprised*, we feel the immediacy and the verisimilitude of the confessional as well as the crippling limitations of the first person narrative as Sara is forced by the technical demands of her story to confine herself to a reproduction of the facts of her life as she recalls them. But in the remaining two parts of the trilogy, Cary uses all the advantages of the first person narrative while skilfully avoiding its limitations.

Wilcher's account in *To Be A Pilgrim* is more of a national than a personal record; and by making Wilcher examine his life in relation

to the history of the times, Cary makes his narrator a free-lance commentator on three generations of English history: his parents, his own and that of his nephews and nieces. Furthermore, by marrying off the cousins, Robert and Ann, and housing them at Tolbrook with Wilcher, Cary allows two generations of the Wilcher family the direct contact and the close scrutiny that make their conflicts, their mutual recriminations and denunciations so completely credible. It must be noted that Ann, the conservative member of the new generation with whom Wilcher discusses so much of the past and the present, undertakes to write a biography of Edward, her father and a cynical politician who had risen to the position of junior minister in a Liberal government before his death. This undertaking enables her to talk with a certain degree of authority about her father's generation. Furthermore, Edward's couplets, which intersperse the narrative, are, in spite of their cynical tone, essential to a fuller understanding of the historical period under review. The effect of the use of these "devices" is to allow Cary to enjoy the best of two worlds. Wilcher, the narrator, becomes more than a "commanding centre;" he is more like a main stream with vital tributaries that join this main stream at a confluence to create a large river that can carry a great mass of material without choking itself out of existence. In other words, while most events in *To Be A Pilgrim* reach us through the consciousness of Wilcher, the couplets of Edward, the presence of Ann and Robert, their actions and their words modify Wilcher's views considerably without materially affecting his passionate feelings, the vividness, the intensity and coherence of his narrative. The result of all this is to give us a multiple point of view in a first person narrative. This is part of

Cary's technical accomplishment in the First Trilogy and should have received more attention from the reviewers and critics who talk so glibly about Cary's old-fashioned approach to the novel.

Nor is it possible for Cary to have written *The Horse's Mouth* the way he did without some knowledge of the techniques of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Gulley Jimson, the artist-narrator and protagonist, is the "commanding centre" in the Jamesean sense. But it is a live centre that radiates with ideas which have been formed out of the crucible of a lifetime of varied and searing experiences. As artist-narrator, Gulley is able to take liberties with his material, liberties which would seem presumptuous in an ordinary first person narrator.

The opening scene of *The Horse's Mouth* illustrates this point beautifully. Walking along the banks of the Thames after his release from prison, Gulley sees the rays of the sun filtering through the London mist and shedding its light on the river below where "a crooked bar of straw" is floating like a serpent on the "dusty water" with all its "dirt and oil from mud to mud." The alembic imagination immediately lends meaning and significance to this ugly collection of images so that the serpent becomes a "symbol of nature and love" and the dirty landscape becomes an emblem of "the eternal world" (HM 11). This deep and wide reach of the imagination makes Gulley's consciousness a kind of many-sided magical mirror that can reflect and transform images simultaneously. By creating a percipient artist as narrator whose imagination can be allowed free rein without unduly straining the reader's credibility, Cary widens the scope of his narrator's selectivity and therefore of the narrative itself. Gulley can quote the poetry of Blake one moment and criticise the philosophy of Spinoza the next without

appearing pompous or affected. Thus, while adopting a first person narrative for the whole of the trilogy, Cary modifies, expands and innovates within the tradition; in each case he adapts the medium to serve his particular needs.

II. *Herself Surprised*

The conflict between the three main characters of the First Trilogy is centred on their diametrically opposed views about the purpose of life. For Sara, man is a pilgrim in Wilcher's sense of the term, and an adventurer in search of a secure place where he can gratify his sensual pleasures. But this pilgrim, this adventurer who is perpetually searching for happiness and security is also a *servant*. We cannot make a proper assessment of Sara without taking into full account her devotion to service; service which, contrary to the simplistic views about her character, is rooted less in self-seeking than in generosity. For Gulley, on the other hand, man is first and last a free and creative artist. And as artist, he owes it to himself and to society to pursue his creation because man is both spirit and matter. Society is more inclined in a secular age to look after material needs and ignore the needs of the spirit. The artist, according to Gulley, is important because only art can provide nourishment to the human spirit. In his view, the violent clashes between him and Sara are a manifestation of the conflict between materiality and spirituality. But as we shall see when we take a closer look at Sara, the dichotomy is not so clear cut. The inter-personal conflicts between them and the conflict of each with society stem from the fact that each is a hardened individualist. Wilcher, on the other hand, smothers his

individuality in a vain effort to preserve a past era which is anything but glorious. He is therefore in conflict not with the other main characters, but with himself, his family, and above all, with time: time which destroys the old to which Wilcher is inseparably bound and creates the new to which he can never be reconciled. His life, chained to the past and to Tolbrook, is the antithesis to Sara's, the rootless wandering woman to whom creativity is synonymous with adaptability.

Of the three books of the trilogy, *Herself Surprised* is the most commonly misrepresented. The picaresque structure of the novel is partly responsible for this misrepresentation. It makes identification with Defoe's *Moll Flanders* an irresistible temptation for many readers as well as an escape from searching criticism. Cary himself, apparently realising that it is the structural similarity between the novels which is responsible for this tendency, points to the difference even at this superficial level when he remarks in a letter: "I designed Sara as the inveterate nest builder . . . and I don't think you could imagine anyone further than that from Defoe's old bawd."[3] It is true, of course, that the two heroines tell their histories with frank realism and lace their salacious stories with pietisms which offend against a modish twentieth-century distaste for moralizing. But against Defoe's episodic and rambling tale, we have Sara's neatly structured life with its four clearly defined periods: the Sara-Matthew Monday period when Sara rises above her lowly station as domestic servant to become the wife of the son of her middle-class employer and make a respectable public figure out of the female-dominated, vapid and clumsy man; the years following the death of Matthew when she becomes the common law wife of Gulley Jimson and tries in vain to turn him from a rebellious

artist to a respectable man of society; the long period of more than twelve years she spends in the service of Tom Wilcher during which she dominates the domestic life of a man who has a reputation for being difficult with servants; and, finally, the years of her twilight when she is cast out of Wilcher's service on the eve of her marriage to him because his aspiring heirs see her as a threat to their inheritance. These last years, described mainly in *The Horse's Mouth*, have a deep pathos as Sara, the ruling spirit of Tolbrook, becomes the castaway, drifting from one uncertain home to another, but still the devoted servant, providing Gulley with the sustenance that makes his art possible. And it is Cary's abiding tribute to a truly generous spirit that when Sara is accidentally killed in a struggle with Gulley for final possession of the last great reminder of their happiest years together--a portrait of Sara in the nude--she refuses to betray to the law authorities the one man she had loved and served with unfailing fidelity. This is also the structure of *The Horse's Mouth* where Gulley's paintings of the Fall, the Raising of Lazarus and the Creation are, in part, symbolic representations of periods of his artistic life, all of which are preceded by a period of social conformity when, like Sara and the rest of us, he grows up, finds a job, marries, settles in a home and raises a family.

Cary's moral purpose in *Herself Surprised*, however, has eluded many critics. Robert Bloom, echoing similar sentiments by Frederick Karl, remarks, in a brief analysis of the novel, that

> Sara's conception of herself is curiously indeterminate. She never ceases to surprise herself with what she is capable of. As readers, we are usually at a loss to decide when she is a genuine mystery to herself, impelled by deep, unsearchable springs of female energy and instinct, and when she is simply exploiting this mystery

> so as to excuse some rather questionable behavior. The comedy of the book resides, largely, in this second possibility. Her sexual generosity is as casuistic as it is bountiful, yet it has a distressingly plausible unavoidability about it as well.[4]

Even if Sara's view of herself is indeterminate, it does not follow that her character is indeterminable. Her retrospective narrative is an appeal to her ultimate juryman for a fair trial and an unbiased judgment. That juryman is the critical reader who has, at the end of the trilogy, all the facts from the defendant and the witnesses, so to speak, and must weigh the full evidence to arrive at a fairer verdict than that of the indignant judge who sentences Sara at the beginning of the novel. It is because the judge cannot have anything like the information at our disposal that we are required by Cary and the demands of judicious criticism to revise the original verdict. What is disturbing about the ringing condemnation of Sara's sexual generosity is that Robert Bloom, like those who hold similar views about Sara, finds hardly anything to castigate in Gulley's more reckless sexual life or his generally much more sordid and unfeeling treatment of women. The critics, in fact, are betraying a priggishness which we are often too ready to ascribe to a Victorian past but which leaves us with a double standard in our judgment of the sexual behaviour of men and women. This is another reason why the verdict against Sara must be re-examined.

According to that verdict, Sara "is another unhappy example of that laxity and contempt for all religious principle and social obligation which threatens to undermine the whole fabric of our civilization" (HS 9). The first thing to note is that this is a moral rather than a legal judgment. It is therefore to the moral conflict between the individual and the public on the one hand, and between

Sara and the other characters with whom she comes into direct contact on the other, that our judgment is directed.

Sara reacts to the verdict in two ways. At first she greets the pronouncement with utter disbelief. She feels that the court has misrepresented her by making a much worse character of her than she really is. But she is upset above all else by the assertion that she has no regard for religious principles. Finally, there is surprise over the feeling that perhaps the Sara of the judge's construction might be a part of the humble, competent, religious and harmless Sara of her own thoughts. She concludes by giving the judge the benefit of the doubt and admitting, in the tradition of the confessional, that perhaps she is worse than she thinks: "I couldn't deny that each little bit they brought against me was true; or nearly true; and that some things they did not know were worse" (HS 9).

Before going into the merits or demerits of Sara's views about herself, it is necessary to refer briefly to the philosophical foundation on which Cary's three-dimensional view of character rests. Invoking the authority of Hume in support of his belief in the subjectivity of experience and the isolation of the human mind, Cary remarks in *Art and Reality* that

> We are almost entirely cut off from each other in mind, entirely independent in thought, and so we have to learn everything for ourselves . . . It is easy to see that if we were not so cut off from each other, . . . we should not be free agents. Freedom, independence of mind, involves solitude in thought. We are not alone in feeling, in sympathy, but we are alone in mind, and so we are compelled, each of us, to form our own ideas of things . . .[5]

It is this view, which is the sustaining power of that militant individualism we learn to associate with all of Cary's major characters, that is dramatised in the trilogies. It is difficult to imagine three

people reared in the same age, sharing a certain portion of their lives together and yet apprehending reality from such totally divergent views as Sara, Wilcher and Gulley do. And when Cary says that each person's apprehension of reality is true, he is not prevaricating. He is recognising a fact of experience. People differ widely even about how to achieve a common goal and often mistake their own conceptual habits for the truth. It is therefore misleading to suggest that in the trilogy Cary "devised an indeterminate form by means of which he can explore an indeterminate world."[6] On the contrary, it is the different modes of apprehending reality, a very common fact of experience, which Cary explores in the trilogy form. No one can obtain the "final" truth about a fellow human being or offer a "final" interpretation of events. This is the philosophical foundation on which Cary's trilogies rest, and each of his three main characters in the First Trilogy has something vital to say on this problem.

Sara, as is appropriate for a woman of her education and background, stumbles on her discovery of this fact almost by accident. When she leaves Bradnall with her share of the Monday estate, she goes to Rozzie, her friend at Brighton; she tries to persuade her friend to join her in a hotel business, thinking that her own superb cooking and Rozzie's firmness would ensure success. She soon discovers, however, that the friend she has always thought of as a brave and bold person,is, for all her swagger and blustering manner, a coward who is forever running away from responsibility. The recognition of this side of Rozzie's character leads Sara to make an important observation about life: "So true it is your best friends have three sides in the dark to every one you see" (HS 86).

Wilcher's views are even more crucial because they refer directly to the charge against Sara and therefore to the public verdict on her character. To the nieces who hate and fear her, Sara is the woman the judge describes at the beginning. According to Wilcher, however, that view of Sara is false:

> They see Sara as a fat red-faced cook of forty-six. And they believe that this cook, a cunning and insinuating country woman, who had deceived two men before, swindled me and robbed me, and so enslaved me, by her sensual arts and smooth tongue, that I promised to marry her. . . . This is what they believe, and the facts are true; yet they believe a lie. The truth is, that when Sara came to me, I was a lost soul (TBP 35).

Here Wilcher is questioning the validity of the public view about Sara. He draws a line between the facts and the truth. The facts are accurate. But they do not necessarily reveal the truth because they exclude the feelings and motives of character.

At the beginning of his story, Wilcher makes a brief but important confession in connection with Sara's imprisonment: "It was I who was the unfaithful servant, and Sara, the victim. It was because I did not give Sara enough pay . . . that she ran into debt, and was tempted to take some useless trifles from the attic" (TBP 9). This confession corroborates and reaffirms Sara's version of the story. But Wilcher does not stop at that. He gives further proof of a deliberate intention to exploit Sara when he reveals that he and his estate agent knew all the facts about her previous minor brushes with the law when they decided to employ her because, in spite of her cleanliness, her even temper and good cooking, about which they also knew, she would accept a small wage in her present difficulties. There is also the independent evidence of the employment agency which warned Sara about the undesirability of Tolbrook even for a woman in distress. And when

Sara, having exhausted her resources, decides to go to Tolbrook because it is the only place open to her, she finds it in a shocking state of disrepair, infested with rats and cockroaches, its furniture covered with hard layers of dust. It is her work in improving this warren of a house that earns her the confidence and admiration of Wilcher who had suffered a great deal of irritation from malingering and irresponsible servants. But Sara's competence and devotion fail to earn her any substantial material reward. Instead, they bring increasing responsibilities and further exploitation as Wilcher's dependence on her grows. The omission of these aspects of the case makes the judge's verdict patently deficient if not altogether unjust. This is the crux of Sara's objection to the verdict when she reflects on it afterwards:

> Now it was said at the trial that I got Mr. W. into my clutches and drove away his own family; and did what I liked with him and robbed him of everything. It was made out so, or nearly so, by the evidence, *but it is very hard to get truth into evidence, as I think it is hard enough to get it in life, about human people, or even yourself*. It was Mrs. Loftus's evidence went against me; and she believed every word of it, for she was always very truthful. Yet I think she was wrong. She took a dislike to me and could never get over it (HS 176, italics added).

The striking similarity between this and Wilcher's view quoted above is unmistakable despite the vast differences in style. Sara is incapable of the subtlety or the intellectual rigour of Wilcher but her contention is much more emphatic. She even utters a simple but penetrating irony of her own. Mrs. Loftus, Wilcher's niece, who sets the police after Sara mainly to prevent her marriage to the uncle, is anything but truthful. She is a scheming, suspicious and possessive character whose greed makes her detestable. What Sara says in effect is that Mrs. Loftus has come to believe in the truthfulness of all her ideas which are rooted in the desire to possess Tolbrook. This desire

makes her liable to draw inferences and believe in them even though they are far from the truth. Thus when Ann sacrifices her medical practice to look after Wilcher (there were other motives, of course), Mrs. Loftus moves with the same deliberate cunning to discredit her because she thinks the cousin is trying to supplant her as heir presumptive to Tolbrook. The importance of all this is that it lends support to Sara's contention, a contention which is at the heart of the trilogy, that it is always difficult to get the truth about other human beings, even about oneself, or draw the right inferences from bald and often incomplete facts.

Gulley makes the same point when in his sardonic humour he praises and mocks at the government, berates the people for their constant lack of appreciation for even the best government actions, and succeeds in arousing the anger of one of the bus riders who tells him to speak only for himself. Gulley's reply is an unusually direct affirmation of the subjectivity of experience which each person expresses in words as his own unique apprehension of reality: "I can't speak for anyone else," I said, "I don't know the language" (HM 221).

Cary recognises, of course, that there must be some common elements in any common experience. I have already noted some points of agreement between Sara and Wilcher even in the few cross references I have made so far. What Cary maintains, however, is that in any enquiry into a problem, in gathering information or acquiring a body of knowledge, there are facts which we sometimes miss without realising it. In his own words, "it is the tragedy of the world that no one knows what he doesn't know--and the less a man knows the more sure he is that he knows everything."[7] It is reasonable to say, therefore, that

the effect of Wilcher's evidence and the contention of Sara is to disprove that part of the public verdict which asserts that Sara shows contempt for social obligation. Wilcher seems to be nearer the truth when he remarks: "We say of such a one as Sara, 'a good servant,' and think no more of it. But how strange and mysterious is that power, in one owning nothing of her own, to cherish the things belonging to another" (TBP 36). Sara, in fact, has an almost religious regard for social obligation.

There are, however, very divergent views about Sara's religion. Some of the people who know her see her religion as a deceptive mask, a cunning device she uses to ingratiate herself with men; in short, hypocrisy and deceit masquerading as religion. But in Wilcher's eyes, Sara is positively and deeply religious. In an exchange between him and his sceptical niece, Ann, we have what might be described as the private and public views on Sara's religion. To Wilcher, Sara is already "saved" and is the only person who can lead him to salvation. This view makes Sara more than an ordinary believer; she is a winner of souls in her own right. According to Ann, however, Sara's religion is mere affectation. This is the conflict of opinion which emerges out of this exchange between Ann and Wilcher:

> "Sara seems to have got a hold on you, uncle."
> "She is a remarkable person."
> "She rather affected the religious, didn't she?"
> "No, you are quite wrong. She never affected anything, but she is deeply religious. She is one of those people to whom faith is so natural that they don't know how they have it. She has a living faith" (TBP 11).

Although Wilcher, by his candour and his long acquaintance with Sara, is a generally reliable witness, he is inclined, nevertheless, to exaggerate her virtues because of the deep sense of loss which tortures

him, following her imprisonment. As Ann puts it, Sara has a hold on him. In reviewing his evaluation of Sara's character, therefore, it is necessary to make some allowance for a degree of bias in her favour. His view of Sara as a saviour, for example, seems extravagant.

But even after considering the doubts and modifications of other characters, the evaluation of Sara's religion by Wilcher remains accurate in its essentials. The strong belief he expresses in the genuineness and sincerity of Sara's religion is not shared by Gulley who, in two separate references to her religion, shows either outright scepticism or, like Ann, sees only a nominal faith shrouded in hypocrisy. The first reference comes in a hostile conversation between Gulley and Wilcher in the only meeting between them:

> "A truly religious woman," said Mr. W. using *vox humana*. "Yes, you might say Sara had some religion, female religion." (HM 185).

Hazard Adams has rightly pointed out that

> By his answer Jimson relates Sara to the natural earth mother archetype of Blake's prophetic books, from which he is always quoting. The comparison is meant to be anything but complimentary to Sara's *formal* religion, which he interprets as hypocritical.[8]

Unwittingly, however, Gulley's uncomplimentary remark only confirms Sara's religion as it is defined by Wilcher in *To Be A Pilgrim*. That religion is evident in "her gaiety, her obstinate resolve that others should enjoy what she found good: warmth, food, affection, soft beds, a domestic sensuality about which her religion was like the iron bands nailed to a child's tuck box" (TBP 162). This is the female religion whose high priestess is Sara, whose sacred shrine is the home or rather the kitchen, and whose domestic sensuality captivates even an uncompromising individualist, an untamable cynic like Gulley. For in spite

of his unique individuality, Gulley, as man and Briton, has a generic side to his nature which makes him fall in love with Sara Monday, "the mother and the wife" (HM 252).

In his second reference to Sara's religion, Gulley is even less charitable. Contrasting the religions of Rozzie and Sara, he says that

> Rozzie was a God-fearing heathen that never went to church in case of what might happen to her there; Sara was a God-using Christian that went to church to please herself and pick up some useful ideas about religion, hats and the local gossip (HM 254).

But on this occasion also, Sara escapes Gulley's cynicism. Although the distinction is clearly intended to be damaging to her and lend support to Ann's charge of insincerity, in fact little real harm is done to Sara's religion. Surely, if one has to choose between "a God-fearing heathen that never goes to church" and "a God-using Christian" that goes to church to pick up some *useful* ideas about religion, hats and local gossip, one would choose the second.

What is interesting about the controversy is that Sara herself makes no special claims to religion. She reveals quite simply that she had won prizes at school for scripture and recitation. She talks occasionally about going to church, but leaves no doubt that if church attendance conflicts with her domestic life, or if by attending she would have to face the animadversion of those who frown on her social life, she would stay away. And although she reacts strongly to the charge of showing contempt for religious principles, her objection is couched in negative terms: "I had never been against religion; far from it" (HS 9).

The final picture that emerges from these conflicting views, therefore, is that Sara, without making any special claims to religion,

invariably strikes other people, including those who are hostile to her, as a religious person. They differ only about the motivation and sincerity of that religion. But to the reader who has, in addition to these conflicting views, the record of her life, Sara emerges in all her domestic sensuality, as a deeply religious woman not only because of the religiously charged maxims that punctuate her speech, but because of her selfless devotion to the service of others, her unwavering adherence to that basic principle of all religion: her resolve to make others enjoy that which she knows and believes to be good.

Thus the verdict against Sara and her imprisonment demonstrate once more the everlasting conflict between the created world of the individual and the established order of society. In stealing what Wilcher himself calls "trifles" to support Gulley and educate his son, Tommy, Sara is fulfilling her function as wife and mother in a wide sense. Even the suspicion that Tommy is Rozzie's son born during a secret liaison while Sara and Gulley lived together cannot stop her from taking personal risks in the performance of what she considers her duty. But the judge who sentences her because she "had behaved like a woman without any moral sense" (HS 9) is also performing a larger social function. His function is to protect society against anti-social behaviour, which means any behaviour that runs counter to conventional morality. Therefore, while Sara's offences seem both unavoidable and venial, she cannot escape the reality of living in society, especially when her actions threaten the created world of another person. When Mrs. Loftus invokes the authority of the law in her determination to prevent Sara from marrying her uncle, it is because she recognises in Sara a distinctive menace to her greedy designs. The central irony of

Herself Surprised is that while the harsh sentence against Sara seems justifiable on social grounds, it is wanting in moral purpose because the sinister motives of Mrs. Loftus, unknown to the court, are more pernicious than anything Sara ever does. The conflict is therefore another illustration of the inability of any social system to do justice to the diverse claims of its members.

Early in her story, Sara reveals the contradictions in her own character. Born and raised in a lower middle class family where devotion to service and the stability of the home are basic tenets of family life, Sara is trained "to be a first-class cook fit for the best service" (HS 11) when her school record turns out to be mediocre. When she takes up her first job as cook to Mrs. Monday, she begins to read sentimental Victorian novels whose overt moral lessons she takes to heart. She can therefore flirt with the milkman, but show surprise and shock when she is ambushed by the timid and bashful Matthew Monday who wants to marry her but cannot even find the right words to make a proposal. When they are married, her vulgar connections of the past show up in the person of Rozzie whose bad manners had always been resented by Sara's gentle mother. Rozzie's gaudy and raffish clothes which Sara imitates irk the genteel feelings of the Mondays. But the difference is soon evident. In Rozzie's case, the vulgar taste and the abrasive manners are an integral part of her character, the result of long years of service in a crude bar. In Sara, the vulgarity is on the outside only; inside there is a beauty and a gentleness of spirit which captivate the very different men that come under her sway. This inner beauty is so much a part of Sara's being that, as Wilcher puts it,

"one forgot the thick, coarse figure, the rough features, in the light of a spirit which gave always encouragement" (TBP 320).

In her narrative, however, Sara shows a limited knowledge of herself, a consistent modesty that frequently borders on self-deprecation. She speaks with humility and respect about Matt and is full of gratitude that he married her. Yet it is evident that it is Matt who owes her an incalculable debt for making a respectable and self-respecting man out of the cowardly and retired figure that he was before their marriage. She continually exaggerates her faults because, in her simple mind, this would turn them into object lessons for others. Almost incapable of introspection, Sara arrives at conclusions about herself which are curiously similar to those held by the public. Talking about what she considers to be her indecorous behaviour during the early days of her marriage to Matt, she says: "It seemed I was two women: and one of them a loving wife and the other mad and wicked" (HS 20). The view of Sara as a loving wife and mother is her own, which is confirmed by Gulley in *The Horse's Mouth*. The other half, the mad and wicked woman, emanates from her sister-in-law, Maul, a static character whose only distinction is her worship of form and decorum. But Sara's confessions about men show why in the public eye she is a mad and wicked woman. During a trip to the country with Matt and Hickson, the wealthy industrialist and art collector who was helping her husband toward social respectability, Sara suggests that Hickson tricked Matt to return to work and leave them alone. Left to themselves, Sara and Hickson take to the lake in a boat where the sensation of riding over the waves and the rhythmic knock of the oars arouse her passion: "For every knock was closing the eyes of my soul and opening

the thirsty mouths of my flesh" (HS 30). By her own account, however, Sara succeeds in protecting her virtue on this occasion by locking her door although she had earlier confessed to flirting with Hickson out of sympathy for his sadness and as an expression of gratitude for his help in gaining social acceptance for Matthew. Later, however, she yields herself to Hickson.

The love affair with Hickson, in fact, establishes the invariable pattern of Sara's moral lapses: a brief struggle between strong fleshy desires and a weak moral sense with the result that the moral sense is always routed by passion. Thus she refuses for a while to give in to Gulley's sexual demands while they are waiting for a marriage (which never happens because Gulley was already married) but yields to him on a sun-drenched beach when he promises to make her rich and drape her in furs and jewels. As a result of this wild promise, Sara says,

> . . . my flesh delighted in his kindly thoughts. So it grew sleepy and I forgot myself and he had his way, yet not in luxury, but kindness, and God forgive me, it was only when I came to myself, cooling in the shadow, that I asked what I had done. . . .
>
> But though I jumped out of bed the next night when he came in to me, I thought it was not worth while to keep what little decency was left me, and to deny him what he thought so much of. . . .
>
> So it was every night. I even made it seem welcome to please the man, for, I thought, if I must give him his pleasure, it was waste not to give him all that I could (HS 92-3).

Finally, when Wilcher asks her to become his mistress, Sara feels the same conflict between her conscience and her duties but accepts the arrangement because she could not give up the new nest she has built for herself: "For I liked my happiness in Craven Gardens and my comforts and my peace and my dear Mr. W. himself far too well to do anything to lose them, or do them any injury" (HS 174).

In all these confessions, therefore, Sara admits frankly to her own weakness which makes her only too ready to yield to temptation. But she is convinced that in gratifying the passions of her men, she is satisfying not only her own strong desires but performing a useful service to others. She thinks that by allowing Hickson to take liberties with her, she is giving a little happiness to a sad man while ensuring continued help to her husband. By yielding herself to Gulley and Wilcher, Sara acts, in part, out of kindness, a desire to give pleasure to others.

But the unconcealed desire for personal pleasure, often a powerful instinctive drive in Cary's women, offends against conventional morality. Nevertheless, Sara's other reasons for giving in to these men are more than attempts at self-justification. If they were, she would not appear so sincere in her concern for others. And she is exonerated not only by her virtues, but by another of her vices: her thefts which are undertaken not to satisfy any compelling personal need or ambition, but to relieve the poverty of others. Even as she recalls them, the robberies remain an enigma to her. She cannot reconcile her desire to economize for Wilcher while cheating him to provide help for an indigent Gulley: "How I came into this double way of life, I cannot tell, except that I got used to my pickings; and that I was bound to send something to Gulley . . ." (HS 183).

To the reader, however, the conflict seems quite simple. Sara's strong sense of duty shows in her determination to serve Wilcher with genuine devotion; but the everlasting female desire to create and sustain a home manifests itself in the compulsive urge to support Gulley and his son, since Gulley is the only man she really loves. The thefts

thus become part of her search for pleasure although in this case it is the noble pleasure of seeing her beloved ones comfortably placed. They are also essential to the fulfilment of her role as wife and mother. Gulley himself, always niggardly in his praise of Sara, cannot help but pay lavish tribute to her generosity which is both her strength and her weakness: "It was a pleasure to take things from Sara, even if you had to steal them; a double pleasure, because Sara liked giving" (HM 253).

Sara's attempt at self-analysis, then, shows only partial self-knowledge. Cary is realistic enough not to allow this simple country woman to penetrate the unfathomable springs of her behaviour which is rooted in deep natural instincts. Her thoughts belong to her time and society; her feelings belong to her alone. In her thoughts she is a conformist; but in her feelings, a complete rebel. This tension between thought and feeling runs through her whole story. During her honeymoon, for example, she puts on a Parisian hat and on seeing herself in a mirror, wonders at her own audacity, thinking that people might say:

> "'Look at that fat, common trollop of a girl with a snub nose and the shiny cheeks, jumping out of her skin to be in a Paris hat. Wouldn't you bet she was out from Dartmouth fair last week? You can almost smell the cider on her lips. What a shame to expose herself like that and her nation to these foreigners'" (HS 10).

But when Matt notices her surprise and asks her if she is thinking about the hat, she denies this at once because she detects in the question an attempt to interfere with her private feeling of self-importance: "So I kept the hat, and if people looked at me I thought: 'If I am a body then it can't be helped, for I can't help myself'" (HS 10).

This is the instinctive response of a woman whose forte is self-reliance. On this fact Wilcher and Gulley are in complete agreement

although as usual, they give different interpretations to this trait of character. Talking about how Sara always holds to her views through her tact and her stubborn determination, Wilcher remarks:

> She had her own mind. She kept her own counsel. She was devoted but she was never servile. And I rejoiced in her quality which belonged to my people, whose nature was rather affection than passion, whose gaiety was rather humour than wit; whose judgment did not spring from logic but from sense, the felling of the world (TBP 320).

But it is this very independence of mind, coupled with a stubborn will not to submit to others but to mould them to a life of domestic ease through a mixture of sensual arts and infinite cunning, which Gulley finds exasperating:

> Sara was a shot in the arm; she brought you alive one way or another; the very idea of Sara could always make me swear or jump or dance or sweat. Because of her damned independence and hypocrisy. When you knew Sara, you knew womankind, and no one who doesn't know womankind knows anything about the nature of Nature (HM 254).

"She brought you alive one way or another": this is Gulley's grudging admission to the life-giving, life-inspiring side of Sara's nature which the conventional middle-class men--Matt, Hickson and Wilcher--find so irresistible a stimulus to their own barren lives. Even the untamable and non-conformist Gulley recognises and admires the intrinsic beauty and solidity which lie beneath Sara's coarse external features: "As an artist, I fell in love with Sara, and her grand forms, but she was an artist herself, and she appreciated herself so much that she couldn't bear me to paint anyone or anything else" (HM 252). Here, the sarcasm which Gulley frequently uses in his appraisal of Sara is evident again. For him, Sara is a female artist in a pejorative sense: possessive, insinuating and artfully clever as she moves to consolidate her hold on a man. This is a partial truth, at best. That Sara is

self-regarding and self-admiring is evident enough from her own story. Yet, her self-assertiveness has no trace of pride in it. It springs from a natural desire to be appreciated by others. And Gulley records his own lasting appreciation of Sara's "grand forms" in his painting of her portraits in the nude which all those who are acquainted with his art find so fascinating.

But *Herself Surprised*, dominated as it is by Sara's grand figure, also offers incisive critical comments on middle-class manners. The Monday women, domineering but stiff and inert, are paralysed by their own uncritical acceptance of an artificial and narrow code of morals. Matt himself, tormented by real and imaginary fears, languishes in misery in spite of the material and social success he achieves through the skilful management of Sara. Hickson, "the greatest man in Bradnall" (HS 24), is patronising, condescending and even contemptuous of the country people. His greatness is only in material things; and Matt's view that "Mr. Hickson was worthy to be rich because he was a noble-minded man, and set the things of the spirit above the body" (HS 26), is clearly ironical. Hickson is fully committed to the pursuit of material things but he is spiritually bankrupt. His patronage of the arts, it is clear from both *Herself Surprised* and *The Horse's Mouth*, is part of his search for material wealth. He supports Gulley on the shrewd business calculation that his genius would eventually win him public acclaim and raise the value of his early paintings from which he had collected a large number. The scurrilous paintings in Hickson's private country retreats to which he lures women in search of the emotional satisfaction with which his own sterile marriage can no longer provide him attests to his perverse taste and corrupt morals.

Finally, there is Tom Wilcher, the most formidable and most pathetic of the middle-class men in the First Trilogy. Possessing a keen social and moral consciousness, Wilcher is paralysed by his excessive regard for tradition. Virile and vigorous in body and mind, he is the direct opposite of the impotent and reticent Matt; but Wilcher's moral decay is more agonising than Hickson's because of his religious beliefs which, like all his other beliefs, are always at war with his conduct. His social aberrations, like those of Hickson, are indictable; but both men escape the consequences of their conduct because, as one of Wilcher's servants puts it, "a rich man can always get away with anything" (HS 147).

Sara thus finds herself in a morally and socially corrupt world where the gentry exploit her physically and socially without adequate reward. Her vitality and gaiety are set against the petrified and sad lives of the comfortable middle-class men who make a wilfully deleterious use of her talents. It is the conduct of these men, her actual and potential employers, which justifies Sara's confidence in her ability to survive the crisis of the moment and triumph over it:

> A good cook will always find work, even without a character, and can get a new character in twelve months, and better herself, which, God helping me, I shall do, and keep a more watchful eye, next time, on my flesh, now I know it better (HS 220).

Sara ends her story on this bouncing note of optimism and self-confidence. There is an irony in this final declaration, however. We realise, as we follow her progress through the rest of the trilogy, that her self-confidence is not altogether justified. She remains creative and adaptable throughout, but the weakness of her flesh, her own share of the bad luck in the world and the corruption of the times combine to frustrate her desire to better herself.

III

To Be A Pilgrim

In *To Be A Pilgrim*, Cary tackles the second part of his plan for the First Trilogy which is to examine the character of the times in which his three leading persons, Sara Monday, Tom Wilcher and Gulley Jimson live. We know from the preface to *Herself Surprised* that Cary's conception of Sara makes her an unsuitable commentator on the history of her age. In *The Horse's Mouth*, Gulley's conception of himself as a militant individualist and social rebel puts him at odds with society and exposes him to so much suffering that in his bitterness he becomes sardonically humorous and facetious in order to preserve his sanity and pursue his chosen path. He cannot therefore be a dispassionate judge of the people and events of his time. This leaves Tom Wilcher with the task of historical commentator for which Cary gives him the necessary equipment: a shrewd analytical mind which, strengthened by a sound education, can relate the past to the present, a reverent regard for family and national traditions, and a tremendous pride in the past achievements and the future destiny of his country. Accordingly, Tolbrook Manor, the family home of the Wilchers and the generations who live in it over the years becomes the microcosm of English society for some seventy years ending on the eve of the Second World War. As Cary himself puts it, *To Be a Pilgrim* "deals with a man of strong religious and affectionate character, suffering the moral changes of seventy years, the inevitable and continuous revolution which goes on all the time, everywhere."[9] The result is that in *Herself Surprised* and *The Horse's Mouth*, Cary holds resolutely to the first part of his plan which

is to make character his prime interest; historical comment is therefore incidental. In *To Be A Pilgrim*, however, the reverse is true. The historical milieu takes precedence over character although Tom Wilcher, the narrator, remains one of the most impressive and perhaps the most unique of Cary's characters.

While all of Cary's characters bear unmistakable family resemblances to each other, Tom Wilcher is singular. The only other character that bears a faint resemblance to him is Gore, the conservative worshipper of traditions in *An American Visitor*. But conservatism is their only common mark. Unlike the static and unimaginative Gore, Wilcher is a complex figure whose vast intellect and learning enable him to illuminate the past and the present through his visions and memories of the past, while he fights with the present, of which he understands a great deal, but which he finds repugnant because it does not measure up to his ideals of faith, dignity and purposeful living.

It must be noted from the beginning that the essential facts of Wilcher's character are recorded in *Herself Surprised*. What we have in *To Be A Pilgrim* is an elaboration of those facts, giving the details of his upbringing so that the reader can understand the reasons why he is the man that he is. Sara says of him that

> He was a man so worried and pestered by everything in his life, by the houses and the nieces and nephews and the times and the world, and I suppose by his own nature, too, that he was like three men tied up in one bag and you never knew and he never knew which of them would pop out his head, or something else, or what it would say or do (HS 161).

In analysing the reasons for his harried life in *To Be A Pilgrim*, Wilcher finds the answer in his devotion to things and his inability to liberate himself from home and the restraints of convention:

"Possessions have been my curse. I ought to have been a wanderer, too, a free soul" (TBP 16). But his attachment to possessions arises not out of greed or selfishness, but out of veneration for the memories and associations which old things evoke in his sensitive mind. He values money but only out of the sober realisation that without it a man loses his self-respect. But as Cary puts it in the preface, one of Wilcher's problems is that in him, "the attachments of sentiment, which are the perpetual root of Conservative feeling, are stronger than the drive to adventure" (TBP 7).

Indeed, the whole of Wilcher's personal story is an endless battle between sentimental attachments and unfulfilled desires which originate from his knowledgeable and intelligent mind. Probably the most introspective of all of Cary's characters, Wilcher is in conflict with himself and is paralysed by his own too clear perception of the value of tradition on the one hand, and the inevitability as well as the desirability of change, on the other. After being forcibly driven to Tolbook Manor as part of the efforts of his relatives to prevent him from marrying Sara, Tom Wilcher suddenly begins to feel a new child-like pleasure in the dilapidated building. His delight comes from the rich memories and associations which this old building arouses in him. But the arrival of Robert Brown (Lucy's son and Tom's nephew), the extreme Protestant and possible heir to Tolbrook, with his enterprise, his little regard for tradition, poses a threat to what, in Tom Wilcher's view, is a historical monument. He grasps this problem intuitively when, in recalling his deep attachment to his sister Lucy and their fierce disputes, he suddenly becomes meditative and says of their boisterous nursery:

> For though I have no happiness now, except in memory, it says to me, "Happiness is possible to men among the things he [sic] loves and knows." And it comes apparently from the touch, from contact, from a presence in the air. I was happy with Lucy because all about was a familiar world, not especially friendly to me, but understood.
>
> An old house like this is charged with history, which reveals to man his own soul. But I can't expect a boy like Robert to understand that (TBP 26).

Robert's name seems to have no place in this meditation, but his presence at Tolbrook reminds Tom Wilcher of the boy's earlier attempt (HS 179-81) to take over the management of the family estate, modernise it and make it pay for itself. This would have involved wiping out landmarks that are so dear to his uncle. But as the plans progress, Robert realises that he and his uncle hold irreconcilable views about the estate. Tom Wilcher wants to preserve the old; Robert, the embodiment of Protestant enterprise, wants to destroy some of the old and replace it with the new. And it is a mark of the difference between the two that once Robert concludes that he could not have the estate on his own terms, he readily takes to his adventurous ways leaving his uncle chained to the property he could no longer manage. Wilcher, Robert remarks before leaving, "does mean well--though he is such a footling old fossil" (HS 181). And this view is fully justified when Tom explains that his aim is to make Tolbrook into a real manor again complete with a squire of Tolbrook who "will be a real countryman, as in the old days of Doomsday, when lords could not write their name" (HS 181).

Thus, the conflict between tradition and change, one of the major themes of the African novels, is also a central theme in *To Be A Pilgrim*. Barbara Hardy, in her brief but incisive remarks on this

novel, notes that in it, as in *The Moonlight*, Cary uses the flashback as a necessary rather than a conventional tool because

> It is the only way of making a certain statement. Wilcher in *To Be A Pilgrim*, and Ella, in *The Moonlight*, must be presented in flashback. Their life is the life they have lived rather than the life they are living. They participate in the past and look on in the present. The pattern of the novel is the intersection and interruption of past and present, the theme a fight between past and present.[10]

There is, however, a second and equally important theme in *To Be A Pilgrim*: the theme of man's pilgrimage as seen in a Protestant democratic state like England. It is through this second theme that Tom Wilcher's pathetic lament over the lost opportunities of his life is poignantly conveyed to the reader, giving the novel a sombre, austere tone that is unique in Cary's fiction. Of course the two themes merge into one another at various points in the narrative, but it is necessary for the sake of clarity to treat them separately, starting with the theme of man's pilgrimage which opens the story.

After his vain fight against his repatriation to Tolbrook, Tom Wilcher begins, on his arrival, to experience the vicarious pleasure of "living" with his dead family again. "I am simply a child again," he exclaims joyfully (TBP 14). But soon the voices of the past begin to haunt him and he "hears" the mature voice of Lucy, the most reckless member of the family, whisper the national call to his ear: "To be a pilgrim" (TBP 16). And as he reflects on the meaning of this call, he suddenly realises its significance in his life and the lives of some of the people he had known:

> "Yes," I thought, "that was the clue to Lucy, to my father, to Sara Jimson, it is the clue to all that English genius which bore them and cherished them, clever and simple. Did not my father say of Tolbrook which he loved so much, 'Not a bad billet,' or 'not a bad camp'; and Sara? Was not her view of life as 'places'

as 'situations' the very thought of the wanderer and the very strength of her soul. She put down no roots into the ground; she belonged with the spirit; her goods and possessions were all in her own heart and mind, her skill and courage" (TBP 16).

In this important meditation, Tom Wilcher defines the difference between him and the pilgrims of the family and the nation. He is emotionally tied to the past and is therefore incapable of the decisive leap into freedom and adventure. The others are adventurous, purposeful and enterprising. They attach themselves to things and places while they have a functional value; but they are always ready to move to the next camp when this becomes necessary--a tendency which Wilcher recognises as one of the distinctive marks of the English Protestant spirit. There are two sides to this national spirit, the secular and the religious, which are really two faces of the same coin. Wilcher defines the secular side of this national temperament in a letter which he sends to Sara in prison because she is the best exemplar of that temperament:

> ". . . we are the children of creation, and we cannot escape our fate, which is to live in creating and re-creating. We must renew ourselves or die; we must work even at our joys or they will become burdens. We must make new worlds about us for the old does not last," etc. "Those who cling to this world, must be dragged backwards into the womb which is also a grave.
>
> "We are the pilgrims who must sleep every night beneath a new sky, for either we go forward to the new camp, or the whirling earth carries us backwards to one behind. There is no choice but to move, forwards or backwards. Forward to the clean hut, or backward to the old camp, fouled every day by the passers" etc. (TBP 36-7).

The religious side is given in *Herself Surprised* where Sara quotes Wilcher as saying:

> "You believe that we have souls to be saved or ruined and so do I. But you have kept your soul alive and I have nearly smothered mine under law papers and estate business and the cares of the world. Under talk too, for I talk too much about religion

and forget that it is not a matter of words, but faith and works and vision." (HS 189).

This faith, however, must be based on a meaningful commitment to life. With the positiveness of the rhetorical question, Wilcher asks: "What is faith but the belief that in life there is something worth doing, and the feeling of it" (TBP 35). This definition makes Wilcher a man of faith since his commitment to the past and to old objects is unswerving. But this is not the pilgrim's faith which, by his own definition, is regenerative and progressive. His is the unchanging and sterile faith which is tied to fixed objects. It is the faith which turns the faithful into a bondsman. Wilcher's tragedy is that he discovers the danger which his sentimental attachments pose to his freedom only in his decrepitude when he has neither the strength nor the will to launch himself on a new and meaningful pilgrimage. As a result, he undertakes a pilgrimage of the mind, experiencing vicariously and observing wistfully the lives which Sara, Lucy, Robert and the others live.

By his own account, it is the love of things, more than his nostalgia for the legendary past, which deprives Tom Wilcher of his right to be a pilgrim. There is a kind of regression which runs through his recounting of his loss: love of things induces anxiety; anxiety impairs the ability to think and act with deliberation; the muddled thinking and clumsy behaviour which follow make him the butt of the family; continual ridicule turns him into the timid, irritable man that he is. It is important to note that even as he relives the past, Wilcher recalls only two sources of happy memories: from his childhood days when he could run back to one of his parents for

protection against Lucy's mad fury and from his days with Sara when her motherly instincts gave him respite and peace after long years of ceaseless anxiety. For, as Wilcher admits, "I have always been subject to anxiety" (TBP 38). So, in his new awareness, Tolbrook which has always been the embodiment of all that is memorable, civilized, beautiful and graceful becomes "the old house, so hated and so loved" (TBP 12). It is hated because as an object it has been a source of torment and anxiety; and loved because it is a storehouse of cherished memories.

But with his slumberous pilgrim's spirit awakened by Sara, Wilcher suffers a great deal of agony from the late discovery that his attachment has been the wrong one. After raging against Jaffery (his estate agent) for daring to discuss changes to Tolbrook suggested by Robert, Wilcher suffers a stroke and when he recovers, he ponders the folly of his conduct and remarks: "I have never had peace or comfort in this house. I have been too fond of it. To love anything or anybody is dangerous; but especially to love things" (TBP 34). On the other hand, he says, "the secret of happiness, of life, is to forget the past, to look forward, to move on" (TBP 34-5). In the final analysis, Wilcher's tortured and unhappy life is the result of a paralysis of the will, a failure to make his will the servant of his desires (TBP 77).

Wilcher reveals his failure to become a pilgrim by comparing his life with the lives of Lucy, Sara and Amy, his brother Bill's wife. What these women have in common is faith as Wilcher defines it: that is, a purposeful commitment to life and the resolution and tenacity to pursue their chosen goals. They have, unlike so many people of their age, a clear sense of direction, a certain knowledge of what they want

in life and the courage to seek it. Lucy, born to comforts and a stagnating civilization, escapes with Puggy Brown and his itinerant Benjamite sect because although she does not believe in their creed, she feels that their mission might bring some calm and comfort to the banal and harried lives of the people in the dirty industrial heartland of England. Sara, the epitome of the female principle, is the eternal mother, home-keeper and comforter of men. Amy, with the stubborn faith of the simple, goes through life untroubled by the turmoil of the times, facing misfortune with a stoic calm, and moves, without bitterness or recrimination, to protect her independence and dignity when an unfeeling daughter-in-law turns her out of the last place she regards as home. By their enterprise, their self-reliance, their unsentimental attachment to the past and the present, to things and places, these women become, in Wilcher's mind, the incarnation of that questing, regenerative spirit which he identifies with England.

Lucy's strange behaviour in deserting her comforts and going over to a life of toil and deprivation illustrates this strength of character. With characteristic fierceness she taunts Puggy Brown for his polygamous life, deserts him, vows never to return to him, but goes hastily back to him the first time he calls for her. Wilcher finds the answer to these enigmas in a mutual attraction deriving from a vitally energetic common response to life:

> But I know why Lucy went back to her hard life and why Brown took her back although she was his scourge. They were both people of power; life ran in them with a primitive force and innocence. They were close to its springs as children are close, so that its experience, its loves, its wonders, its furies, its mysterious altruism, came to them as to children, like mysteries, and gave them neither peace nor time to fall into sloth and decadence (TBP 99).

This is also the mysterious strength and the "private quality of life" which move Sara and Robert; and much of Wilcher's lament is about the fact that he and too many people in his generation lack this strength and this adventurous quality and therefore fall into sloth and decadence.

Wilcher recognises the recklessness of Lucy's decision to join a tiny sect whose creed she does not really believe, but her action brings home to him what his books could not tell him: "that the way to a satisfying life, a good life, is through an act of faith and courage" (TBP 55). It is, for Lucy, an act of courage rather than faith in any religious sense. Unburdened by any feeling of sinfulness, and accustomed to luxury and comfort, she turns her back against home to escape the prison that it has become for her volatile spirits and enjoy the adventure which Puggy Brown's heady religion provides. As Wilcher clearly understands, Lucy is "one of those whose faith is like a sword in their hands, to cut out their own destinies" (TBP 55). He claims rather hesitantly that he has now embraced this dynamic faith, but it is all too evident that while he can grasp it intellectually, he is in no position to launch himself on any meaningful pilgrimage because of his failing health and growing senility.

But even if Wilcher were strong enough to undertake Lucy's kind of pilgrimage, it would be impossible for him because he cannot stand the crudity of its nature. Lucy is rough, headstrong and disdainful of all those whose views differ from her own; Wilcher, before his self-destructive impulses take hold of him, is a respecter of people and places, a refined man of integrity whose genteel breeding would not permit him to deceive people in the deliberate manner of Lucy. These

personal differences come out in the village where Wilcher finds Lucy looking for accommodation for an undisclosed number of Benjamites who have already become notorious for their misuse of rented premises. When the Benjamites descend on the Joneses, the old couple whose house Lucy has selected, Wilcher's sense of decency and justice is shocked by the crude mixture of veiled threats and cajolery by which the group imposes itself on the reluctant and puzzled couple. Even so, there is beneath the crude tactics a persuasiveness which dissolves the initial antipathy of people so that notwithstanding his moral indignation, Wilcher nearly submits to the sect because he can perceive their dedication to a way of life as he listens to their talk and their rousing song:

> The dark wave was rising over me, and I had longed to drown in it; to get rid of self; to find what? A cause. Excitement. The experience of suffering, of humiliation, so attractive to my sense. Above all, an answer to everything. (TBP 69).

In fact, Cary creates in Puggy Brown, the leader of the Benjamites, another of his religious spellbinders; that is, people of imagination who express themselves through and hold others captive by the strength of their religious intuition. Elizabeth Aladai of *The African Witch* is the first of these creations, while Puggy Brown clearly foreshadows Walter Preedy, the faith healer of *The Captive and The Free*. The fascination which these characters have for Cary lies not in any spiritual value or rationality which their "religions" cannot claim, but in the power they wield over other people. They are, without exception, "people of power" in Cary's full sense of that phrase. It is an indefinable power which is real in the sense that it brings people into submission to a creed and a godhead. In Wilcher's

description of his first encounter with Brown on Tolbrook Green, we have one of the clearest presentations of the incongruous mixture of the pious and the impious, the humane and the bestial, as well as the deep emotional stirrings that characterise the "religious" performances of these people:

> His short squat figure stood black against the crimson sign of the "Wilcher Arms," hanging behind him. Its gilt lettering, sparkling in the sun, made a kind of glory round his head and shoulders; the shoulders of a giant or a dwarf; and the face of a prize fighter, pug nose, jutting brows, thick swollen lips, roaring over all the noise of bullocks and sheep.
>
> No foes shall stay his might,
> Though he with giants fight;
> He will make good his right
> To be a pilgrim.
>
> At these words I felt my heart turn over, and I drove away as fast as I could. I had meant to take the waggon. But I was afraid of Brown; I thought he could convert me, and I was enjoying life then as never before, in my first year at Oxford. Why was I afraid of Brown. I was a clever young man who was reading Kant. Brown had no arguments that did not fill me with contempt. But when he sang these verses from Bunyan, his favourite hymn and the battle cry of his ridiculous little sect, then something swelled in my heart as if it would choke me, unless I, too, opened my mouth and sang. I might have been a bell tuned to that note, and perhaps I was. For the Wilchers are as deep English as Bunyan himself. A Protestant people with the revolution in their bones (TBP 20-21).

The identification of this outlandish sect with English Protestantism and its revolutionary and rejuvenating tendencies is important because it sets the polarities between the unrelenting determination of the man of faith and the irresolution of the man of abstract logic or reason. Tom escapes only by retreating before the emotional wave which Puggy Brown has released and which threatens to drown him with all his Kantian metaphysics of pure reason because the heart has a reason of its own which the head cannot understand. Cary seems to suggest that in the religious sphere, it is not the man of logic or reason who brings changes, but the man of conviction who has the

capacity to transmit that conviction to others and create a community of feeling. His methods and teachings might not appear rational, but he might be satisfying "the need for a new statement of the Christian belief, which [sic] special regard to the positive power of evil" (TBP 262). This kind of idea grows and dies in the mind of a passive character like Tom Wilcher, but is articulated and made the basis of action by men like Puggy Brown.

When Brown preaches his open air sermon on Tolbrook Green, commandeering a Wilcher waggon by his right as a "prophet", he is bringing the call to adventure to the place where most of the people are in danger of sinking into sloth and decadence. If, as the narrative clearly indicates, Tom alone, of all the Wilcher family, heard Brown's sermon, it is because he, more than anyone else, stands in danger of forgetting that "the English soul is a wanderer, a seeker" (TBP 300). By being unduly solicitous about the fate of Tolbrook, Wilcher forfeits his right to pilgrimage and adventure while also losing the futile fight to preserve it as an ancient monument. His final confession on this matter is a frank admission of his failure to answer to his national destiny:

> The truth must be confessed, that I am an old fossil, and that I have deceived myself about my abilities. I thought I could be an adventurer like Lucy and Edward; a missionary. I shouted the pilgrim's cry, democracy, liberty, and so forth, but I was a pilgrim only by race. England took me with her on a few stages of her journey. Because she could not help it. She, poor thing, was born upon the road, and lives in such a dust of travel that she never knows where she is.
>
> "Where away England, steersman answer me?
> We cannot tell. For we are all at sea."
>
> She is the wandering Dutchman, the pilgrim and scapegoat of the world. Which flings its sins upon her as the old world heaped its sins upon the friars. Her lot is that of all courage, all enterprise; to be hated and abused by the parasite (TBP 341-42).

The main difference between Tom on the one hand, and Lucy and Sara on the other, is that while he tries to swim out of the sea of life into some secure and orderly haven of rest, they immerse themselves and swim continually or float with the current when their energies desert them until they gather sufficient strength to exert themselves anew.

But Lucy and Sara are different in several important respects. Lucy's energy is passionate and tempestuous, while Sara's is calm, soothing, gentle, but inexorable. Lucy is assertive, obstinate and capricious; Sara is shrewd, firm and wily. "But both, born in neighbouring parishes, had the same power of bringing before one's eyes the pisgah sight of wider landscape than a provincial drawing-room or a London Square" (TBP 92). The imagery of this statement preserves the religious character of their quest, without obscuring the fact that they are seeking beyond the narrow confines of their local parishes the promise of a better life in this world. That is, they are both seekers and wanderers in the true English tradition which Wilcher cannot enter because he mistakes the parish or rather the home for the world.

Thus while Tom Wilcher works steadfastly to preserve his late father's personal possessions, Lucy comes home to collect a camp bed and other items suitable for her roving life. The numerous violent conflicts which these temperamental differences cause between the brother and the sister are narrated with dramatic vigour and provide, especially in the first half of the novel, a welcome change of tempo from Wilcher's long string of tame meditations and reminiscences. With Carian objectivity, Wilcher describes the accurate but limited conclusions which each makes about the other after their long series of fights.

> Lucy could always enrage me by calling me a pettifogger. As I could anger her by calling her a hypocrite. For both words came so close to the truth of our natures that they took its light and cast a shadow on our souls. To Lucy, fighting pride with pride, it was easy to think that humility was pretence; and for me, clinging to order and rule in the turmoil of the world, it was easy to think that the word was greater than the spirit; that I valued not my father's memory, but a piece of property (TBP 161).

The conflict between spirituality and materiality, an important theme of the First Trilogy, illustrated in its wider social context in *The Horse's Mouth*, is epitomized at the personal level in the character of Wilcher. That he has a delicate and even elevated moral sensibility is evident enough; but that this moral sensibility is blunted by his inordinate regard for material things is also beyond doubt. With the penetration of his sharp mind, he delimits the outer and inner tensions that are tearing him apart:

> I would think often, To set one's heart upon the things of this world is the most plain folly. Because this world, solid as it appears, is a construction only of desire. All those cottages, those fields, and the very lanes are the deeds of desire. They are the spirit of man made visible in the flesh of his accomplishment. As he seeks, so he builds . . .
>
> "Man lives by his ideas, and if his ideas be mean, then his life shall be mean. If he follow the idea of his body, then his life shall be narrow as one body's room, which is a single grave. But if he follow the idea of his soul, which is to love and to serve, then he shall join himself to the company of all lovers and all the servants of life, and his idea shall apprehend a common good. And if he follow the idea of the Church, he shall embrace the idea of a universal goodness and truth, which is the form of the living spirit. And its name is wisdom. And its works are love and the joy of the Lord" (TBP 151).

"The joy of the Lord" is a common phrase in Wilcher's meditations. But he is unable to choose between the things of the spirit for which his mind craves endlessly, and the things of the world which attract him as though by a magnet. This conflict between intellectual desires and sentimental attachments is the cause of his agony.

His grasp of the problem is certain; but his feelings have sunk their roots into the familiar fields and cottages around Tolbrook. And his life seems foolish and mean to all his relatives because he lives not by the admirable ideas that whirl in his head, but by his strong and barren feelings. Since Tolbrook is the centre of those feelings, Wilcher's repeated assertions that he must leave it behind to embark on a late pilgrimage makes the talk a part of his long but unattainable dream of the past. It is understandable therefore that in a nightmare he sees Tolbrook as a coffin into which he is nailed alive while he makes a furious but ineffectual attempt to free himself: "This morning I dreamed that Tolbrook itself was growing smaller and smaller. The walls closed in; the roof came down upon me. The house became a coffin and it seemed that I had been shut up in it alive" (TBP 299). Tolbrook thus becomes the veritable death-trap, incarcerating Wilcher in body as well as in spirit. Lucy escapes this danger because like the true pilgrim, she knows when to move to the next camp.

Sara and Amy are used, in part, to provide a contrast to Lucy's fearful pride, her ferocious temper and crude manners, which a firm upbringing and the exemplary behaviour of her parents could not change. Sara and Amy embody a female quality which Cary identifies as "grace," an inclusive term for such virtues as humility, patience, fortitude and calmness of spirit. For them as for Lucy, faith does not mean a passive submission to dogma, but an active instrument in the creation of a meaningful life for oneself:

> Amy and Sara, countrywomen both. They didn't submit themselves to any belief. They used it. They made it. They had the courage of the simple, which is not to be surprised. They had the penetration of innocence which can see the force of a platitude. Amy's

> "got to die sometime" has been on the lips of every private soldier since the first army went into battle. For her it was still profound (TBP 339).

The burden of Wilcher's lament, then, is that he is too fond of material things and too uncertain in his purpose to be a pilgrim. But with his historical sense, Wilcher also detects that his uncertainty of purpose is the disease afflicting many of his peers and which also threatens the younger generation. By contrast, Wilcher tells us near the end of the novel, when Chaucer wrote of pilgrimage in England, "every man knew where he was, and where he could go. But now all is confusion and no one has anywhere to go" (TBP 313). Modern man, living a drab life, badgered and confused by conflicting newspaper reports, lonely in the midst of millions of his fellow human beings is, in Wilcher's view, a drifter, a tramp, and not a pilgrim.

This is a characteristically morbid twentieth-century conclusion, but one which is appropriate to the man and his story. Trapped by the creation of others; lacking the energy and the initiative to free himself; intellectualizing life rather than living it, Wilcher is the man who would sit back and mourn his self-imposed imprisonment because he cannot, like Gulley, resign himself to gaiety, and laugh over a real calamity inflicted by others.

In the preface to *To Be A Pilgrim*, Cary states clearly that

> The background is historical change seen through the eyes, not of Sara, who knows it only in people and in herself, or of the artist Jimson, who sees it as the battle of aesthetic ideas with each other and a public always blind and self-assured, but of the man of political and religious intuition. (TBP 8).

This theme of historical change is presented largely through three generations of the Wilcher family with Tom's generation occupying the favourable middle position, looking back at their own and their parents'

times which belong to the past, and on the present which belongs to the nephews and nieces since the reader knows from the beginning that Tom Wilcher, the narrator, is on the verge of death. But as is appropriate to his historical perspective, Tom Wilcher's view is panoramic, digging deep into the past to find the dazzling eras that make the present look jaded, vulgar and commonplace, although a weak but necessary balance is maintained by his perception that for all its failings, the present generation is perfectly capable of sustaining the eternal cycle of birth, growth and death, and that Robert, with his extreme Protestant spirit, will destroy and rebuild parts of Tolbrook Manor to ensure its continuity.

As Wilcher sees it, English social, political and moral life has been declining steadily throughout the nineteenth century and reached the nadir of perversion, corruption and faithlessness in the inter-war years of the twentieth century, culminating in the gloom and hopelessness of the years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War when it seemed that "the whole social fabric was obviously dissolving. The European currencies had already collapsed; and we, in England, were asking ourselves how long we should be an exception" (TBP 303). In probing this phenomenal decay, Wilcher finds that among the factors contributing to it are, principally, a loss of faith in religion and a corresponding rise in psychological obsessions; a shift in emphasis in educational institutions from altruism and service to egoism and materialism; an excessive indulgence in pleasure by all classes to the utter disregard of their social responsibilities; a growing cynicism which afflicts rulers and subjects alike and a wanton disregard for civilized values of the past and present. The deterioration is evident

in succeeding generations of the Wilcher family, with Tom's parents displaying fortitude, resiliency, self-reliance, patience and a quiet repose which is rare in Cary's characters, while in Tom's generation only Bill shows some of these qualities but lacks the formidable dignity and vitality of his father because he is too passive; and the generation of nieces and nephews shows, for the most part, the dissolution of the past without the establishment of a perceptible substitute in the present. John, the son of Bill, who was already old enough to enlist in the army for the First World War, goes to his duties with a fatalistic resignation; he returns home disillusioned by the chaos of the world, seeks refuge in religion without a consistent faith and becomes, in his desire to move with the times, far too tolerant of his wife's immoral life and suffers the anguish of his folly in much the same way as Tom suffers for his dislike of the present. Robert, less affected by the war which he was too young to experience directly, is enterprising but anarchic in tendency and not sufficiently educated to appreciate a good many things in the present which he contemptuously dismisses as "modern muck" (TBP 48); Ann, educated in medicine and Freudian psychology, is fickle, passive and corroded by a deep-seated scepticism, and takes herself so seriously that she seems morbid and lacking in resolution to give her life a meaningful direction; and Blanche (the Mrs. Loftus of *Herself Surprised*) is an avaricious and insinuating woman whose conservatism appals even Tom Wilcher who therefore dismisses her as a reactionary and a "blind worshipper of exploded systems" (TBP 133). Tom adopts a typological approach in his examination of this national decay, using small units of the Wilcher family so that the reader gets a vivid picture of each generation

and the ethos of its age without losing the feeling of continuity, of one generation merging into the other and yet retaining its distinctive qualities.

The Wilcher parents and their times, although receiving the briefest attention, provide, nevertheless, the main standard of comparison which shows how much the quality of life and the patterns of behaviour have deteriorated in the post-Victorian era. Of course, Cary does not hold up the Victorian period as an ideal. What he does show is that for all its narrow views, which often lead to spirited and violent conflicts, the Victorian age has an inner consistency which gives it the order and stability that the twentieth century lacks. For his ideals, Cary takes us occasionally to what he considers more elegant and stable periods of English history.

What sets the Wilcher parents apart from their heirs is their implicit faith in and their determination to preserve the hierarchic order of their society. They have neither the questioning habits of their children, nor their fervent desire to see the old order replaced by a new and more equitable one that would dismantle the class barriers of English society. From the twentieth-century view therefore, the age of the parents seems narrow, rigid, uncritically acquiescent, restrictive and unduly dependent on fixed rules as a guide to conduct. This is how Tom describes the family regimen as prescribed by his father:

> Our father never went into final causes. His idea of religion was that of Confucius, rules of conduct carefully taught and justly administered. Prayers were at a fixed hour. And it was a crime to be late. All quarrels to be made up, and repentances spoken, before the last prayer, at the bedside; on penalty of drum-head court martial; that is, an immediate slap on the behind, so

> conveniently reached at that hour. And three complaints from nurse in one week, meant a whipping (TBP 29-30).

The whipping itself is carefully graded to match the severity of the offence. But even the firmness, the consistency and the certainty of punishment could not deter Lucy, the rebel of the family who realises that the fixity of the rules is also their weakness. Since one of the family rules stipulates that no one is to be punished twice on the same day, she compounds punishable offences until the old man is forced to break his own code and beat her twice in one day.

Lucy's rebellious, coarse and violent manners are used functionally in the novel to provide a contrast with the urbane and delicate refinement of her mother. It is a contrast between the care-free and unsentimental young woman and the compliant and sentimental old woman. As he recalls the quietness and peace that made his mother's room a sanctuary for all her children, Tom recollects a quality of womanhood which is totally wanting in Lucy:

> I seemed in that room to be existing within my mother's being, an essential quality, indescribable to me then, and not easy to describe now; something that was more grace than happiness, more beauty than joy, more patience than rest, a dignity without pride, a peace both withdrawn and sensitive. But for me, as a child, beauty, grace and distinction (TBP 31).

But if the mother's virtues make Lucy seem even more vulgar, she has, nevertheless, the energy, the drive and the independence of mind which make her attractive in her own right. And Cary seems to suggest that to be a complete and satisfactory woman, each needs some of the qualities of the other. In a direct comparison of mother and daughter, Wilcher says that his father's high code for women requires just this kind of balance between good breeding and lively spirits without the abrasiveness of Lucy's manners:

> My father, as I say, loved Lucy with pride as well as joy, that love which is the noblest, as well as the most demanding form of the passion. He wanted for her every virtue of body and spirit. His code for women was high; not higher than for men, but different. He looked in women, above all, for that peculiar grace which inspired all my mother's acts and moods; a grace of spirit as well as body; a charity of soul which affected even her carriage and her voice. . . .
>
> My father, unlike his daughter, could appreciate my mother's quality as well as Lucy's. His mind may have had an inflexible character, but his sympathies were pliant and comprehensive. He understood and valued my mother's peculiar sensibility and her gentleness of spirit, as well as Lucy's courage and passion. But coarseness and brutality in a woman was to him a sin against Nature, as well as his code. He thought of women as the guardians of a special virtue given them by God (TBP 42-3).

This comparison comes in the middle of a long meditation on the difference between the way Tom and his brothers and sister were raised and the way they in turn were raising their own children, of whom Robert and Ann are representative types. Cary's objectivity enables him to see not only the virtues, but the defects also of each age so that no generation escapes criticism. The mother's passivity deprives her of the right and duty to give moral guidance to her children; instead, she becomes a comforter, and her room is the sanctuary to which the children seek temporary relief from the arduous discipline of their father. For his part, the father is shown to be tactless. On the other hand, although little direct account is given of the upbringing of Robert and Ann, it is evident that their parents were much less stable and that they were sceptical of their parents' religion. Tom therefore makes two conclusions, one at the beginning and another at the end of his meditation to show the different attitudes to social order in the second and third generations of the family. Ann and Robert, sexually lax and generally indifferent to conventional morality, are nevertheless shocked to see a child punished with the rod. But the

absence of corporal punishment in their childhood which they consider a source of greater happiness actually deprives them, in Tom's view, of something vital which they cannot even appreciate. "They cannot understand the virtue of law, of discipline, which is to give that only peace which man can enjoy in this turmoil of the world; peace in his own soul" (TBP 41). By contrast, their parents, reared on a system of rewards and punishment and a strict Protestant ethic that stressed self-reliance and courage, are more resilient. Lucy survives, without bitterness or self-pity, the nervous crisis of family discipline when she defies her father's orders and is punished twice on the same day. This system, which the young generation holds in contempt, breeds a sense of freedom and independence within the law and leads Tom to his second conclusion:

> But none of us was encouraged to self-pity, the disease of the egotist. Religion was not our comforter. How could we be comforted by hell fire; and individual responsibility for sin? We lived in the law, that ark of freedom. A ship well founded, well braced to carry us over the most frightful rocks, and quicksands. And on those nursery decks we knew where we were, we were as careless and lively as all sailors under discipline (TBP 46).

Tom thus blames the moral laxity of the young on the failure of their parents to give, in Cary's own phrase on this same subject in *Charley is My Darling*, "a clear picture without uncertainties." The brilliant and gay Edward, engrossed in the pursuit of his own extravagant tastes and ambition, abandons Ann to institutions which have become tainted by the materialism and egoism of the age so that he gets a daughter with the look of breeding rather than real breeding. Well educated and feeling self-sufficient, Ann is nevertheless eternally uncertain because, in Tom's terms, she has only 'information' and no education at all and therefore suffers from the lassitude of the age

with all "the melancholy, the look of a doomed race, lonely and burdened;" and the reason for this sadness and misery Tom locates firmly in the rejection of faith by the young: "No one could plant happiness in a soul that rejects all faith" (TBP 13).

The complete shift in values and the conflict of ideals between the old and the young is evident in the fact that Tom sees a woman's security in marriage and a home whereas Ann feels secure by virtue of her professional training. Tom is astounded by the thought that Ann's sense of security makes her indifferent to a possible break in her marriage, a fact which makes her uncle feel that "all the most stable and valuable parts of social order had suddenly burst into fragments and formed themselves into something quite different" (TBP 181). Tom Wilcher, that is, sees the home and the church as the twin centres in which to lay the foundations of social order, although the religion he describes throughout serves as a means to self-fulfilment and self-discipline rather than a way to secure a heaven after death.

But the mood of anxiety and uncertainty which afflicts Ann is not peculiar to her age. Throughout his exposition, Wilcher frequently uses himself as a standard of comparison with the present generation. His anxiety, his uncertainty and the feeling of inadequacy to which he confesses, are all too evident. Morever, these feelings did not descend on him in his decrepitude but have been with him all his life:

> The young man of my memory, serious, burdened, prematurely anxious, whose very dandyism was a moral enquiry, changes into somebody quite different, a boy who at twenty-one was utterly unsure of himself. So shy, so clumsy beneath his careful manners, that he was scarcely responsible for his own vices. Moved this way and that by every voice of power, by Pug Brown, by Lucy, by Edward. (TBP 76-7).

The difference between him and Ann, however, is that his anxiety stems not from the failure of his parents and the social system of his age to give him the necessary guidance and preparation for the complexities of life, but from a congenital paralysis of the will , an irresolvable conflict of desires and the chilling apprehension that the cherished order of his parents is being shattered by the scepticism of his age. In a crucial conversation with Edward, Tom and his brother reveal that one of the distempers of their age is a loss of faith in life itself and in middle-class values generally. The conversation starts with Mrs. Tirrit, a wealthy London socialite who had fallen in love with Edward, cheated her husband, and now wants to marry Edward soon after the husband's death while he vacillates because he is simultaneously attracted by the charm and repelled by the corruption; then quite unexpectedly Edwards moves to the boredom, the ennui that grip his age and their larger implications for society:

> He reflects a moment, letting his cigarette hang crookedly, and then gives the coal a sharp rap. "That's it, Tommy--is life worth living? Give a man everything in the world, give everyone everything they think they want, and they might still ask that question. Judging by my experience, they might be all the more ready to ask it"
>
> "Do you believe in God, Edward?"
>
> "Oh, yes, I mean I believe in His existence. But how does one keep up one's interest in Him?"
>
> I am inexpressibly shocked. "Edward, think of what religion means.
>
> "And how does one go on being interested in life. That is the important question which governments will soon have to answer. How do you maintain the vital spark. It isn't a matter of health. A perfectly healthy world would probably die out like the Polynesians. And look how poor papa clings to life--I've always envied him".
>
> "He does really believe in God--and heaven"
>
> "But then you would think he would be willing to go to heaven. And look at Lucy, she doesn't believe in anything"
>
> "She's given up everything for God".

"Do you think so? My impression is that Lucy hasn't any religion at all. But she has a great sense of class. She has turned herself into a char because she feels that her own class is finished. She doesn't feel grand enough as a mere lady. She has flown to the arms of Puggy to give herself the sense of nobility" (TBP 75-6).

And so we are back to what in the preface to *The African Witch* Cary calls the fundamental question in life: that is, what makes men tick and keeps them ticking (Af W 9). Tom finds the answer in religion and therefore suggests that his own generation does not tick because it has lost faith in God. Edward gives the rationalist answer that the faithful cling tenaciously to this life rather than hasten to the promised heaven of their religion, and therefore feels that the answer lies not in the decline of religion, but in the disintegration of the English middle class. Lucy's escape from her class further complicates the issue because, like Edward, we know that she holds no conventional beliefs and dies earnestly imploring Tom to save Robert from her sect by giving him a sound education in Latin (TBP 298). There is therefore a third answer which attributes the ills of the age to education. Earlier, Lucy had openly objected to university education for John, her nephew, on the grounds that "the varsity is the ruin of boys" (TBP 218). She herself finds, when she goes over to the Benjamites, that her middle-class training has given her no worthwhile skills and she must therefore undertake the most menial chores in the cooperative life of the group. But her tenacity wins her a respectable place in the group because she is in search not of nobility as Edward suggests in his cynicism, but of a renewal of life which has become stale and static and corrupt in her own class.

As Wilcher looks back into the past, he finds that English national pride, confidence and optimism reached a crest in the Jubilee

of 1887. In that year the young were full of enterprise and self-confidence while the old looked back to the past years of the century with justifiable pride. But even in the middle of its celebrations the nation was already showing signs of stress and dissension because some people saw in the pageantry of the jubilee festivities "a vulgar glorification of power and wealth." The imperial idea of national glory, the biggest source of pride and wealth to the adventurers of the age was being questioned by radical champions of freedom:

> Men for whom the Empire had been a trust from God to evangelize the world, Indian veterans who had heard Lawrence pray and Havelock preach, stood beside youngsters from Kimberley mines for whom Empire meant wealth, power, the domination of a chosen race.
> On both sides it was a battle of faith. Rhodes was already looking for the reign of eternal peace and justice under the federated imperial nations, and against him, the Radicals passionately sought national freedom for all peoples. The first spoke in the name of God the law-giver, for world-wide justice and service; the second in the name of Christ the rebel, for universal love and trust; and both were filled with the sense of mission (TBP 139).

In the twentieth century, however, the intoxication of imperial triumph, opposed by radical humanists of the nineteenth century, becomes a kind of Marxian class struggle between a self-assured and arrogant wealthy few and an overwhelming majority of indigent sufferers. The secret fear of revolution plagues the nation as the buoyant youth of Jubilee become the anxious men of the twentieth century impatiently waiting for the dawn of the millenium. Instead of the expected millenium, however, they see in the filthy industrial towns and the degenerate life of their inhabitants man's creation of hell on earth, and radical politicians detect in these facts a deliberate intention to destroy the nation:

> "If the devil is known by his work, then you can find hell all over England. Every great industrial town is a candidate for the honour, and improves its chances of election every year. The accepted plan is to place as many people as possible in the most hideous and wretched surroundings, and give them no food but adulterated rubbish and no pleasure but drink. It is highly successful" (TBP 57).

But even this tendentious statement by Edward represents, according to Tom, middle-class thinking of the time, a thinking which mirrors the general feeling of desperation. With the wealthy unwilling to make concessions and the Communists and Socialists demanding the blood of the wealthy, the frightening class conflict seems totally irreconcilable. "For, in that time, the rich men were still boundless in wealth and arrogance; the poor were in misery, and neither saw any possibility of change without the overthrow of society" (TBP 58).

This national conflict is reflected in its microcosmic form in what Tom calls their "savage family quarrels of 1913" (TBP 220). The family quarrels, like the national disputes, stem from class snobbery and from the uneven distribution of wealth in the various branches of the Wilcher family. Lucy, with her sense of class, looks on the inhabitants of Hog Lane, a slum of Tolbrook, with frank contempt even though her mother had treated them with courtesy and generous charity. And when her mother and Amy visit Hog Lane with Robert, Lucy explodes with characteristic violence and intolerance, scornfully dismissing its miserable inhabitants as "gutter snipes" and "dregs" who remain poor by default (TBP 217). On the other hand, Amy with her feminine grace, her sense of class without the class-consciousness of Lucy, treats the inhabitants of Hog Lane with deference and civility because, in her mind, these poor people are the victims of a social determinism that is beyond their power to influence: "So Amy, with her eighteenth

century idea of the world set in castes . . . seemed more democratic than the evangelist Lucy, who judged rich and poor by the same iron standards" (TBP 217).

Thus the inflexibility of the antagonists at both the national and domestic levels makes the political battles of the pre-war years virulent and menacing to the entire social order (TBP 202). These political battles threaten the political macrocosm because they transcend class barriers and embitter relationships in that basic unit of society, the family. In one of the most dramatic instances of this, Tom recalls how in the midst of general merriment and gaiety following a successful party for Liberal politicians at Tolbrook, his father explodes into vehement anger when he learns that Edward is in favour of old age pension, a scheme which his ailing father sees as an attempt to pauperize hard working English men and turn many others into parasites. And when, as part of the pleasantries of the evening, a newspaper carrying one of Edward's cynical couplets is produced, his usually self-possessed father goes into a frenzy and rails so furiously at his son that he collapses and suffers a mild stroke (TBP 124). These violent conflicts show not only the failure of one generation to understand another, but also the absence of a common political or moral purpose in the nation or the family.

Tom sees in his own life a metaphor for the restlessness and agitation of the time in which he lives:

> My life . . . might be described as three great waves of passion and agitation. The first rose in my youth, out of that inland sea, and gradually grew higher, darker, heavier, more dangerous, until, in the great war, it fell with one tremendous crash. And after that war, out of the confused choppy ocean of my middle age, arose another wave, not so high as the last, but faster, wilder and blacker, which finally dashed itself to pieces in a swamp; and

> became a stagnant lake, among rotting trees, and tropical serpents. From which Sara, like a mild English breeze, came to rescue me, by blowing away the vapours, and sweeping me off from that oozy gulf into a third wave, a bright Atlantic roller, smooth and fresh, which was just about to come into port, when it struck upon a sand bar and burst into foam, bubbles, spray, air, etc. But like the waves you see from all these western cliffs, never finding rest. (TBP 223).

The note of despair on which this summary of his life ends typifies the lives of most of the main characters in Tom's generation. Like him, they pass from the calm and security of youth to the turbulence of revolutionary agitation which frightens the cowards like Tom and excites the foolhardy like Edward. And when the war smashes their brittle ideals, they all turn to the enjoyment of a new reckless wave of passion. But like Tom also, their attempt to escape the dark swamp of despair is illusory. The smooth and fresh Atlantic roller with its regenerative power is swamped by a wilder wave of greedy passion with devastating effects for all.

Edward, despairing, turns from his passion for politics to his passion for women and marries the old Mrs. Tirrit for her charm and money. When she dies and leaves him her fortune, he turns his back on everything else to enjoy the civilization he has always admired and marries a beautiful, cultured but profligate woman like himself; and when she divorces him, he gives in to despair and dies from a mild case of influenza which quickly develops into a fatal pneumonia. Among a mass of unfinished literary works, Tom finds one nearly complete poem whose closing lines summarise the sense of futility and hopelessness of the age:

> Not time destroys the old but creeping spite
> For all they fought for, in a bungled fight.
> For fame along the street, June's summer gush
> Choking the sun with gilt, the leaves with plush,

> For triumphs lost which won would still be mean--
> They die of laughing at their might have been (TBP 282).

This is the unhappy conclusion of a man who knows that his is an age of unrealised hopes.

Tom himself, hoping to escape the turmoil of events by withdrawing into a quiet nest where Sara can give him the domestic peace he has never known in his adult life, is thwarted by the nephews and nieces who put their claims to the inheritance of the family property over the needs of their uncle.

And Julie Eeles, long time mistress of Edward and later of Tom, epitomizes the corruption of civilization in her age. A former actress, Julie allows her talents to decay through disuse. Beautiful and intelligent, her mind "had the same forms as her body; an austere grace, a balanced quickness. She had all the qualities of a great actress . . . She had all, except ambition" (TBP 148-49). And like other members of her class, she is extremely self-indulgent. She has strong attachments and sluttish morals. So she grieves deeply when Edward neglects her and even attempts suicide; but she is willing to go to bed with Tom because Edward had suggested the idea to her:

> "He told me years ago that you and I were exactly suited. He really believed it, you know, because he has no feelings for people, only for ideas--he labelled us both; type, religious, species, amorous and sentimental, and thought how nice it would be if, when he found me a nuisance, he could pass me on to you" (TBP 201).

Like so much else that the characters in *To Be A Pilgrim* say, this statement reveals as much about Edward as it does about Julie and Tom. Julie's remark about Edward is valid just as his own categorization of Julie and Tom is irrefutable; and each suffers from the cardinal flaw of his character; Edward from his levity and heedlessness,

Tom from his hypocrisy and double morality and Julie from her sluttishness and simple-mindedness. Each is also betraying the selfishness which undermines the fine legacy of civilization they inherited from the nineteenth century. Edward, and Tom, especially, pursue Julie because she embodies their ideals of beauty and refinement. Julie sacrifices herself to Edward because his revolutionary fervour holds the promise of a new social order which her generation so ardently desires. But in pursuing his personal ideals, each of these people fails to serve the wider national cause. Tom formally summarises the reasons for their individual and collective failures:

> What was Edward's charm; and Julie's and Mrs. Tirrit's; so different in character? A universal tolerance, based on universal enjoyment. They were faithful to friendship, to kindness, to beauty; never to faith. They could not make the final sacrifice (TBP 205).

The unwillingness to make the final sacrifice, exemplified in the retirement from public life by Edward at the height of his powers, explains the failure of his generation to preserve their heritage. It must be noted that Edward is not without respectable ideals in his political life. In his private capacity, he is degenerate, unfeeling and inconsiderate. But as a politician, he is firmly committed to the laudable ideal of improving social amenities and the condition of the poor. Moreover, he has the inventiveness and the drive to translate his ideas into actions (TBP 195). His early retirement therefore amounts to an abdication of social responsibility. And by raising the expectations of people for the rapid emergence of a brave new world and then withdrawing from public life, Edward contributes to the general discontent and makes people even more desirous of change for its own sake (TBP 197). For a man who frightens Tom with his talk of

"the secret and everlasting conflicts of life" (TBP 240), Edward's withdrawal is a repudiation of his personal faith. It is also an abnegation of "the best feeling of the time--the sense of duty, of sacrifice; the desire for a better world" (TBP 253).

And it is the central irony of *To Be A Pilgrim* that while most people of Tom's generation want a better world, no one is willing to work hard enough for it or make the necessary sacrifices. Edward, the imaginative and practical politician, withdraws at the very time his qualities are most needed. Bill, the soldier and traditional servant of the state, is too complacent and self-satisfied to go beyond the hackneyed routine of service. Tom, with the most lively civic and moral consciousness, is self-deceiving and limits his usefulness because of his excessive concern over the fate of Tolbrook. And Lucy undertakes her arduous pilgrimage largely to satisfy a personal whim and secure her release from a burdensome discipline. And the irony is crowned by the fact that while Tom strives throughout his narrative to assert the superior moral and social consciousness of his generation over that of the young people, John, Robert and Ann, the reader perceives all too clearly that it is largely the failure of the parents in Tom's generation to live up to their responsibility that accounts for the moral laxity and general deterioration in the quality of the life of the young.

In a series of juxtapositions of old and young, Cary shows the increasing corruption of the young as a result of the action or inaction of the old. But as if to debunk or modify Tom's variously expressed creed that "it is in some well-founded idea that men and women, and whole nations, float as in a ship over the utmost violence

of chance and time" (TBP 104), Ann and Robert, in particular, show a growing reliance on action rather than intellectually held ideas that remain dormant as in the case of their uncle. In a conversation with her uncle, Ann argues convincingly that it is not their ideas, but their combined actions which have prevented Robert from going back to Brazil and tied him firmly to Tolbrook (ch. 46). But before their discussion is over, it becomes evident that while these two conservative characters are acting out of a common desire to preserve Tolbrook, their underlying motives are different. Tom encourages a marriage between Robert and Ann because he wants to preserve Tolbrook for its historical associations and keep it as an emblem of family survival and vitality. Ann, however, wants to possess Robert and perhaps Tolbrook purely for the satisfaction of getting what she wants and feels no compunction in asserting that a world dominated by her kind of "selfishness and self-seeking . . . might be rather restful" (TBP 106).

Ann's brutally frank view, intended in part to shock her uncle, is, as Tom realises, sincerely held. It is part of her criticism of what she considers the hypocrisy of Tom's age. In a previous encounter in which her uncle reproaches her for her pre-marital affair with Robert, Ann nonchalantly dismisses her uncle's moralizing by coolly reminding him that "after all, . . . Daddy was not so strict. . . . And you told me yourself that Sara Jimson was as good as a wife to you" (TBP 39). This conflict between the lofty moral precepts and the dissolute ways of Tom's age is a major factor in perverting the moral order of the young. In one of his later reflections on what he repeatedly calls the "egotism and materialism" of the young, Tom finally

concludes that it is the dichotomy between precept and example in his age that is responsible for the distorted and perverse morality of the present. They preach service and duty to church and state while they pursue their selfish interests. Quoting an old Tory who is fulminating about the new education which he claims teaches the young only "to grab, and do the least work for the most money," Tom says that the answer to this complaint is to be found in this couplet by Edward:

> Leave politics to us, the Tories cry
> For politicians cheat and rob and lie (TBP 307).

In spite of his criticism of his age, however, Tom makes no secret of the fact that he resents the present. He is distressed and revolted by the immorality of the young, especially among women. And in Gladys, first the mistress and later the wife of John, Tom finds the most nauseating example of feminine perversion. Bawdy, drunken and dirty, she makes Julie, with whom she is frequently identified, look infinitely more elegant and refined and moral. While John can still detect beneath the faded beauty of Julie the magnificence that made her great in her day, Tom, who uses a moral criterion to evaluate people, tells him that "Julie had had no great days, and that she seemed . . . much deteriorated from her little days" (TBP 264). Yet a direct comparison of the two women shows that whatever criterion is adopted, the old seems vastly superior. Here is part of Tom's evaluation of the two women:

> Falseness now seemed to be taking possession of Julie. It peeped from the most unexpected corners, as bats and rats suddenly show their whiskers in the crannies of palaces too long unused.
>
> The rich material was there, the dignity, the sincerity, but all began to seem meaningless and therefore tawdry . . . The slender tragic actress had changed into a theatrical poser, who

> was apt to give a little performance, at certain cues, such as the words friendship, courage, loyalty. And like all such performers on the carpet, without her limelights, she seemed amateurish. What John took for the grand manner of a former age was simply the flummery of any age.
>
> And she made such a fuss about John, that I was ashamed for her.
>
> Now, to my astonishment, I saw her offering the same attentions to Gladys, who, for her part, lay on Julie's sofa most of the evening, her feet in the air, her skirt to her thighs, and telling us about her boys, how often they had tried to rape her, how nearly they had succeeded, how she had got rid of some of the others, who were too dull, or ugly, or poor, or who didn't know enough to attempt a rape (TBP 264-65).

This is the description of the "grand manner" as it appears in the old and the young women of the post World War I era. And Julie's histrionics cannot but strike Tom (and the reader) as a new kind of "falseness." The war had engendered a feeling of fellowship and solidarity among people of Julie's generation and forced them to give up their hedonistic pursuits in order to save the world "by the devotion and sacrifice of their lives" (TBP 241). But, as Tom discovered in the front lines in France where he served as a stretcher bearer, the war had had the effect of brutalizing people, especially the soldiers, who made "of all life, its glories, as well as its miseries, something obscene or contemptible" (TBP 241).

Julie herself is so brutalized and shattered by the shock of events that at the end of the war, she shows an increasing tendency towards self-sacrifice--that contemptible disease, in Cary's dialectics, of the self-indulgent individual. Her willingness to turn her elegant flat into a bawdy house because she wants to satisfy young people like John who have been battered by the war is frivolous and morally indefensible. In any case, John who can sit and marvel at the exploits of Gladys because "that's only the fashion" (TBP 264) cannot be helped by increasing drunkenness and defilement. Far from restoring anyone

into a position of dignity, the effect is to leave them broken down by the slings and arrows of an outrageous life until

> Each became a parody of his own nature. Julie's dignity was turned into pompous hypocrisy; Glady's [sic] frankness became obscene, imbecile; John's good nature and unselfishness became sloth and boredom (TBP 284).

John's generation, then, suffers from an incurable "corruption of weariness" (TBP 286). The corruption of weariness or the danger of falling into sloth and decadence which Toms sees early in the story as the real threat to the well-being of England now seems irreversible. On a visit to John's place of work to complain about Gladys's affairs with other men, Tom finds his nephew as indifferent to his wife's infidelity as the wealthy but insolent woman he is helping to select a new car is unconcerned about public decorum. In their shared vulgarity, their insouciance as they sit examining the elaborate luxury of a car already covered with dust, they objectify a new morality and a new world in which the meretricious beauty of the exterior conceals the corruption and ugliness within at both the human and mechanical levels (TBP 286-87).

But Tom Wilcher's trenchant denunciation of the present is much more than the futile posturing of a helpless old man. In the words of Robert Bloom,

> He is a learned, even a wise man, who, unlike the largely unthinking Sara, has brooded deeply and deliberately over the process of historical change. He knows that life must go on by taking new forms and that an unyielding attachment to the past, especially to such material embodiments of the past as Tolbrook, can be life-defeating.[11]

And his views carry conviction precisely because the past which is eulogized is not even the past of Tom's youth which marks the

beginning of a new era of decadence, but the past age of his parents and others before it.

And throughout his narrative, Tom continually drops subtle reminders that by his criticism of the present, he is merely repeating the unending process of one generation reviewing another and often making unfair judgments because it is using criteria that frequently have no relevance to the age under review. This he calls "the injustice of one generation to another" (TBP 40). Thus while his generation finds much that is ludicrous in the politics of Gladstone, their parents see him as a prophet:

> To Edward, and therefore to me, Gladstone was an old-fashioned Whig, and already an obstacle to progress. We condescended to him as the Grand Old Man. It was not for many years that we realized how great he had seemed to my father's generation; a prophet, a leader sent from God (TBP 124).

And the wheel turns full circle when Tom discusses with Ann what he considers to be the serious politics of his age and the "advanced" views of Edward. Ann's response is unflattering, even deflating. Her father whom Tom considers to have lived a century ahead of his time seems like "a period piece" to the daughter, his tragic view of life appears "a little too fussy", and "all that old politics looks so small from this end of the telescope--and when politics gets to look small, it looks mean, too" (TBP 283).

This is part of the triumph of *To Be A Pilgrim*: the fact that with a first person narrator who has a great deal of self-knowledge and admirable insights into the problems he is discussing, the reader not only occasionally enjoys his superior understanding of the issues and characters, but also that the narrator is forced from time to time to recognise the naivete of his own views on things and people. Ann's

verdict on her father is essentially that of the reader, too. But the circumstances (the earnestly poetic view of life as tragedy which opens the discussion) and the method of pricking Tom's carefully blown balloon gives a melodramatic twist that reduces the whole thing to its tellingly comic but significant proportions. Nevertheless, the process of mutual criticism continues and on the final page of the novel, it is Ann who admits, apparently forgetting her objections to the gravity of her father's generation, that life is indeed serious while Tom admonishes her to take herself less seriously. There is superb irony here and a confirmation of Tom's impression that "every age had its nonsense and this age likes to be hard and careworn" (TBP 340).

And in spite of his generally brooding manner, Tom is capable of humour, albeit a dark kind of humour that is appropriate to his character. Here, for example, is a moment of comic self-recognition with the characteristic blend of Carian pathos and import:

> . . . I, the very last individual being of the old creation, though still solid in appearance, and capable of supporting a hat; as I ascertained by touch; trousers, umbrella, etc., as I perceived by sight, was yet already wavering in essense, beginning to lose the shape of my ideas, memory, etc., preparatory to the final and rapid solution of my whole identity.
>
> I do not mean, of course, that I continued in such a delusion. It was the weakness of a passing second. Yet it caused me to feel again how insecure are those chains of assumption by which we conduct our lives; how easily broken; how necessary to be anchored to a faith which, being of the mind and the spirit and so forth, can defy the corruption of sense and the shims of fashion (TBP 278).

But this is the tragic dilemma not only of Tom, but also of the majority of his peers: the fact that they cannot distinguish between the durable faith they preach and the fragile assumptions by which they live until they break down under the stress. Tom himself remains likeable, even admirable, because while there is ample justification for the

charge of hypocrisy which his family, especially the young, bring against him, the reader can see that he is genuinely concerned about the survival of those things and traditions which, undisturbed, "can defy the corruption of sense and the shims of fashion." It is his unceasing fight for the preservation of those irreplaceable parts of civilization which earns him the sympathy and respect of the reader. And his own clear perception of the futility of his effort is poignantly conveyed in this piercing lament over the fate of Tolbrook now that it must come under the control of Robert:

> This place is so doused in memory, that only to breathe makes me dream like an opium eater. Like one who has taken a narcotic, I have lived among fantastic loves and purposes. The shape of a field, the turn of a lane, have had the power to move me as if they were my children, and I made them. I have wished immortal life for them, though they were even more transient appearances than human beings (TBP 135-36).

But Tom Wilcher is realistic enough to accept the inevitable before the end of his story. Like Ann, he knows that Robert is iconoclastic and that the old Protestant in him would "really like to make a whole new god for himself" (TBP 164). And when Robert begins to work on the changes to Tolbrook, indiscriminately knocking down the good and the bad, Tom is justified in saying that "barbarians had taken possession" of the place (TBP 128). The saloon at Tolbrook had been the pride of the family for more than a century, attracting architects and photographers from all over the world because it "breathes of a double refinement; the Roman art of life, distilled through the long spiral of English classicism" (TBP 128). But Robert, the new barbarian, does not even recognise this classic beauty. He has already measured the room and discovered that it can hold a modern thresher and has therefore decided to convert it into a machine shed

TBP 129). It is this irreverent disregard for tradition which Tom denounces. This puts him above the common run of conservative characters in Cary's fiction because he knows that change does not always mean progress. And although in the end he is forced to surrender to the inevitable, it is not without some satisfaction over the knowledge that Robert is simply putting Tolbrook through another phase of history:

> Robert, I suspect, is more Brown than Wilcher, a peasant in grain. But he does not destroy Tolbrook, he takes it back into history, which changed it once before from priory into farm, from farm into manor, from manor, the workshop and court of a feudal dictator, into a country house where young ladies danced and hunting men played billiards; where at last, a new rich gentleman spent his week-ends from his office. And after that, I suppose it was to have been a country hotel, where typists on holiday gaze at the trees, the crops, and the farmer's men, with mutual astonishment and dislike. Robert has brought it back into the English stream and he himself has come with it . . . (TBP 328).

The novel thus ends on a note of optimism, with Tom Wilcher defeated but consoled by the feeling that the English capacity for revival and renewal will ensure the continuity of Tolbrook and therefore of England with which it is repeatedly identified. In the end, Tom's views take hold of us because in spite of reservations, we can see the validity of his plea. This is how Cary explains the paradox of Tom's life in *Art and Reality*:

> Old buildings, antique furniture, have about them the associations of history, of period, as given to us by the historians and novelists. They are enriched symbols of the past suggesting to us all the various stories connected with them, the idea of the men and women who have suffered with them. This passion for the old is an analogue of our own love of our own things, not because they are possessions, but because they are part of that world that we have created for ourselves, and, like any creative artist, we have a special pleasure in what we have made.[12]

Tom is fascinating not only because the reader detects in the contradictions that tear him apart the elemental stuff of life that besets, in varying degrees, every human being, but also because he has

the capacity for rigorous self-criticism, a capacity which is denied the other characters who must therefore confront their fates without his awareness. His focus can be deadly accurate whether he is pointing the searchlight to others or to himself. He gives, for example, as neat a summary of the root cause of his life's handicap as can be when he says: "I have always been a lover rather than a doer; I have lived in dreams rather than acts; and like all lovers, I have lived in terror of change to what I love" (TBP 333).

One suspects that it is the uniqueness of Tom Wilcher's character that often leads the critics to concentrate on his person rather than the fate of England in the twentieth century which is his prime concern. Orville Prescott calls him "one of the most subtly developed, complete and original characters in modern fiction." [3] And Walter Allen remarks that

> Striking as Jimson is, the character of Wilcher seems to me in essentials the greater feat, as I find *To Be A Pilgrim* more profound and on a vaster scale than *The Horse's Mouth*. Wilcher is a true original: there is no other character like him in the range of our fiction.[14]

But although these views are perfectly tenable, it is important to stress that *To Be A Pilgrim* is essentially a study of the failure of two generations of English men and women to live up to their national destiny: to be pilgrims and adventurers with a sense of history so that they can protect what is irreplaceable in their civilization while accepting that which is new and desirable.

IV. *The Horse's Mouth*

In *The Horse's Mouth*, Cary presses to its utmost limits his contention that conflict is the inescapable condition of man in society. *Herself Surprised* opens with a judge passing sentence on Sara, thereby asserting the supremacy of the social order over the created order of the individual. In *To Be A Pilgrim*, Wilcher helplessly presides over the destruction of everything that is dear to him as the mechanical civilization of the twentieth century crushes English civilization of the past. In *The Horse's Mouth*, on the other hand, Cary makes a very sustained effort at depicting "the tragic dilemma of freedom": the irresolvable conflict between the creative individual and society whose laws sanction individual freedom but whose practice must restrict that very freedom in trying to meet the varying demands of its people. But the attempt to reconcile the conflicting needs of different individuals involves an unavoidable measure of injustice to some people. Sara receives a harsh sentence not because she deserves it but because the demands of social order make it necessary to hold up her case as an example and a possible deterrent to potential offenders. Tom Wilcher and Hickson, the "respectable" members of society, go scot-free even when they commit real offences that are no less serious than Sara's. But Gulley Jimson serves a number of prison terms for harassing Hickson who had cheaply acquired the artist's early paintings which are now selling at considerably higher prices while Gulley cannot find the money to feed himself or buy the paints and brushes he needs for the epic pictures that whirl in his imagination.

All these factors make for violence and *The Horse's Mouth* is the most violent of Cary's European novels because Gulley Jimson, the hero, is the most militant individualist in the whole of Cary's fiction. As a young man, he abandons the security of a home and a job to enjoy the precarious freedom of the artist. For him, the only truth worth pursuing is the truth of the imagination. Yet, conflict is unavoidable even in withdrawal because, as Gulley repeatedly reminds himself, the freedom within cannot ignore the necessity without which compels him to look for shelter, food and the tools of his trade. He therefore borrows, begs or steals from friends and strangers whenever he is possessed by the irresistible urge to create, or is forced by physical necessity. As Marjorie Ryan puts it, Gulley's "eternal verities" include "on the one hand, the restraints placed on man by his physical limitations and by organized society and, on the other, an intensely subjective individualism that must be expressed, despite the dangers of such expression, if he is to live at all."[15]

In fact, from that fateful day when he began to play with an ink drop in a London office until he felt convinced that he could be a painter, Gulley is continually rebelling against everything conventional in life as well as in art. He stops supporting his old mother and leaves his wife and young baby to starve in order to embark on his career as an artist (HM 61). He embraces English classical painting of the early nineteenth century and soon begins to make a living again because the style happens to be fashionable at the time. But he rejects it the first day he sees an impressionist painting by Manet. And he makes the change not simply because of the attraction of novelty to an original mind, but also because he sees himself as the manifest symbol

of the unending struggle between tradition and change. His change is also a gesture of revolt against the ignorance of a public which ridicules whatever it cannot understand. So Gulley goes over to French impressionism even though he cannot yet paint in that style:

> Because some chaps were laughing at it. And it gave me the shock of my life. Like a flash of lightening. It skinned my eyes for me, and when I came out I was a different man. And I saw the world again, the world of colour. By Gee and Jay, I said, I was dead, and I didn't know it.
>
> From the fire on the hearth
> A little female babe did spring.
>
> I felt her jump. But of course the old classic put up a fight. It was the Church against Darwin, the old Lords against the Radicals. And I was the battleground (HM 62).

But impressionism, like all other established schools of art, will in turn be rejected by Gulley because he cannot be satisfied with anything less than his own original creation.

These gestures of revolt are characteristic of Gulley and reveal at once the devoted artist and the eccentric human being. We admire his disinterested passion for original art but marvel at his egocentricity. Impelled, like most of Cary's creative characters, by some mysterious power, Gulley immerses himself completely in the aesthetic experience, abstracting himself, whenever possible, from the ordinary world of routine in order to pursue his artistic dream. He can do this because he is resilient and inventive to a degree which is perhaps unequalled by any of Cary's indefagitable creators. His artistic career expresses in its most extreme form the pilgrim ideal which Tom Wilcher enunciates in *To Be A Pilgrim.*

In spite of Gulley's extreme individualism,however, *The Horse's Mouth* is essentially an elaboration and a reworking of Cary's recurrent

themes of the creative individual in conflict with society and "the fundamental injustice of the world." Or, as Cary himself puts it, Gulley "is himself a creator, and has lived in creation all his life, and so he understands and continually reminds himself that in a world of everlasting creation there is no justice" (HM 7). The two themes run parallel throughout the narrative, with Gulley unfolding his pathetic story in his deliberately facetious and detached manner, while multiplying instances of injustice, ranging from the simple to the complex and the extraordinary.

When we encounter Gulley Jimson at the beginning of his story, he is already in deep conflict with society. He has just emerged from prison where he served a term for telephoning threats to Hickson, his long time patron and financier. But Gulley is very much himself, enjoying his uncertain freedom, seeing, in the Blakean language he is continually quoting, "small portions of the eternal world" and thinking of how to resume his art. But while his mind bristles with new ideas, the external restraints placed on him by society make work impossible because, despite a sharp rise in the value of his early paintings, now entirely in the hands of collectors, he cannot even afford "a brush or a tube of colour" (HM 16). This is one aspect of the artist's struggle against society. The other, and, from Gulley's point of view, far more exasperating problems, stem from the threat of destruction to his work by mischievous children and uncomprehending adults, as well as the nearly complete lack of appreciation and support for the original artist in his life time. In Gulley's endless struggle against society, therefore, Cary dramatises "the dilemma of the free individual soul,

separated by the very nature of his individuality from the real of which he is nevertheless a part."[16]

Unlike most of Cary's creative artists, however, Gulley is fully aware of the dangers of his undertaking. He knows that by its insistent criticism of traditional systems and beliefs, modern art is insidiously subversive of the social order and must therefore be opposed by the traditional forces of society. Modern art, Gulley says facetiously, is as dangerous as the influenza and those in authority know what it can do. "Creeping about everywhere, undermining the Church and the State and the Academy and the Law and marriage and the Government--smashing up civilization, degenerating the Empire" (HM 26). Thus, although for Gulley artistic creation is all that matters in life, he warns Nosy Barbon, the young boy who admires him and wants to be an artist, that there is not a more dangerous undertaking in the modern world than that of the artist (HM 24). His problems are insoluble. If, like Gulley's father, he lacks originality and must therefore draw his inspiration from the established schools, he might find his style superseded by new forms of art which will render his work unsalable. But the original artist might also starve because he is incomprehensible to the connoisseurs who often have set ideas about art. Gulley suffers the second fate. His first exhibition is dismissed as childish and ostentatious; and the farther away he moves from traditional forms, the more hostile criticism becomes. One critic writes that "Mr. G. Jimson's work shows a progressive disintegration and is now quite incomprehensible" (HM 112). Another, hired by Hickson to stimulate interest in Gulley's work, "got converted and wrote that in his real

opinion I was anti-Christ, and one of the chief causes of the decadence of British youth" (HM 134).

These instances and the hostility which the artist's work generates in the public mind illustrate both Gulley's plight and a view of art held by Cary himself:

> Art, in fact, as the creative activity that keeps the spirit alive, that forever fights against everything that stultifies and kills the spirit, for the creation against the created thing, is by its very nature, subversive. It disturbs; it awakes. It is the natural enemy of all dogmatic assertion, all State machines. And all established powers, all Governments, academies, Churches, hate it and fear it. It stands for liberty. It threatens their power.[17]

Gulley's problems seem all the more real because Cary is able to *demonstrate* his creative powers. Whether he is walking along the Thames or sitting in a bar, Gulley's fertile imagination is continually weaving aesthetically beautiful and significant forms out of the ugly and the mundane. The stream of consciousness or adaptations of it which Cary uses to depict the artist's reflective moments successfully conveys the illusion of ideas flowing naturally out of a creative mind. The instances are numerous, but here is a typical example as Gulley rhapsodizes about his vision of man's fall after seeing a good but cheap canvas in an art dealer's shop:

> The very touch of that canvas was enough to make my hand sing. I felt the colour flowing on to it as sweet as cream. My God, I said, I'll put the Fall on to it. Trouble with the Fall--it's not big enough. All at once I had the feel of the Fall. A real fall. Fire and brimstone. Blues and reds. And I saw green fire in the top left next the red tower. And the red tower opened to show a lot of squares full of blue and green flames. Symbols of something. Generation would do. Or a lot of little flames like men and women rushing together, burning each other up like coals. And then to carry the pattern upwards you could have white flowers, no, very pale green, moving among the stars, imagination born of love. Through generation to generation. Old antic propriety falling down on his nose and seeing constellations. Yes, the destruction of

> old fly button, the law by the force of nature and the unexpected entry of the devil as a lyrical poet singing new worlds for old. The old Adam rising to chase the blue-faced angels of Jehovah (HM 118-19).

The spiral of colours and images, the elliptical phrases tucked between what looks like a mere jumble of sentences conceal the carefully ordered ideas beneath the morass of words. The Blakean idea of life as a ceaseless struggle between the sexes at the passionate level of existence is adumbrated in Gulley's vision of "men and women rushing together, burning each other up like coals." The idea is then reinforced by a quotation from Blake's "Europe", concentrating on the lines which dwell on the problems arising out of the imposition of Enitharmon's feminine will on the universe. This thought of the endless struggle between the sexes is one of the encompassing ideas of the First Trilogy. Its significance is apparent in the relationship between Gulley and Sara, the "contraries" that are forever attracting and repelling each other. Gulley then talks about the creative imagination and the part it plays not only in the conflict between the sexes, but that also between the individual and the traditional institutions of his society. Imagination is, in Gulley's view, the source of man's rebelliousness, the destroyer of "old antic propriety", and all those laws which inhibit the nature of man. And man in his native state (Adam) is a creature of imagination. He is therefore the natural enemy of dogmatic religion and thus his fall from the grace of God becomes the fall into knowledge and freedom. Or, in the words of Gulley, the fallen man and uncompromising rebel, it is "the fall into manhood, into responsibility, into sin. Into freedom. Into wisdom. Into the light and the fire" (HM 119).

The moment of imaginative release which sets Gulley off in his wide ranging speculation marks an important epiphany in the first of the three main movements in the plot structure of *The Horse's Mouth*, each of which is symbolically related to his three epic paintings: the Fall, the Raising of Lazarus and the Creation. The Fall, with its frequently changing forms, occupies his mind for the longest period and coincides with the time when Gulley is forced by his own as well as the circumstances of his friends, to contemplate man's fallen state. The Raising of Lazarus, painted on the walls in the flat of Sir William and Lady Beeder, represents the creative artist's unattainable hope of "resurrection" in the land of Beulah where the wealthy, with their barren imagination and their outworn feelings, enjoy a life of ease. And although it is in the land of Beulah that Gulley tastes complete freedom--freedom from want and freedom to create--for the first time in his artistic life, his imagination is blunted so that the Raising of Lazarus turns out to be a painting of all types of feet--an obviously incomplete vision of man. When he is forced to flee the flat, Gulley takes to the country with Nosy and suddenly his imagination is ablaze with new ideas. Dropped from a bus in which, by another act of the imagination, he has stolen a ride with his pupil, Gulley soon realises that "to the imagination of genius", nature is "a door to glory" (HM 224). In the spaciousness and desolation of the countryside, he indulges his visual imagination until the biggest idea of his career, the Creation, crystallizes in his mind (HM 229). Thus the cyclical pattern of the novel is completed with Gulley affirming the eternity of man's creativity by reversing the normal order of things so that instead of starting from the Creation through the Fall and the

Resurrection (the Raising of Lazarus), we end with the Creation as the novel comes to its violently dramatic close.

Although Gulley is primarily concerned throughout his story with these epic paintings, the effort to give form to his ideas brings him into contact and in conflict with society. Through his contacts and conflicts with mankind, Gulley is forced to consider not only the problems of the artist in a philistine world, but also the wider problems of man in society: the problems of individual freedom and responsibility in a world which demands conformity, of good and evil and of injustice. These problems are examined in each of the three major phases of his career although some aspects dominate certain periods. Thus man's fallen state (his fall into knowledge and wisdom, freedom and responsibility), the nature of freedom and the problem of injustice in the world dominate the period of the Fall; in the second phase these concerns recede into the background as Gulley enjoys his exhilarating freedom in the land of Beulah until he is thrown out into the world of injustice where the forces of convention close in on him and cut him down before he completes his painting of the Creation.

Even at the beginning of his story, Gulley is literally and metaphorically a fallen and battered man. His endless struggle against society is going through a critical phase. His release from prison brings him face to face with the harsh realities of a cruel world. His "studio" has been taken over by the angry and bitter Mrs. Coker, thus depriving him of the dilapidated shelter he is used to; and his paintings have either been defaced by children or used by Mrs. Coker to patch the leaking roof that he had ignored while he worked in the shack. These difficulties force Gulley to consider the problems of

good and evil in the world. His view is that there is little real good to be expected in a fundamentally unjust world, but there are bonds of genuine sympathy between those who suffer the cruelties of an unjust existence. Thus, compelled to live the life of a tramp because he has been turned out of the ramshackle building he calls his studio, and realising that he could count on little further help from friends he already owes a great deal, Gulley goes to Coker, the embittered barmaid and daughter of the old and irascible Mrs. Coker. This is how he explains the logic behind this seemingly illogical move:

> Coker, so I heard, was in trouble. But I was in trouble and people in trouble, they say, are more likely to give help to each other, than those who aren't. After all, its not surprising for people who help other people in trouble are likely soon to be in trouble themselves. And then, they are generally people too who enjoy the consolation of each other's troubles (HM 11).

This mutual sympathy, in fact, is the only consolation the sufferer can expect. But this is a poor consolation and during much of the period of the Fall, Gulley, in spite of the unfailing sympathy and support of his fellow sufferers, rages against the injustice of the world, although it is against his philosophy to nurse a grievance or, as he frequently puts it, "get into a state." But the severity of his problems forces Gulley to rely more heavily on Coker and Plantie, the cobbler, for friendship and sustenance. His dependence on these "innocent" people, each of whom suffers a cruel fate in the most fortuitous manner, raises in Gulley's mind a number of questions about the problem of injustice in the world and the right way to respond to it.

The questions he raises are strikingly similar to those raised by the Reverend Carr on this same problem in *Aissa Saved*. But the crucial difference is that in *The Horse's Mouth*, Cary offers some

answers even if, as the story indicates; these answers cannot satisfy everyone. The questions, however, are the same intractable ones. Why injustice in the world? Why is this immanent evil so capricious in its choice of victims? What is the proper response to this fact of experience? Is self-consuming bitterness, like that which fills Coker, not an unnecessary help to this invisible enemy? If this is so, then is Plantie's Christian resignation the right answer to the problem of injustice in the world?

Gulley's view is that neither of these responses is adequate. But he makes no attempt to defend such traditional institutions as the Church against Coker's repeated assertions that its message of hope is irrelevant to those who suffer as she does at the hands of an indifferent Providence. But Gulley, the champion of individualism, takes exception when Coker directs her anger against individuals because her problems are not man-made. Her resolve to live by the high standards she sets herself is weakened by the ugliness (an example of injustice) which denies her the love her affectionate and sympathetic nature so keenly desires. The result is that she gives in to the first man who comes her way only to be deserted for a more beautiful woman at a time when she is already carrying her lover's baby. The injustice is compounded by a society which promptly condemns and ostracizes her without going into final causes.

But Gulley is concerned not so much with Coker's suffering which, judging by the numerous examples he recalls or hears about, seems not uncommon, but with her reaction to her fate. She simply hates anybody or anything she can blame for her misfortune. Thus, she tells Gulley, "I hate God. It isn't fair to make a girl and give her

a face like mine" (HM 20). And while she is willing to excuse Willy, the young man who jilted her because he had favoured her with his love in the first place, she is unwilling to forgive the woman who took him away. This, in Gulley's view, is the reaction of a person with "a sense of justice," and a sense of justice only aggravates one's agony in a fundamentally unjust world. What then can one do to combat injustice?

One can oppose injustice with rational optimism by refusing to submit under its hard blows and by convincing oneself that "things are never so bad they can't be worse" (HM 20). Alternately, one can simply forgive and forget because hate often poisons the life of the hater more than the hated. This, Gulley explains, is the lesson he learned from his mother who made him pray for forgiveness whenever he expressed hate for those who made him suffer unjustly. Yet, the problem is more complex than that. Gulley has no satisfactory answer when Coker asks him to explain why those who suffer injustice must also pray for forgiveness. But he does suggest an existentialist solution to man's problems in an indifferent universe: independence of mind and self-reliance rather than dependence on God (HM 20). To Coker, however, anger, revolt and hate are the only "weapons" left to the sufferer and these, she insists, must not be surrendered for anything else.

Her response is, however, negative and self-defeating. Gulley tries to persuade her that injustice is much more common than she is willing to admit. The wife of the sea captain, Mrs. Jones, is another example. At sixty she looks healthy, sprightly and, to Coker, therefore, a fortunate woman. But as her husband discloses, she is just another unhappy example of suffering humanity. She has been deaf for twenty

years and all her daughters grow deaf before they reach adulthood while the boys escape (HM 21). But she has accepted her affliction with quiet dignity rather than the self-consuming rage of Coker. The story of Mrs. Jones thus symbolises the commonness and the capriciousness of injustice and therefore brings to the mind of Gulley who has learned to accept his harsh lot without bitterness or self-pity, "all the deaf, blind, ugly, cross-eyed, limp-legged, bulge-headed, bald and crooked girls in the world, sitting on little white mountains and weeping tears like sleet" (HM 21-22).

Gulley is concerned about Coker's rage because of the vengeance behind it. She is kind and responsive to the sufferings of other people but she is unforgiving to those who offend against her. She feels venomous hatred for the girl who took Willy away from her and when she expresses a desire to pour acid over her rival "to get justice," Gulley points out the futility of such action and suggests, with a deliberate play on the word acid, the self-consuming nature of her rage. Here is part of their exchange with Coker speaking first:

> "What she [Coker's rival] wants is a splash of acid.""You'd get seven years for that." "It would be worth it." "Don't you believe it--she'd be burning on your brain the rest of your life. She'd come back, in the acid." "I shouldn't mind if I'd got justice." "You can't get justice in this world. It doesn't grow in these parts." "You're telling me." "It makes you laugh" "What does." "The damned unfairness of things" "It doesn't make me laugh. More like crying." "Or cry, just as you like" (HM 92).

Laughter or tears: these are two other ways of responding to "the damned unfairness of things" in the world and Gulley chooses laughter over tears. Life for him has been a crucible but he has learned from his searing experiences that love is always better than hate: "For Eternity is in love with the productions of Time" (HM 97). It is this

Blakean wisdom, shot through and through with his own profound understanding, which Gulley is repeatedly trying to pass on to his fellow sufferers. But when Coker persists in giving free rein to her feelings of hate, Gulley abandons his indirect method of teaching wisdom to an obstinate friend for a straight tip from the horse's mouth:

> You take a straight tip from the stable, Cokey, if you must hate, hate the government or the people or the sea or men, but don't hate an individual person. Who's done you a real injury. Next thing you know he'll be getting into your beer like prussic acid; and blotting out your eyes like a cataract and screaming in your ears like a brain tumour and boiling round your heart like melted lead and ramping through your guts like a cancer. And a nice fool you'd look if he knew. It would make him laugh till his teeth dropped out; from old age (HM 96).

Again, the emphasis is on the corrosive, self-destroying nature of hate. It is destroying the inner beauty of Coker, one of the qualities that attract Gulley to her (HM 92). Her obsessive concern over her cruel fate blocks her imagination and takes all the joy out of her life; and instead of creating a meaningful role for herself by using the intrinsically formidable assets of her character--dependability, firmness, deep natural sympathy and affection and a great capacity for devotion to others--she wastes her energies bemoaning that which she cannot alter. She is thus condemned to unhappiness not so much by her affliction as her response to it. "A million a year and a husband out of the films wouldn't have made Cokey happy. She took life too seriously. She was one of the Marthas" (HM 239). But it is the futility and corrosiveness of Coker's unreasoning passion which make Gulley so persistent in trying to get her to adopt a more creative and mature attitude to the problems of existence; he fails to convert her, but the validity of his criticism is unimpaired by that failure.

this response is too passive. It is a surrender of personal freedom, an attempt to lean on Providence or find a scapegoat.

The difference between these two fallen men stems directly from the opposing philosophies they have each embraced as well as their divergent personalities. Gulley Jimson, the artist, sees the world *through* the eyes of Blake and believes, therefore, that "the world of imagination is the world of eternity" (HM 42). Consequently, the free exercise of the creative imagination takes precedence over everything else. But possessing a free and creative mind, all the Blakean ideas that Gulley appropriates to his own use filter through his consciousness to emerge with the imprint of his original intellect. He alters some lines, parodies others and makes scathing comments on some of the views of Blake, the man he calls the "greatest Englishman who ever lived" (HM 23). By contrast, Plantie accepts Spinoza's view of life without modifications or reservations. He sees the world *with* the eyes of Spinoza; and in summing up the philosopher's view of life and identifying Gulley with it, Plantie demonstrates once more the isolation of the human mind, the near impossibility of one mind understanding another, which is the underlying idea behind the First Trilogy. This is how Plantie sums up the Spinozan view as he understands it: "What he said was, 'Life is a gift, and what right have we to complain that we weren't given it different.' No he never complained against good or bad luck or any nonsense like that. Anymore than you do, Mr. Jimson" (HM 87).

Here Plantie is evidently choosing the easy path of self-surrender instead of Gulley's combative way to self-assertion and self-expression. He wants the serenity and beauty that are traditionally

associated with Spinoza's philosophy without facing up to the problems of man's existential freedom, "of his agonizing responsibility for choosing between complex alternatives concerning his existence."[18] The over-simplification of the Spinozan view of life by Plantie and his passive acquiescence to his fate in a cruel world lead Gulley to a discussion of the nature of freedom in which Spinoza and Blake are contrasted directly.

Gulley's mind is stimulated by the sight of one of his early paintings of Sara in Hickson's house where he and Coker have gone to see if his old patron could grant him new subsidies. Gulley quietly withdraws from the discussion of a new financial arrangement and begins to debate with himself. At first, the transcribed interior monologue seems rambling and incoherent but when the mind returns to Spinoza and his disciple, everything becomes orderly. The first ideas that occur to him seem clearly derived from Plantie's neat but facile summary of Spinoza although, as usual, Gulley moves rapidly to other matters of crucial concern to himself.

> Yes, I said to myself, when you see a piece of stuff like that, spontaneous, it brings you bang up against the facts of life. Which are beauty, and so on. So, I said, Plantie's Spinoza had the right stuff in him when he said that it was all my eye to talk about justice. Being alive was enough--to contemplate God's magnificence and eternity. That was happiness. That was joy. . . .
>
> But my point is this, I said. Contemplation is not the doings. It doesn't get *there*, in fact. . . .
>
> Yes, I said to myself, I've got something. Contemplation, in fact, is ON THE OUTSIDE. It's not on the spot. And the truth is that Spinoza was always on the outside. He didn't understand freedom, and so he didn't understand anything. Because after all, I said to myself, with some excitement, for I saw where all this was leading to. Freedom, to be plain, is nothing but THE INSIDE OF THE OUTSIDE. And even a philosopher like old Ben can't judge the XXX by eating pint pots. It's the wrong approach.
>
> Whereas Old Bill, that damned Englishman, didn't understand anything else but freedom, and so all his nonsense is full of truth;

> and even though he may be a bit of an outsider, HIS OUTSIDE IS ON THE INSIDE; and if you want to catch the old mole where he digs, you have to start at the bottom (HM 103).

For all its subtleties, however, this passage is essentially a résumé of Gulley's criticism of Plantie and his Spinozan philosophy. The basic contrast is between Blake, the man of imagination whose vision of life is rooted in reality, and Spinoza, the philosopher who dwells on abstractions. With a mixture of parody and irony, Gulley rejects Spinoza in his characteristically facetious manner. Some of the ideas in the passage are intentionally antipodal to his personal views. A few examples will suffice here. The reference to "the facts of life which are beauty, and so on," is unmistakably ironical. In an earlier passage, Gulley lumps Plantie together with preachers who, "being a class proof against domestic influence, often go on believing in truth, beauty and goodness, all their lives" (HM 46). Gulley is frankly contemptuous of these men for believing in abstractions that are so remote from the harsh realities of life. Indeed, the facts of life are, in Gulley's mind, directly linked to the fall of man, the Biblical myth he tries to reconstruct in his painting of the Fall. The last extended reference to the Fall, in spite of its frequently changing forms and descriptions, does define it as "the discovery of the solid hard world, good and evil. Hard as rocks and sharp as poisoned thorns" (HM 173). Its full and final title is "the Fall into Freedom" (HM 174). That freedom, as it is described by Gulley, is man's unique privilege as well as his inescapable burden. Inescapable since it is man who can and must decide whether to make of this world an earthly paradise or a hell because he alone is free:

> Free to cut his bloody throat, if he likes, or understand the bloody world, if he likes, and cook his breakfast with hell-fire, if he likes, and construct for himself a little heaven of his own, if he likes, all complete with a pig-faced angel and every spiritual pleasure including the joys of love; or also, of course, he can build himself a little hell full of pig-faced devils and all material miseries including the joys of love and enjoy in it such tortures of the damned that he will want to burn himself alive a hundred times a day, but won't be able to do it because he knows it will give such extreme pleasure to all his friends (HM 174).

Freedom, in other words, is an awesome burden. Cary himself speaks of this world "which is condemned to be free and condemned to live by its imagination."[19] He thus sees freedom in the light of the existentialists who, as one writer explains,

> refuse to allow man to take freedom for granted as he usually does. They reject the vague notion that it is a privilege that somehow renders life easier and happier. Rather, they assert its difficulty. As Sartre says, man "is *condemned* to freedom." Comfort and freedom are incompatible. The easy life, in fact, is the privilege of slaves, for whom all the painful decisions are made by others. The life of a truly free man is measured by the degree of his suffering. In short, freedom . . . is, in the words of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, "a terrible gift."[20]

Thus by his fall into freedom, man becomes the master of his own destiny. He can make or destroy the world *if he likes*, but the burden of choice is unavoidable. Gulley's argument is that this choice must be practical. Plantie's idealism can only complicate life and add to its miseries. The consequences of evading the responsibility of choice in a free world are devastating.

This is probably the point of the crushing final blow which Plantie receives. Having maintained his precarious independence as a cobbler, he is finally reduced to penury when his right hand is amputated after being pricked and poisoned by a shoemaker's needle. This is the culmination of a life that has been tortured and debased by a series of brutally cynical ironies. But nothing can change Plantie's

rigid assumptions about life. Determined to preserve his independence at all costs, Plantie goes into a doss-house rather than accept support from the government (HM 124-25). When Gulley finds him in the doss-house, they resume their argument with Plantie still expecting fair-play from his fellow derelicts and insisting that even his latest accident has an underlying significance: "It can't be wasted. It's a revelation. It makes me feel like I never knew anything before" (HM 127).

Gulley's reaction is that this response to the fact of evil in the world is typical of the self-respecting and self-regarding man like Plantie. Plantie might know something, but what he knows cannot guide him through the tortuous and thorny path of life. His unchanging ideas about the world deny him the freedom of choice on which Gulley relies for coping with the exigencies of life. By contrast, Plantie fails to learn any practical wisdom from his personal disasters because of the narrowness and rigidity of his views. He admires the rugged independence of Spinoza and deludes himself with the belief that the philosopher "was the happiest man that ever lived, the God drunk man" (HM 128).

This belief, in Gulley's view, is another of the illusions of the philosophic mind. In an earlier scene of sparkling comedy, Cary lampoons the abstract notions of happiness and love in one of the meetings frequently arranged by Plantie in his more "properous" days. The speaker is a Professor Ponting from America, a specialist in some indefinable subject with a great deal of popularity in Germany, thus suggesting a theoretical or abstract philosopher.[21] In what is probably the most skilful juxtaposition of opposing ideas in his fiction,

Cary allows the voice of the professor to interrupt occasionally the larger theme of the unhappiness of the old which occupies Gulley and Sara who, in varying degrees of intoxication, have been reunited after a period of separation, and are sitting apart from the main audience reminiscing over the past and examining the gloomy present.

Gulley, as usual, is wearing his gay mask, although we are too familiar by now with the sadness beneath and the burden of his life. Sara, for her part, is plainly sad and dejected. She is already experiencing those mysterious pains that afflict the old and feels that nothing agreeable is likely to happen to her again. Even Gulley's gay and comic mask slips occasionally to expose his sadness. And when the voice of the professor interrupts Sara's litany of sad memories, the irony is simply shattering. Whether Sara interpolates a personal remark intended for Gulley's ear alone or comments directly on the orations of the professor, the effect is always to reject or undermine the idealist's voice. Here, for example, is the first contrapuntal placing of the two themes as the voice of the professor (invariably called "the skate" by Gulley) reaches the old pair in the scullery where they are helping themselves to Plantie's secret stock of beer:

> "The boundless possibilities of human happiness when guided by those natural loves and fraternal sympathies planted in the soul."
>
> "Oh well," said Sara, "I suppose I'll get used to it in time. Time slow but sure will all your troubles cure."
>
> "The nature of man is love. Look at the little helpless child, born so utterly dependent. Dependent only on love."
>
> "He speaks nicely, the young man," said Sara. "I shouldn't think he'd been married, do you? I'm glad it's about religion. I haven't been to a church for a long time, I've been too busy."
>
> "And so it is to love alone that Nature entrusts her most important task. Love, the source and guarantee of all our hopes."
>
> "That's right," said Sara. "Though goodness knows, children are a work too. But it would be better in church. Church is more homely" (HM 79).

The incongruity of the setting (the basement of an old building crowded with people whose main desire is to spend an evening away from the stale familiarity of home) which even an inebriate Sara recognises for what it is, the overt suggestion that the speaker is philosophising about happiness and love because he has no practical experience of life, or that he is orating about religion for want of something else to do: all these elements combine to reduce the professor's bloated pronouncements to farce. Sara's final comment is that by the time you know in real life that "you can't have happiness brought up on a hot plate, you're old and its too late--" (HM 83). Andrew Wright makes a perceptive comment on this scene:

> It is a touching juxtaposition here, of Sara's old woman talk and the skate-faced Ponting's rolling platitudes: a tragicomic incident altogether, ending roisteringly in Gulley's and Sara's drinking too much and trying to make love in the scullery. The closing song they sing, "Jerusalem", is an ironical comment on the meeting.[22]

The song, in fact, underlines the impossibility of realising the professor's dream. The talk about "the boundless possibilities of human happiness" is as illusory and vain as the desire to build Jerusalem "in England's green and pleasant land" (HM 84).

But if the promise of general happiness has no basis in real experience, is there anything man can do to confront a hostile universe? Gulley argues that part of the solution is to reject the Spinozan view of man as an insignificant being who is indigent of God and capable of loving God without the right to expect Him to reciprocate that love.[23] Such a relationship between God and man makes man helplessly dependent on God. To Plantie, however, the relationship is attractive because it preserves the illusion of independence:

> Anarchists who love God always fall for Spinoza because he tells them that God doesn't love them. This is just what they need. . . .
> Plantie has had a hard time and so he likes to be told that in God's sight he is dirt. Plantie has been kicked about the world like a football, and so he likes to be told that he isn't any better than a football, except to kiss the boot that kicks him. It makes him feel more brisk and independent. It gives him confidence in himself. To say, "I can take the worst they've got."
> When you tell a man like Plantie that he isn't free except to take it as it comes, he feels free. He says, "All right, let 'em all come."
> But I didn't like Spinoza. I haven't got any self-respect and besides, I'm an optimist. I get a lot of fun out of fun, as well as the miseries. And so when Plantie tried to convert me to dignified independence I quarrelled with him (HM 87).

Thus the opposition between the self-respecting but self-surrendering Plantie on the one hand, and the self-reliant Gulley on the other, is defined. Plantie is a slave to a narrow system of beliefs. He is in love with the ideas of independence and freedom, but cannot see that by surrendering to his fate without a struggle, he is in fact denying himself the right to personal freedom which is real because it can be made to serve the needs of the individual.

The importance of these differences between Gulley and Plantie is dramatised in the violent scene in the doss-house where Plantie is still holding tenaciously to his Spinozan philosophy. When Gulley arrives in time for the evening meal, he finds the place in confusion as each person fights desperately for his turn with one of the three frying pans that are to serve some twenty people. Plantie who, as usual, is expecting some kind of order, has been waiting patiently for his turn but each time he reaches out for the pan he is deprived of it by some burly young derelict. When he joins the fray and snatches a frying pan from one of the young men, a second promptly wrests it from him while the first comes in cursing and charging with savage fury which drives Plantie hard against the wall. "The old man was

crying. It surprised me. And then I thought, But it's natural. He's got a sense of justice. Poor old chap. And he can't get over it--not at his age" (HM 129). The Blakean lines which Gulley injects into his narration of this episode form the basis of his response to injustice; they also provide the wisdom he recommends to all those who cannot escape the injustice of this world:

> The angel that presided at her birth
> Said, little creature, born of joy and mirth
> Go love without the help of anything on earth (HM 29).

It is important to note that Gulley repeats the last line of this quotation several times in his narrative. Almost invariably, the line is repeated in those crucial moments when either Gulley or one of his friends is confronted with injustice and is tempted to respond angrily to it. The line gradually emerges as a guiding philosophy and its significance is underlined when Gulley makes it the foundation of his final advice to Nosy who, as so often happens in *The Horse's Mouth*, mirrors the anger beneath Gulley's gay exterior.

The wisdom of this response to injustice can be questioned on the same grounds on which Gulley questions Plantie's attitude: its passivity. But its superiority over the futile anger of Coker or the pathetic resignation of Plantie is evident in the total context of the problem of evil in the world. For Gulley's documentation of injustice includes not only those like Coker and Plantie who are afflicted in the most capricious manner, but those also who are hated without a cause as well as those who inflict injustice on other people without a malicious intent. Frank, the young man who is always suffering from facial boils, belongs to the category of people who are hated without good cause. Unable to court the girls he fancies, hated and tormented

by those he has ceased to fancy, Frank confronts his problems with a formidable display of ataraxy (HM 55). On the other hand, Plantie, who has suffered more injustice than anyone else, visits injustice on other people without always realising what he is doing. His response to the conflict between Gulley and Hickson illustrates this foible. Thus as soon as he hears of Gulley's problems with Hickson, Plantie raises funds, hires a lawyer for his friend and drags Hickson to court where the facts are wrested so that the art collector looks like an extortioner rather than the most dependable and generous patron Gulley has ever known. This is the outcome Plantie desires but for Gulley, it is a disconcertingly ironic turn of events. Plantie's longing for justice imposes injustice on somebody else without freeing Gulley from the consequences of taking the law into his own hands against Hickson. As Gulley observes the twisted court proceedings and the earnestness of the people involved in the matter, he makes this typically Carian observation: "They know it isn't justice and they know there can't be any such thing in this world, but they've got to do their job . . ." (HM 67).

The conclusion that justice is impossible in the world is inevitable in Cary's dialectics. Cary shows repeatedly in his novels that those charged with the responsibility of dispensing justice are as incapable of the task as those who impose it on them. We have already seen this belief illustrated in the trials of Mr. Johnson, Charley Brown and Sara Monday. However, the wider discussion of the problem of injustice in *The Horse's Mouth* is important because it leads to a viable Carian solution. The argument and the conclusion to which it leads might be summarised this way. Since justice is impossible in

this world, and since men do sometimes condemn the sufferer for the wrong reasons (Coker); or treat him with callous disregard for his rights (Plantie); or hate him without cause (Frank): it is better to face the world with this awareness and respond to this fact of evil not with self-consuming hatred or passive resignation or stoic calm, but with the positive power of love--love without the help of anything on earth.

How does all this relate to the artist in a philistine world? Gulley demonstrates through his "memoirs" that the artist is more likely to encounter antagonism and that injustice hits him not as a fortuitous visitation, but as willed and calculated harm inflicted by those who see art as a silent but formidable enemy to the established order of society. Therefore, in confronting a world which is either indifferent or openly hostile and unjust to the artist, Gulley adopts the philosophy of love which he preaches to others because it is the only means to self-preservation. Consequently, even the discovery of the wholesale destruction of his paintings and tools, an action which represents the ultimate provocation to Gulley, is met with more forbearance than rage. Yet there are practical considerations behind his attitude: "anything like bad temper is bad for me. It spoils my equanimity. It blocks up my imagination. It makes me stupid so that I can't see straight" (HM 18).

This practical wisdom is necessary at all stages of his career since Gulley's primary aim is to oppose the material world with the spiritual facts of his artistic visions. He knows that he cannot ignore the needs of the flesh for too long yet he is unwilling to work for material wealth. This attitude poses an intractable dilemma for the

artist and for society. Gulley is unwilling to compromise the integrity of his privately apprehended truths for the sake of satisfying his physical needs. For its own part, society feels constrained to halt or hinder anything that disturbs its familiar modes of thought and action. Moreover, society must inevitably concern itself with material needs while the artist is equally unyielding in his determination to give tangible form to his visions because, as Gulley explains, life is "not pleasure, or peace, or contemplation, or comfort, or happiness--it's a Fall" (HM 104).

The conflict between the creative artist and his society therefore seems irreconcilable. Gulley's choice of a career puts him outside the main stream of society; but he continues to do battle with the forces of convention in order to find the spiritual truths that will preserve social vitality. The monotony of existence in a fallen world without peace or happiness can be relieved by the power of art to shake us out of our torpitude and lend freshness to the stale and the familiar. In fact, the benefit is mutual. In addition to the sense of release which follows the transformation of his ideas into art, the artist can also feel his affinity with God. As Gulley puts it, even a mental deficient who undertakes and completes a creative act can say: "By God, look what I've done. A miracle. I have transformed a chunk of wood, canvas, etc., into a spiritual fact, an eternal beauty. I am God" (HM 170). Yet there is no pride in this feeling. Gulley is painfully aware of the limitations of the artist, the physical and mental barriers he can never transcend (HM 27). At the same time the desirability of reconciling the material and spiritual needs of man is underlined by Gulley's own confession that he is at

his creative best after a party. "Especially a party with somebody like Sara; all allivoh" (HM 42).

The relationship between Gulley and Sara, to which Gulley returns repeatedly throughout the narrative, is vital to an understanding of the artist. The relationship offers the best illustration in the First Trilogy of the Blakean paradox on how contraries work for progress. Criticism has, however, emphasised the opposition between Gulley and Sara which the artist himself defines in terms of the tendency of the female will to dominate and repress the creative energies of the male.[24] The poem which clarifies this conflict for Gulley is Blake's "The Mental Traveller," in which an archetypal female is always trying to destroy male creativity from the moment of birth:

> And if the babe is born a boy, that is to say, a real vision
> It is given to a woman old
> Who nails him down upon a rock
> Catches his shrieks in cups of gold (HM 48).

The context of this quotation and the comment which follows it leave no doubt that Gulley is using the term "old woman" in a generic sense. It includes all those who, regardless of their sex, try to limit the visions of the artist by forcing him into a conventional mode of existence. The quotation is provoked on this occasion by a man who is asking Gulley to explain why modern artists invariably distort the shapes and forms of things as they are generally perceived by ordinary people. It must also be noted that the first line of the above stanza ends with the word "boy". Gulley inserts the extra words to equate "boy" with "vision" so that his comments will be clearly relevant. When he thinks specifically of Sara, he quotes the same stanza without alterations (HM 51), and explains why the man of vision must escape from

the dominating will of the female. Sara is the epitome of that universal female desire which, in Gulley's view, always tries to bind a man to a contract. This contract is stifling and therefore undesirable. As a result, Gulley offers an unequivocal advice to the male: "Fly laddie, fly off with your darling vision before she turns into a frow, who spends all her life thinking what the neighbours think" (HM 51).

The uniformity of thought in society, the attempt by Sara to domesticate Gulley and her great sexual passion compel him to rebel against her even though he knows that he is being unkind and ungrateful. For all this, Sara is indispensable to the creative genius because, as Gulley repeatedly reminds us, an artist creates "works of passion and imagination" (HM 42). The paradox of this relationship of mutual attraction and repulsion centres on the fact that as a domestic and domesticating animal, Sara is stifling to the creative imagination. But there is another side to Sara, the embodiment of womanhood (the eternal Eve), which animates the male mind. Gulley recalls the first time he beats her for trying to mould him into a conventional man; but even that memory is full of ideas of inspiration and repression:

> Yes, I found out how to get Sara on canvas. Some of her, anyhow. And I was always at her, one way or another. The flesh was made word; every day. Till he, that is Gulley Jimson, became a bleeding youth. And she, that is, Sara, becomes a virgin bright.
>
> And he rends up his manacles
> And binds her down for his delight
> He plants himself in all her nerves
> Just like a husbandman his mould
> And she becomes his dwelling-place
> And garden fruitful seventy fold.
>
> As Billy would say, through generation into regeneration. Materiality, that is, Sara, the old female nature, having attempted to button up the prophetic spirit, that is to say, Gulley Jimson, in her placket-hole, got a bonk on the conk, and was reduced to her proper status, as spiritual fodder. But what fodder. What a time that was (HM 52).

This brief reference to the vital relationship between Gulley and Sara is intended to restore the balance between opposition and cooperation. Sara's sensual arts are at once a source of irritation as well as inspiration. As Gulley admits, "There was always something about Sara that made me want to hit her or love her or get her down on canvas" (HM 82). He also reveals that whenever he is short of ideas, a sketch of Sara, even when it is unrelated to work he is creating, invariably generates fresh ideas that make progress possible. The emphasis, therefore, is on the paradoxical nature of the relationship: a relationship of mutual attraction and repulsion, of inspiration and repression. Gulley's delirious vision of Sara after he had inadvertently murdered her confirms this impression in the penultimate chapter of *The Horse's Mouth*.

On the social plane, however, Gulley and Sara remain poles apart. Their positions are immutably fixed because they hold irreconcilable ideas about what constitutes success and fame in society. To Sara, a man's wealth is a reliable index to his success in life. While Gulley does not contest the validity of this view in a philistine world, he knows that he cannot accept it without compromising the integrity of his artistic visions. Acceptance of Sara's view will deprive him of the name of artist and turn him into "a lipstick merchant" (HM 190). In spite of these sharp differences, however, it is still important to recognise the positive elements in their relationship. Sara, the archetypal female, has something of all of Cary's women and if her concerns make her no more than "spiritual fodder" to the creative mind, it is important not to forget that it is the vital fodder that

keeps the imagination alive in art, politics (Nina), business (Tabitha) and religion (Alice).

The value of the relationship to Gulley is underlined by the fact that during much of the period of the Fall, he depends for sympathy on several friends but draws material support mainly from two very different women, Sara and Coker. But the problems of these people increase with the passage of time so that the help they can provide Gulley is considerably reduced. Plantie is disabled and although he retains a measure of independence, he is reduced to extremity and forced to feed himself out of a dustbin. Mrs. Coker's decision to live with her daughter denies Gulley the essential material support which the tough-talking but soft-hearted Coker always provides. Sara, the most generous supporter of Gulley, is in dire straits, moving from one tenement to another unable to sink roots in any place as the social pressures mount.

This is the low point at which Gulley, recently released from another term in prison, receives a letter from Alabaster the art critic. This contact is extremely significant because in addition to his desire to write a descriptive "biography" of Gulley, Alabaster also wants to obtain some of the artist's early paintings for his wealthy friends, the Beeders. When he receives a second letter, Gulley, excited, hopeful and business-like, goes to the flat of the Beeders to see if he can sell one of his paintings to the millionaire. By a series of tricky manoeuvres, Gulley settles in the flat of the Beeders and when they leave for a vacation in America, he dupes Alabaster out of the home and quickly converts it into a massive art workshop.

Gulley's brief sojourn in the home of the Beeders offers a comic interlude that is brilliant, gusty, hilarious and full of earnestness. Andrew Wright remarks that "there are . . . few funnier episodes in all fiction than the account of Gulley's afternoon and evening with the Beeders."[25] Some of the scenes are as hilariously comic as the opening moments in the gulling of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. The arrival of Gulley in the Beeder flat while the couple are out to tea, for example, is a moment of unrelieved comedy. Ragged, hungry, but hopeful that his arrival in the Blakean land of Beulah might bring him some relief, Gulley, nevertheless, senses his superiority over these wealthy connoisseurs of the arts the moment he begins to examine their flat. In Gulley's description of the opulent flat and its heterogeneous collection of artefacts and paintings, Cary produces one of the most brilliant triumphs of his comic prose. The process of unmasking the lack of discrimination and the confusion of these wealthy people is accomplished in a short passage of unsparing humour:

> A real hall, a big studio with gallery, a little dining-room off the studio, two bedrooms and chromium bathroom. Usual Persian rugs and antiques, vases, marbles, African gods, American mobiles, Tangara, and rock crystal ash-trays. Old portraits in the dining-room, modern oils in the studio, drawings in the bedroom, watercolours in the hall. Usual modern collection. Wilson Steer, water in watercolour, Matthew Smith, victim of the crime in slaughtercolour; Utrillo whitewashed wall in mortarcolour; Matisse, odalisque in scortacolour; Picasso, spatchcock horse in tortacolour . . . All the most high-toned and expensive (HM 146).

When the Beeders arrive, the comedy becomes a satire on the manners and tastes of the wealthy, the barrenness and monotony of their existence, even the staid peace of their life without imagination. Genial and kind, magnanimous and forbearing, there is, in spite of these admirable qualities, a smack of insincerity about the behaviour of the

rich. The gay and effusive manners of the Beeders remind Gulley of his first meeting with that other wealthy man, Hickson, who "was so full of goodwill that it came off him like the smell of his soap, linen, hair cream, tooth wash, shaving lotion, eyewash and digestive mixture" (HM 150). The suggestion of artificiality is evident here, and Gulley's discussion with the Beeders quickly confirms this impression. The good manners are there, but as often with the rich, virtue is not its own reward, but a means to some other end. Gulley has been invited to dinner, but while he waits, the Beeders must feed their vanity by showing off Lady Beeder's amateur paintings to this famous artist and solicit his opinion on her ladyship's work. As usual, however, Gulley is uninhibited in the frankness and vulgarity of his criticism of the rich. Art, he suggests, is more than self-indulgence; it is a search after the truth. Real art always tries to convey some meaning about human experience. Consequently, the clever depiction of nature by Lady Beeder and the conjuring tricks of those who want to please the rich cannot be called art. Such works seem "heavy-handed stupid-looking daubery" (HM 152), and have no meaning at all.

When the Beeders settle to dinner with their strange guest the metaphysical isolation of each from the other is established. Sir William and Lady Beeder, the ruling spirits in the land of Beulah, return at once to their hackneyed table manners. They pile superlatives in praise of the quality of their toast while Gulley detaches himself mentally from the humdrum surroundings and, with pungent irony, quotes Blake's definition of Beulah as a land where men and women compete only for the gratification of each other's insatiable desire for gold and comfort (HM 154-55). Indeed, the brief dinner discussion, with Gulley

frequently talking at cross-purposes with his hosts,or quoting Blakean lines which the others miss or ignore for want of understanding, dramatises once more the isolation of the human mind. Sir William, a man of sympathy and political wisdom, can understand some of the paradoxes Gulley raises about life: good out of evil, injustice and chaos in a seemingly orderly but baffling universe. Their very different experiences, however, make a common response to the problems of life impossible. Sir William sees only the good side of things while Gulley is burdened by the problems of evil in the world. Sitting between them is Lady Beeder, complacent, aloof and unfeeling, throwing in the rare but unintentionally cruel or anile remark even as she strives to be polite and pleasant to her guest. But when the brandy-bibbing Sir William begins to talk in a sleepy voice, Gulley makes his last comment of the evening by quoting again from Blake and elaborating in a manner that summarises his view of the rich and his total separation from them:

> And every moment has a couch of gold for soft repose
> And between every two minutes stands a daughter of Beulah
> To feed the sleepers on their couches with maternal care.
> And every minute has an azure tent with silken veils--
>
> I did not feel sleepy. Far from it. Dreams were moving in front of my eyes like festivals of Eden. Land of the rich where the tree of knowledge of good and evil is surrounded with golden rabbit wire (HM 157).

The land of Beulah, then, is a land where man's imagination goes to sleep. To Gulley, therefore, it is a forbidden part of the cosmos. Consequently, his brief sojourn in the Beeder flat must be seen as a symbolic gesture. It is appropriate to recall here that Cary himself says that *The Horse's Mouth* is "a study of the creative imagination working in symbols."[26] Thus while recognising the broad and unrestrained comedy of much of the situation (which can have no fun at all

for the Beeders), it is necessary not to understate or ignore the significance which lies beneath Gulley's puckish humour.

The systematic and complete removal of everything of value from the Beeder flat after Gulley has skilfully managed to take sole possession of the place is the prelude to creation. Gulley's invasion of this land of sleepy repose is part of his crusade against everything that is conventional and familiar. The description of the place and its permanent inhabitants calls for renewal through a creative effort. And creativity is possible for the first time in his artistic life, as Gulley enjoys complete freedom: freedom not only to compose pictures in his head, but to put them on canvas and walls because he has at last entered the land of Beulah. The removal of the Beeder collection of inferior paintings and personal effects is necessary for the creation of the new. These "old" things have to go because, as Gulley reminds us in bold capitals, creation is "SOMETHING THAT GOES ON GOING ON" (HM 104). Creation is not a piling up of one old idea upon another; it is a continual replacement of the old with the new. This is why Gulley often turns with disgust from any idea that he can successfully pin down on a canvas or a mural. It is never that which has been created, but that which is to be created which fascinates the artist.

The invasion of the Beeder flat by Gulley is a deliberate act of aggression intended to shake these unfeeling patrons of the arts out of their sleepy, soft repose. It is significant that while Sir William is primarily interested in one of the early paintings of Sara in the nude, Gulley makes a desperate effort to sell him one of the symbolic paintings, especially the Fall. The attempt to salvage the Fall in order to sell it to the Beeders and the discovery that it has been

irreparably damaged by Mrs. Coker provides Gulley with the excuse he needs to give another lecture to his tearful and outraged pupil on the function of the imagination in a world full of spite and cruelty. In this kind of world, Gulley tells Nosy, men and women "will drive each other mad unless they have grown some imagination" which is necessary to give man some understanding: "to see behind the turnips, to enter into each other's mind" (HM 173). These remarks carry a particular significance for the Beeders apart altogether from their wider implications. We recall here that Gulley's objection to the paintings of Lady Beeder is that although they are attractive to the eye, they look in fact like an accidental concatenation of colours; they cannot, therefore, convey any significant feeling of truth about experience. By introducing his complex symbolic paintings into the land of Beulah, then, Gulley is trying to stir the sleepy imagination of the Beeders, to animate their minds so that they can see beyond the turns "Into eternity of which this vegetable earth is but a shadow" (HM 100). This seems to be so central an idea in Gulley's mind that although he always prefers murals over canvases, he feels for a while that his painting of the Raising of Lazarus for the Beeders must go on a canvas to save it from being covered up by flashy drawing-room pictures. The painting is uncommissioned, but the significance of its title is self-evident. The Beeders are experiencing death-in-life: the death of the imagination. They have material wealth but they are grindingly poor in spirit. As Gulley says of the couple, thinking especially of Lady Beeder, "Poor sole, its a flat life. One flatness on another. Flattery to flats" (HM 197). The puns give added depth to his observation and

clarify the significance of the title as well as the strange details that go into the Raising of Lazarus.

The sudden return of the Beeders to their empty flat to face the Raising of Lazarus takes us back to the broad comedy of the earlier scenes. Sir William's quiet repose in the face of lost property, Lady Beeder's petrified shock and stupefaction over the same misfortune, the self-righteous indignation of their anonymous guest and the waggishness of Gulley who is observing and commenting on the other three from a hideout: all these combine to reduce the scene to near farce. At the centre of all this stands Gulley still defiant and unrepentant. His prayer for release from the present quandary shows his characteristic combination of mockery and appreciation for the formal good breeding of the rich: "God bless all Beeders. God bless the millionaires, who can forgive everything unless it bothers them too much" (HM 214). But when the guest of the Beeders begins to call the police, Gulley realises that there is always an independent force to adjudicate between him and other members of society and flees before he is brought to trial once more for his unorthodox life.

The interlude ends on a note of complex moral ambiguities. Gulley's mocking prayer is answered when Sir William magnanimously decides not to press charges against him. The moral order is inverted when Gulley leaves the flat raving at the injustice of the world to himself, still oblivious to his own breach of faith to everyone and the injustice he has caused by violating the hospitality of his hosts.

Indeed, the mordant irony inherent in Cary's humorous conception of the artist as *gull* is most evident in Gulley Jimson's invasion of the Beeder flat. Unwilling to earn his own livelihood,

and forced, therefore, to live by his wits, he dupes and gulls innocent and unsuspecting people, and he is in turn gulled repeatedly by his fellow outcasts or by organised society which neither tolerates nor sympathises with the self-withdrawal of the artist. Feeling no moral or legal obligations to the laws of society, Gulley violates them at will and complains only when his own violations raise the possibility of retribution or threaten his personal safety. Much of the comedy of the novel, in fact, resides in this anomalous situation: in Gulley's refusal to be bound by moral and social obligations, so that he is continually imfringing on some law and being chased by the forces of convention while he raves against the world for allegedly treating him unjustly. Yet Cary is so skilful in his portrayal of the artist that, in this very strange situation, we continue to sympathise with Gulley and recognise the force of his criticism of the Beeders.

When Gulley flees the flat of the Beeders, he enters once more the world of rocks and thorns where the struggle to create will continue. In this final movement of the novel, Gulley is in a more philosophical frame of mind than he is in the first two parts where he is almost equally the amoral artist and the Socratic teacher. The problems which beset him in the earlier parts have, if anything, intensified. His health has deteriorated and he is as penniless as ever so that the danger of a clash with the forces of the law is as real as it was at the beginning. But as he tells Nosy about the police who will frequently dog his steps in this final phase, "I forgive 'em, Nosy. And tomorrow I shall forget 'em. To forgive is wisdom, to forget is genius. And easier. Because it's true" (HM 220).

This does not, however, imply any change of attitude towards society. Working with a new sense of urgency arising out of his intimation that he has not got much time to live, Gulley is even more determined to assert his individual will in defiance of human law. In fact, Gulley is so full of rebelliousness in the last few days of his precarious life that even the worst possible calamity is brushed aside as just another attempt to obstruct the work of his imagination. Brutally assaulted by a young racketeer who, like Gulley, has been passing ordinary postcards as genuine art reproductions, he counsels himself against any grievance because it will simply block his imagination (HM 228-29).

The advent of the Creation brings us to the last febrile days of this extraordinary man. Gulley feels a new sense of mission which makes him absolutely defiant. Even his return to the life of a tramp is seen as a spur to creativity. The creation, he says, is not going to be a puzzle, but a real picture and

> a real picture is a flower, a geyser, a fountain, it hasn't got a pattern but a Form. It hasn't got corners and middle but an Essential Being. And this picture of mine, the Creation, had to be a creation. A large event. And no one can feel largely except in the open air (HM 240).

In the heat of creativity, Gulley goes out in search of a wall to paint the Creation. He quickly obtains the use of an abandoned old chapel for his work and when the arrangements are concluded he feels an immense satisfaction with himself: "I sat down and laughed. And then I began to cry. Well, I said, you old ballacher, you've rolled into port at last. You've got your break. First the *idea* and then the *wall*" (HM 243).

But there is no port of rest and no final break in the world of creativity. New obstacles and new hostilities always emerge to frustrate or obstruct the creative process. Gulley himself is painfully aware of the difficulties in this final undertaking. The rotten walls might fall off and the forces of convention could halt his work at any time. But the urge is irresistible. Creation must proceed even with the certain threat of destruction because, in Gulley's own words, "You can't stop art by dropping bricks on its head" (HM 265).

The individual work, however, can be destroyed, and this is precisely what happens when the forces of convention close in on Gulley. First, the council gives notice that the chapel is unsafe and will therefore be demolished. The inconclusive argument between Gulley and the council spokesman (HM 266-68) illustrates the reluctance of everyman to surrender the fortress of belief he has created for himself. By the time they part the council spokesman is much more determined to save Gulley against himself while Gulley presses with greater energy towards the inevitable destruction of himself and his work. Second, the fiery old man who rented the tumbledown chapel to Gulley soon becomes the artist's most obstinate enemy, pursuing him with the pertinacity of the dogmatist. The moral indignation of Pepper Pot, as Gulley derisively calls his adversary, is aroused by the early sketches of the Creation which left him convinced that Gulley is a modern artist and therefore an offender against conventional morality. With the cock-sureness of the self-righteous fanatic, Pepper Pot denounces all modern artists for creating what he sees as a perverse and irreligious art by "fakers that can't even draw right and twist up God's works so you wouldn't know them. Blasphemy. Spitting in the face

of the Lord" (HM 281). Gulley makes no attempt to defend himself against the charge of irreligion. In his sublime wisdom, he replies quite simply that he does not have the certitude of his accuser and then prepares himself for the worst. Soon the overwhelming forces of society combine to pulverise Gulley and his work. The borough engineer and his demolition crew send the old chapel cascading to the ground, raising a huge cloud of dust that quickly vanishes into thin air.

The destruction of Gulley and his work is, in Cary's world, the inevitable outcome of the struggle between the creative individual and the society in which he lives. Gulley pays the supreme penalty for attempting to renovate the institutions of society in an unorthodox manner. He is destroyed in the process, but not defeated. He leaves behind him a small but dedicated band of disciples who see in his visions the only hope of preserving and renewing those spiritual values that can counteract the taint of materialism in the twentieth century. It is clearly not without significance that in one of his last contacts with the representatives of institutional society, Gulley rejects a request for a portrait of a war hero and the cash that goes with the request in order to concentrate on his symbolic painting of the Creation (HM 277). The cash is badly needed, but it is a poor exchange for the opportunity to convey through the Creation "all the grief and glory in the world" (HM 288).

The final scene of *The Horse's Mouth* is, in Gulley's mind, the supreme example of injustice in the world. Deprived of the means to his art and disallowed the use of his own improvisations by a society which stands to benefit indefinitely from the work of the artist, Gulley senses defeat and for the first time in the story, his gaiety nearly

gives way to pessimism. There is a faint note of resignation in Gulley's voice as he contemplates the incurable blindness of society to its own good and the unmitigated and unnecessary cruelties men of genius frequently suffer. But he accepts these facts because they are among the big certainties of life: "For my experience is that life is full of big certainties and small surprises. You can usually tell that the knock is coming; but the details are unexpected" (HM 282).

Evil is certain; goodness is uncertain and rare. Therefore, Gulley advises Nosy who is always wailing and raving about the unkindness of the world to his master: never cultivate a grievance, always get rid of that sense of justice which can only add to the miseries of life (HM 296). So Gulley leaves the world laughing at the blindness and stupidity of society instead of shedding tears over the calamities inflicted on him. Cary himself, anxious to check the tendency to give an allegorical interpretation to the final scene of *The Horse's Mouth*, points out that "the last scene of Gully [sic] is a real conflict, not an allegorical one. And it was necessary to cap the development. It was the catastrophe in the Greek sense."[27] It is also, in Cary's view, the only philosophical resolution of the conflict.

Thus Cary brings the First Trilogy to a sound conclusion. By putting Sara Monday, Tom Wilcher and Gulley Jimson, three very different and unusual characters in the same world, Cary demonstrates his understanding of the complexity of life. *Herself Surprised* is a tribute to Sara's unwitting dedication to a life of service and a dissection of the problems she must face in a world of creative freedom where her vision of life conflicts with the visions of other people. *To Be A Pilgrim* deals with the problems of social order and the

responsibilities of the individual within society. Gulley Jimson in *The Horse's Mouth* gives the rationale behind the extreme individualism of most of Cary's great characters while making, at the same time, a most searching examination of two of the recurrent themes in Cary's fiction: creative freedom and its attendant injustices in a world of social constants. For, as Gulley explains, freedom and responsibility are inextricable. Therefore, in a world of creative freedom, every man is his own candle (HM 119). The result is endless conflict since one man's sense is frequently another man's nonsense. The advantage of the trilogy form in depicting this view of human experience is that it conveys more poignantly than perhaps any other form the relativity of personal viewpoints, thereby touching the very source of conflict in society.

PART IV: The Second Trilogy

CHAPTER V

A Study in Domestic and Political Conflicts

Joyce Cary's Second Trilogy, consisting of *Prisoner of Grace, Except the Lord* and *Not Honour More*, was completed only two years before his death in 1957. This trilogy, in fact, represents his last completed work, since his posthumously published novel, *The Captive and the Free*, is obviously unfinished. Within the pages of this closely knit trilogy, Cary returns to a subject of perennial interest to himself--politics. Much of the period covered by the Second Trilogy had been examined earlier in *To Be A Pilgrim*. But although Chester Nimmo, the hero of the Second Trilogy is, like Tom Wilcher, imbued with religious and political intuitions and shares with Tom a belief in the Liberal political doctrines that dominated much of Victorian England, Cary avoids mere repetition by creating two men with a common creed but very different backgrounds, temperaments and aims. Chester, the son of a poor preacher with a deep unshakable faith, is as anxious to change the old social order as Tom Wilcher, with his strong middle class background, is determined to preserve it. For unlike the Wilchers, whose well established family enables the children of each new generation to start their lives in comfortable surroundings and inherit incomes and historical manors, the Nimmos suffer from poverty which verges on destitution. The elder Nimmo, displaced by the turbulence of change in the second half of the nineteenth century, suffers with his wife and children all the privations and humiliations of poverty. The effect of this childhood experience is to turn Chester's wishful liberalism into ardent radicalism.

The three novels of the trilogy are linked together through the agency of Nina Woodville, the upper middle class woman who marries Chester when she is already expecting the baby of her cousin, Jim

Latter. This is therefore a marriage of convenience for all the parties concerned. For Nina who has been under the foster care of the wily Aunt Latter, the marriage is necessary to protect family respectability since Jim is unwilling to sacrifice his career as a professional soldier by resigning and marrying his cousin. On the other hand, Chester is so committed to the lofty ideal of achieving social equality that he is only too willing to marry Nina in spite of her condition because he needs her money to launch himself into politics. The marriage is therefore portentous. It brings into conflict the passions of two volatile and impatient men: Chester who wants to reform English social structures to save succeeding generations of his class from the degradation of poverty, and Jim, the sportive middle-class man who is totally opposed to the restlessness engendered by radical politicians like Chester. To the inflammable passion of love, therefore, is added another very exasperating source of conflict: that of class differences. The problem is made more complex because Chester is not a Leonard Bast quietly trying to enter into the strange and sophisticated world of the Schlegels. There can be no *rapprochement* between the poor but assertive Chester Nimmo and the comfortably established but snobbish Latters. For while Cary shares with Forster the deep concern over the problems of inequality and social injustice in Victorian and early twentieth-century England, their attitudes to the fundamental problems of existence differ widely. Forster's creed is centred on the belief that good personal relationships are, regardless of class or race, essential to a harmonious life. Cary, on the other hand, creates the inescapable feeling that all human relationships are unstable if not altogether fragile.

Nina's gentle breeding enables her to bring to the "management" of her marriage an array of skills which are comparable to the exceptional skills of Nimmo in politics. So for thirty years she remains a prisoner of grace to the man she despises and "hates." During those years, her attitude towards the man undergoes many changes. She learns to admire Chester but finds him unlovable. She even comes to believe in the saving power of his political genius in much the same way that he convinces her of the revitalising power of her "love." But while in their private lives they are each as morally culpable as the other, Nina, nevertheless, finds Chester's bold and sometimes totally corrupt political stratagems reprehensible. Accordingly, the man becomes increasingly repulsive as success makes him more reckless and audacious in his moves, and less tolerant of people and things that thwart his indomitable will.

This story of a man of unusual imagination and ambition in politics is narrated in chronological order but the arrangement of the trilogy is not. *Prisoner of Grace*, the first volume of the trilogy, actually deals with the second or political phase of Chester's life, narrated and interpreted by his wife Nina, while *Except the Lord*, the second volume in order of publication, gives the necessary background to Chester's radical commitment to change for the sake of achieving equality and social justice in England; the third and final volume of the Second Trilogy, *Not Honour More*, narrated in a laconic and hurried manner, captures the telegraphic simplicity of the mind of the narrator, Jim Latter, and brings the story to a violent climax as the stormy passions of love, of different moralities and politics tangle dangerously with the intense emotions aroused during the social upheaval that gripped England and took it to the brink of revolution in the General Strike of 1926.

The central problem of interpreting the second or political trilogy, as it is sometimes called, is that unlike the First Trilogy with its three highly individualized characters, the political trilogy is dominated by Chester Nimmo who seems to some critics to be not one, but two men bearing the same name. One of the main reasons for this attitude lies in the habit of critics to read and interpret the trilogy in the order of its publication rather than following the natural sequence of the story so that they can see the logical and inevitable development of its hero. In fact, by first exposing us to the unscrupulous politician and the crotchety and corrupt old man who, in his private and public life, frequently arouses intense moral indignation in the reader, Cary has severely tampered with our emotional response to his hero. The effect might be compared to that felt by a man who reads *Othello* backwards, starting with what, in the absence of the earlier evidence, must seem like the cold-blooded murder of the angelic Desdemona by a madly jealous Othello. A man who reads *Othello* in this manner will find it difficult if not impossible to see afterwards that the events leading to the tragedy constitute a sufficient if not altogether excusable reason for the murder. Cary's reordering of events in the Second Trilogy has a similar effect on the reader. When we turn from the fetid atmosphere of the closing chapters of *Prisoner of Grace* to the serenity of *Except the Lord*, our moral sense is deeply shocked.

The fact, however, is that it is difficult to think of another novel or series of novels that can more aptly illustrate the truth of the Wordsworthian paradox that the child is father of the man. That is to say, the trilogy is coherent and psychologically consistent provided we do not first expose ourselves to the shocking antics of a

desperate and battered old man, still full of delusions of a past grandeur and smarting under the pain of what he considers to be an undeserved and unbearable defeat. If we first look at the mealy-mouthed politician who so obviously enjoys his skill in writing escape clauses into his richly ambiguous political statements and frequently rescinds unequivocal commitments for reasons of expediency, we cannot but feel the uneasiness which Robert Bloom, for example, repeatedly expresses in his extensive analysis of the Second Trilogy. The transition Bloom makes from *Prisoner of Grace* to *Except the Lord* attests to this uneasiness and shows the confusion his procedure can produce:

> The Chester of *Except the Lord*, however, is a startling departure from the Machiavellian figure that Nina unwillingly portrays. He is a man of principle rather than expediency, of serenity rather than energy. He is inspired by faith, truth, and love, not by power. Indeed, he does not hesitate to repudiate politics itself, the activity which absorbs almost his whole being in both Nina's and Jim's narratives.[1]

The first thing to be said about this judgment is that it is patently misleading. The Chester of *Except the Lord* is a sensitive and energetic boy, nurtured on narrow but consistent and unchanging fundamentalist Christian beliefs. As he becomes aware of the degrading poverty of his family, he develops for the rich in England a hatred which makes him determined to enter politics and fight for his primary objective of social equality for all. He repudiates not politics, but the inhuman use of political power by men like Pring. The "man of principle rather than expediency, of serenity rather than energy;" the man "inspired by faith, truth, and love, not by power" is Chester's saintly father and not Chester himself. Indeed, Chester abandons his faith because he realises eventually that the moral scruples of his upright and generous father tend to perpetuate and accentuate the

poverty and suffering of the family. In *Except the Lord*, therefore, Cary provides the social and moral background which explains the crusading zeal of Chester and the violent conflicts of *Prisoner of Grace* and *Not Honour More*. Without that background, the violence of these last two novels will not have much significance and Chester Nimmo himself will forfeit the sympathy of the reader and become the merely corrupt and loathsome demagogue of Jim Latter's misconception.

II. *Except the Lord*

The emphasis at the beginning of *Except the Lord* is on the moral and social conditions of the Nimmos: the tranquil faith of the parents, their unruffled dignity in the face of the privations and humiliations of poverty, their kindness and generosity towards the poorer members of their class, their unfailing adherence to the highest principles of their religion and, withal, the fearful insecurity that besets the family when the father is reduced from the position of an independent farmer in Highfallow to that of an itinerant labourer in the Shagbrook hamlet. As usual with Cary, the view of village life is thoroughly unromantic. There are the strong communal feelings and those mutual sympathies that alleviate the miseries of village life; but so also are the petty but persistent jealousies of the people, their narrow-mindedness and the intolerance it breeds in them. By placing the sensitive and restless Chester Nimmo in a setting where the few rich people treat their poor neighbours with disdain, Cary is able to show how the powerful religious sanctions of the boy's early training gradually give way to a fervent radicalism as he and his family are exposed to more and more social injustice. The loss of the

family farm at Highfallow and the move to Shagbrook marks the beginning of the change in the boy, then merely seven years old.

The deep religious training of the children fosters in them a sense of reverence for their parents so that any humiliation of the parents cuts a lasting wound in the hearts of the children. But for the labouring classes of this Victorian world, humiliation and deprivation are constant threats to personal dignity. Apart from the mild irritation of knowing that their devoted and affectionate mother is often ridiculed by the ignorant but self-assured villagers, there is the new bruising experience of seeing her publicly humiliated by the wealthy but extremely bigoted Mrs. Coyte, the employer of their father. Mrs. Coyte is generally kind, but like many orthodox believers, she is intolerant of dissent and would occasionally scoff at the elder Nimmo's fundamentalist religion or unnecessarily rebuke Mrs. Nimmo to demonstrate her power over the family. Father Nimmo, for his part, is so wholly committed to the teachings of his sect that no temporal gain could force him to modify or compromise his beliefs. This is the central conflict in the family story: the unwillingness of the father to reconcile the ideal good as taught by his religion with the practical good of the family as dictated by the pressing needs of a precarious life. The father's idealism therefore provides the sharpest contrast to his son's corrupt political and social life in much less difficult circumstances.

This contrast must not, however, be seen as implying an unconditional condemnation of Chester's politics. On the contrary, the father's dogmatism increases the family difficulties so much that not only the restless Chester, but his clever and gentle brother,

Richard, and his rough and dependable sister, Georgina, are all eventually disaffected from their saintly but impractical father. An example of the father's indiscretion is given when he denounces Mr. Newmarch from the pulpit for separating from his wife. The denunciation comes at a time when Mr. Newmarch, a prosperous farmer and member of Father Nimmo's congregation, holds the only promise of restoring the Nimmo family to a position of dignity by recommending his pastor for a foreman's position. As the children see it, the behaviour of their father shows his habit of sacrificing the family interest for the sake of adhering to his abstract notion of the truth. We may respect the elder Nimmo for his unswerving adherence to the truth as he understands it, but our sympathies are with the children who feel a painful sense of betrayal. Chester's vivid recollection of the event underlines the helplessness and dreadful insecurity of the family:

> . . . I knew for the first time the sinking down of the spirit--the sense, as it were, of a momentary interruption of life itself, which comes upon a child at the idea of a parent's danger or incompetence. I was not breathing as I looked from Richard . . . to Georgina, already a standby . . . in every crisis that could not be taken to my mother, who had spent all that January in bed (EL 17).

When their mother dies prematurely of consumption, the children are alienated not only from their father, but also from the rich members of their society. While their father stolidly accepts the death of his wife as the work of Providence, the children are united in their belief that their mother could have been saved if the family had the money to send her to France for a while (EL 39). The unnecessary humiliation of his mother and her death combine to turn Chester's personal animosity towards Mrs. Coyte into general hatred for the rich:

> We were not an envious nor a resentful community. I think none of us as children felt malice against those richer than ourselves, much less against the wealthy. The real rich belonged to a world as strange and romantic to us as fairy tales. . . . I did not hate them and rob young Coyte's snares because they were richer, but because Mrs. Coyte had, in the common phrase, set down my mother before me and made me feel humiliation and fear.
>
> There was a time within the next few years when the hatred of social injustice and of the fearful inequalities of our society became an obsession with me and Georgina, a pressure that tormented us even in our dreams (EL 40).

It is evident from this recollection that the children do not share their father's calm surrender to Providence. Much of the tension in the story of the family stems from the fact that the children are continually shifting from the faith of their father. Richard, the reticent intellectual of the family, coolly rejects his father's belief in an omnipotent and benevolent God. His argument is old and familiar but its effect on Chester is insidious and ultimately faith-destroying. The belief in an omnipotent and merciful God ruling over a world which is forever burdened with evil and endemic social injustices seems totally contradictory to Richard: "If there were a God, he asked, why did He not stop wars, and why had He let our good mother die so miserably" (EL 122). The rhetorical question offers one clear clue to Richard's defection from the faith of his father. The boy is finally repulsed after two unsuccessful expeditions to await the Second Coming of Christ--a doctrine which the elder Nimmo and his congregation accept literally. When the elder Nimmo blames the failure of the expeditions on the lack of faith in some members, Richard is appalled. For the first time he sees his father as a deceived and sometimes deceitful man and dismisses the old man's religion as "just a get out" (EL 124).

Significantly, when Chester looks back at these early experiences and tries to interpret them, he feels a sense of reverence and awe for the saintly piety of their father but he finally endorses Richard's position. For Chester, looking at his past with a mature eye, the belief in the Second Coming is part of a general quest for certainty and security by a bewildered and down-trodden people:

> Even as a boy of eleven I was impressed by the grave and anxious looks on the faces of the poor father and mother as they stood there waiting in confidence to be translated into paradise from a world which had treated them so cruelly. Those who deride our folly and credulity might ask why that poor mother among her hunger-wasted children should not believe that if Christ truly loved the poor and the outcasts He would come again to rescue them from misery (EL 116).

These comments leave no doubt that Chester also lost the faith of his father.

With Georgina, however, the conflict between father and daughter centres not on the need to have absolute faith, which the girl always possesses, but on the related question of whether one should always speak the truth even at the cost of fearful consequences to oneself. This question is given as much prominence as Richard's defection from the faith.

One evening, the two boys are sitting with Georgina who, since the death of her mother, has had to assume the difficult role of mother without a mother's natural authority. Suddenly, she begins to upbraid Richard for spending many hours reading material that is not relevant to the examination that might win him a university scholarship. Richard responds to this scolding with remarks imputing that grocer G., Georgina's employer, might be taking sexual liberties with her in return for small extra gifts, thereby provoking his sister's savage

temper. When their father steps in to investigate the dispute, Georgina flatly denies that the grocer's name has been mentioned at all. Their father's moral sense is scandalised. He has taught his children to revere the truth and fear God not because God "is terrible, but because he [sic] is literally the soul of goodness and truth, because to do him wrong is to do wrong to some mysterious part of oneself . . ." (EL 49).

This episode brings to the fore what is perhaps the most persistent moral problem of the Second Trilogy: When is one justified, in private or in public life, to tell a lie? In the complex world of politics where the line between private and public life can be razor-thin, the question might not have a simple answer; but the implication is that we must always keep it in mind if, as politicians, we are to escape the utter corruption of Chester Nimmo's later years. It must be noted that the recollection of this episode glides from past to present tense, a habit which Chester frequently repeats not only because of the vividness and immediacy of the present tense, but also because of the applicability of the ideas to his recent political life.[2]

As for the lie which Georgina tells to her father, it is evident that Cary is using the episode to contrast the young girl's practical wisdom, a wisdom rooted in her motherly instincts, with the father's worship of an ideal truth, separate from and unconcerned about human beings in the present. When the old man obliquely equates Georgina's venial lie with "the lie which feeds on the spirit as maggots feed on a dor beetle till all is hollow, black and empty within a painted shell" (EL 51), we feel that his reaction is exaggerated and

mistaken. Georgina is an upright girl who would spare no effort to protect her virtue. But she also knows that her morally strait-laced father would have removed her instantly from the job which has significantly reduced their physical needs. At the same time we realise that Chester's keen personal sense of guilt--he calls his story the story of a "crime" against his own soul (EL 5)--derives, in part, from the full knowledge that as a politician, he has frequently gone far beyond Georgina's kind of necessary lie to the lie which twists the human mind. The irony of the situation is that the teaching of their father has such a strong hold on the minds of the children that even a slight deviation from the truth stirs their moral indignation and produces a great measure of disaffection. The disastrous expeditions in anticipation of the arrival of Christ and Father Nimmo's rather disingenuous explanations of the failures illustrate this point. Chester is not only unforgiving to his father for bringing public ridicule on the family; the disaster also destroys his "complete trust" in his "father's wisdom and so opened the way to political agitation" (EL 125).

The loss of faith and the subsequent march into politics are closely interrelated events resulting, inevitably, from the difficult moral and social world of Chester's childhood. For while the elder Nimmo readily accepts his hard lot in society, he is, nevertheless, painfully aware of the sufferings of others and anxious to ameliorate their positions. This duality of self-resignation and active concern for others inexorably takes the father into the inner councils of the budding trade union movement where his high reputation for honesty and

integrity makes him a ready choice for the important position of honorary treasurer. His social involvement, however, stirs not only the wrath of the local employers, but also the suspicion of the police who have to mediate between the restless workers and their truculent employers. Ironically, the elder Nimmo is drawn into union violence by his natural abhorrence for all forms of violence. When fighting breaks out between rival factions during a strike of miners, union leaders ask him, "as a respected citizen and a man well regarded on both sides, to intervene" (EL 105). The result is that he is knocked down and injured by the more boisterous members on both sides and later arrested as a leader of the strikers. He narrowly escapes imprisonment only because of the intervention of the wealthy members of the community, including Mrs. Coyte.

The memory of this incident is important for several reasons. Morally, the incident shows how vulnerable a good but poor man can be in a world of intrigue where influence, rather than innocence, is a greater insurance against unjust punishment. The fact that the magistrates, drawn entirely from the gentry, had shown unnecessary hostility towards his father remains with Chester even in his old age. Even more shattering is the discovery that their father's reliance on the untarnished truth cannot, unaided, save him from unjust persecution. The moral which Chester draws from the incident is very revealing, especially because of his own conduct in politics. The elder Nimmo had suffered needlessly because of his too strict regard for the truth: "He took no party sides, and that was his crime, he spoke the truth as he saw it, and that was his danger. *Angry men do not like the truth, they want to be flattered*" (EL 105, italics added).

When he becomes a politician, Chester frequently evades the truth and turns flattery into a specious art that is admirable for its cleverness but repugnant for its mendacity. Politically, the part played by the rich in securing the release of his father convinces Chester that the world is "a tissue of private and hidden relations" (EL 106)--a world, that is, in which his clever but unscrupulous manipulation of people and events can be justified on political if not moral grounds. One direct result of this accident to the father is the withdrawal of Chester from school so that he can go to work and supplement the meagre family income. Some of his memories as a child labourer are as searing as those of Oliver Twist.

Chester recalls this particular episode to repudiate the tendency of his "biographers" to divide his life into three periods that naturally merge into one another: that of the agitator, the preacher and the statesman. According to that division,

> The agitator who learnt the art of rabble-rousing from his father passed naturally into the revivalist preacher, the preacher with his extreme Protestant and dissenting creed naturally opposed himself to privilege and entered politics to achieve his ideal of equality. And then again he used the methods of the demagogue (EL 103-04).

This is an accurate description of Chester's life but it contains a falsehood: the assertion that he learnt the art of rabble-rousing from his father, a man who would have recoiled with indignation from the demagogy of his son. The main function of this particular recollection, therefore, is to contrast the father's exemplary dedication to the truth with the son's political chicanery and later corruption. The sources of this corruption, then, lie elsewhere--in those brutal experiences of his childhood: the humiliation of his parents by the rich and the

unscrupulous, the degrading poverty that killed their mother and forced Georgina and, later, Chester himself, into self-debasing service. All these factors combine to make Chester a class-conscious youth nursing a deep secret hatred for the rich but unwilling to admit it to himself because it conflicts with his religious training.

This is the background against which we must examine what Chester calls the "central" event of his life, the visit to the Lilmouth Great Fair with his sister, Georgina (EL 81). Although Cary gives more prominence to this episode than even the children's fateful visit to Twyport in *Charley is My Darling* or Gulley Jimson's crucial visits to the homes of Hickson and the Beeders in *The Horse's Mouth*, critics have, without exception, given only slight attention to this "central" event in *Except the Lord*. A careful reading of the event shows, however, that the children's experience at the fair finally crystallizes their vague feelings of resentment against the rich, turning Chester in particular into a rabid hater of wealthy people generally and arousing in him that crusading zeal that later makes him the eager pupil of anarchists, nihilists and Marxists. The event also makes him a determined enemy of every kind of privilege until privilege, wealth, and public acclaim turn him into a megalomaniac, posing as a popular man of the people but interested largely in protecting his personal title.

The most important occurrence during the visit to the Lilmouth Great Fair is Chester's first exposure to the theatre. The theatre is absolutely forbidden to members of their sect because, according to their faith, the theatre is a "temple of lies where men and women practised feigning as an art, to deceive and confuse honest souls" (EL 87). Chester, however, excuses his visit to the theatre on this

occasion by saying that the play is based on a true story. It is significant that Chester's more candid brother and sister separately reject his specious excuse for more honest, if, from their father's point of view, equally unacceptable explanations of their visit to the theatre. Evidently, Cary is directing attention to what is to become, in Chester's political life, a permanent habit of mind: the regular habit of offering the most attractive rather than the most honest explanations for his moral, social and political infractions.

Maria Marten, the play at the Lilmouth Great Fair, is a melodrama of rape and murder involving Corder, a dissolute farmer's son, and Maria Marten, the village bawd. Corder kills Maria when, after a brief secret liaison, she tries to trap him into a marriage. In the theatre, however, this sordid story is transformed into an allegory of evil:

> Maria on the stage became the virtuous child of poor cottagers, and Corder a rich gentleman, son of the squire who was the Marten's [sic] landlord, his liaison with Maria was no longer a common intrigue with the village Jezebel, but a deliberate seduction by a villain. One might say, indeed, that it was rape; for Corder, as we saw him that evening, forced Maria to surrender by threatening to raise her father's rent by an impossible amount, and to evict him if he did not pay.
>
> That is to say, the drama we saw, and that millions had seen, was a story of the cruellest kind of wrong inflicted by the rich upon the poor (EL 91-2).

This transformation makes Chester's emotional response to the theatre and his identification with the victim readily understandable. Instead of dramatising the conflict between two evil characters whose difference is one of degree rather than of kind, the story has been slanted "to show the virtue, innocence and helplessness of the poor, and the abandoned cruelty, the heartless self-indulgence of the rich" (EL 92). To Chester, the play has become a dramatic distillation of his own

bitter experiences. It cannot but evoke the most painful remembrances of the damp, crumbling cottage in which they live and the unfeeling reaction of their landlady to even the most basic requests for repairs. The meaning behind this play, Chester tells himself, should have made revolution as inevitable in England as it has been in France, Italy and Germany.

This first experience of the theatre, Chester reveals, is decisive in his life (EL 92). Its immediate effect is to intensify and consolidate his secret hatred of the rich. Corder becomes "the very picture of arrogant wealth," stirring the most deadly hate in Chester: "Hatred is far too mild a term for a feeling which would not have been satisfied merely to kill. I longed to see him torn to pieces, to be tortured to death" (EL 92).

When at the end of the play Chester joins Georgina who has watched the performance from a different corner of the booth, the two children find that they are both experiencing a "continuing state of mental tumult" (EL 96). But even in his state of frenzy, Chester is keenly aware of the spell of the orator which Corder had used with such telling effect in the theatre. The crime remains totally abhorrent but the performance of Corder left Chester with "a fascinated admiration" (EL 93). For once, he is able to understand the source of the power his father wields over his congregation by means of the spoken word: "a power that could be achieved by anyone with the will and a voice, anyone capable of learning this art of stringing words together in poetic form, and striking the right attitudes" (EL 99). This conclusion links oratory with dissimulation and deceit, and prepares us for the specious rhetoric and the great feigning acts of

Chester's political career. The perverse use of oratorical power, is, indeed, an important theme of *Prisoner of Grace* where it reaches a climax in the public mimicry of Chester's political histrionics by his illegitimate son, Tom Nimmo (PG ch. 110). Thus, from the point of view of his own moral development, Chester's experience of the theatre is extremely damaging. By wrongfully persuading himself that anyone with a will and a voice, anyone capable of striking the right attitudes can hold people under his spell and sway them even toward the wrong actions, Chester lays the foundation for what, in his later years, is to become one huge feigning act.

Equally important is the fact that Chester returns from the Lilmouth Great Fair with a greater and more painful awareness of social and metaphysical evil in the world. Not only does he, like Georgina, suddenly begin to recall the loss of the family farm, the untimely death of their mother, the poverty that still afflicts their father while the wayward Lord Slapton, chief landlord of neighbouring Battwell, spends vast sums "on drinking and fornications" (EL 99), but unlike Georgina, Chester is also animated by a secret but overwhelming determination to right social injustices. The vague rumblings in the young boy's heart now coalesce into a vast but as yet indefinable desire to escape from the restrictions imposed on him by his faith and engage in radical action that might reduce the evils in society.

When in retrospect Chester describes his visit to the Lilmouth Great Fair as the decisive event of his life, it is precisely because the visit completely destroys his old way of life which makes an uncomplaining acceptance of one's lot in society a virtue. The destruction of his old faith begins at the Lilmouth Great Fair and is

completed when the family hope for relief, following the return of Christ to earth, is shown to be illusory.

Thus Chester is mentally and emotionally prepared for the anarchic and revolutionary political doctrines that were circulating in England towards the end of the nineteenth century. The most influential of these is Marxism which comes to Chester through a propagandist pamphlet entitled *The Great Design* (EL 127). The message of this pamphlet repudiates the Christian doctrines that permeate the trade unionism of the elder Nimmo, its symbolism accuses the traditional leadership of wilfully fostering and exploiting poverty in the working class people of England. The aim of this message is to foment enough unrest among workers so that they will replace the peaceful unionism of the past with an aggressive new movement capable of inciting the poor to rebellion. The radically different attitudes towards civil disobedience are vividly conveyed in this description of a trade union card of the elder Nimmo's day and the pamphlet that lures Chester into politics:

> I have before me a union card of that date. It is surrounded by religious emblems; God the Father at the top dispensing His benefits to all people; Christ at one side receiving the children; and the Holy Ghost sending down the flames of his spirit upon his preachers; and below one read that the labourer was worthy of his hire (EL 66).

In contrast to this view of a Christian social order which turns a faithful worker into a long-suffering stoic, the new Marxist doctrines portray religion "as the instrument of the rich to oppress the poor, what would be called nowadays the opium of the people" (EL 127). *The Great Design* which so powerfully incites Chester to political action shows on its cover

> a farmer's boy in a smock harnessed to a huge waggon--he had a cruel bit in his mouth marked 'Poverty.' The waggon was being driven by a bishop in a mitre, and seated in it behind was a party of persons among whom one recognized a judge in his wig, a general in uniform, a peer in his robes, and behind them, in turn, the top of a woman's head wearing something which was not quite a bonnet and not quite a crown--that is, it indicated Royalty clearly enough even to an unlettered yokel like myself . . . (EL 127).

When Chester reads through this caricature of the Victorian social order in his sceptical and rebellious frame of mind, he reacts with great emotion. The propaganda is effective because he can easily see where he and his family stand in that Victorian hierarchy. By persuading Chester that as a worker he deserves and commands respect, the Marxist doctrines readily fill the vacuum created by his loss of faith. On completing the reading of the pamphlet, a "passion of illumination" (EL 128) penetrates his brain "to find there a place so exactly prepared for it that *every sentence fell instantly into the niche that had ached for its coming*" (EL 129, italics added).

Shortly after this conversion to Marxism, Chester visits Exeter full of enthusiasm for the new doctrines which he apprehends only emotionally. In Exeter, the boy hears Dr. Lanza enunciate his socialist message of universal brotherhood and love, and his conversion is completed. Dr. Lanza is a disciple of Proudhon, an avowed enemy of organised religion, a Tolstoyan nihilist who believes that government and private property are the prime sources of all evil. Yet his message captivates Chester because it sublimates his new socialist beliefs into the noble ideals of brotherhood and love which are part of his early religious training. This is how Chester explains his acceptance of the new teaching:

> I had rejected God and with God, the love, the charity, the assured faith in goodness that I had learnt in my own home. Now under another name, that of humanity, He was restored to his full

> grandeur and majesty as ruler of the world. For the miseries of that world were shown as the just and inevitable punishment of those who had turned their faces from that fundamental law of brotherhood (EL 141).

It is clear from this statement that Chester goes into trade unionism and politics afterwards with a great deal of noble idealism.[3] This idealism points to the similarity and the difference between Lanza, the theorist, and Chester, the practising politicisn. When Lanza realises that Proudhon's ideal of a peaceful social revolution (through the education and organisation of workers) is being perverted by the violent creed of Bakunin in his League of Peace and Freedom which, ironically, bombs buildings and assassinates politicians, Lanza resigns so that he can continue to preach his message of brotherhood and love. The drift of Chester's argument suggests, however, that this easy way out of the problem is possible only because Lanza is a theorist. In practical politics the problem can be much more complex. Chester is careful to remind the reader that he had entered politics with the abstract theories of men like Lanza as his only guide; consequently, he was unaware "of the conflicts that arise actually from the goodwill in different persons having different temperaments, of the complication in all human affairs, of the place of evil in every society" (EL 140).

From these early recollections, therefore, Chester emerges as a restless young man, acutely conscious of the great social problems that are waiting to be tackled. Full of earnestness but naive to the extreme, he goes into social activity professing to be a dedicated Marxist but still full of moral scruples from his early training. His trade union experience, undoubtedly the most important part of his practical education in politics, is to change all that. The idealistic

and considerate unionist gradually develops into the hardened and occasionally callous and cruel politician.

The early experience of union "politics" is a major factor in producing this change. Encouraged by labour leaders to form a secret union of farm labourers in the Shagbrook area, Chester goes to work with zeal but soon he and some of his members lose their jobs. Worse than the loss of their jobs, however, is the discovery that the pledge of secrecy which every member makes on joining the union has not been honoured by all. Then while Chester is trying to find out who the traitor might be, he is ambushed in a dark lane and brutally assaulted by some of his own men who accuse him of betraying them to their employers. Although he escapes from the attack without serious injury, the incident leaves him with a permanently dark view of politics:

> The wound to my head, in that affray, was superficial. I can truly say that the wound to my soul has never healed. It was the first time I had been made to understand the fearful condition of political life, the fundamental want of all security, the appalling risks of those who accept any large responsibility for their fellows (EL 226).

This experience leaves Chester circumspect, evasive and even secretive because he is forced to the conclusion that in politics, "looks, and long acquaintance" (EL 187), offer no guarantee against unnecessary suspicion and outright treachery.

After his recovery from the injury, Chester goes to London and meets Pring, the radical Marxist trade union leader who openly advocates class warfare. At this point in his career, Chester's bitterness towards the rich is, if anything, sharper, and his sense of inadequacy, following the disastrous results of his attempt to organise the poor, has left him more determined to prove his capability to himself and others. Underlying this determination, however, is a naïveté which is

to be shattered by his contact with Pring. That naïveté is nowhere more apparent than in Chester's reaction to London which he sees merely as a vaster, more terrifying extension of the brutal life of the poor; it is therefore another instance of social injustice which he must correct:

> Here are vast wrongs to be set right, here is proof enough that humanity has plunged off its road, and as for putting it back again with pretty speeches and philosophical pamphlets, you might as well try to stop a landslide with wind (EL 235-36).

What distinguishes this declaration from others of its kind is that for the first time Chester clearly implies that he is willing to pursue an aggressive path to social reform. He is in effect repudiating the peaceful approach to reform which his father, Dr. Lanza and Dr. Dolling (a republican revolutionary of peaceful inclinations who has been indoctrinating Chester following his meeting with Lanza), have taught him. In other words, Chester is embracing the violent creed of Pring without fully understanding its implications. From now until he becomes the hardened politician of *Prisoner of Grace*, Chester is often portrayed like the principal figure in a heroic drama, torn between his passion for reform and his conscience which checks him when he violates the high principles of his early training. Once the contact with Pring has given Chester the job and the consistent policy he desires, he begins to look like a callous politician. He is to realise, however, that there are limits beyond which he cannot follow a doctrinaire Marxist like Pring.

The appointment of Chester to the office of the dockers' union at Lilmouth where he is to act as liaison officer between Banner of the Lilmouth local and Brodribb, head of the Tarbiton branch, quickly

shatters his illusions about politics. The men who lead the union range from extreme conservatives of Brodribb's vintage "who liked to tell his men that they were Christians first and workers second" (EL 242), to the inflexible Marxist Pring who would not permit moral considerations to check his political activities. Soon after the arrival of Chester at Lilmouth, the dock workers are called off their jobs and Pring arrives from London to direct the strike, making Chester his aide-de-camp.

This strike is important not only because it advances Chester's political education significantly, but also because it gives us valuable insights into his behaviour in a position of authority. Apart from a sense of personal triumph over those who had assaulted him earlier, the reaction of Chester, on the whole, betrays a want of feeling, a tendency to look at events largely from the personal rather than the national point of view. His recollection of the sight of the paralysed docks gives him, some forty years afterwards, a perverse pleasure deriving from his part in stopping one of the main arteries of British commerce:

> The docks all round me are dead. Not a winch sounds, not a truck moves, as far as the eye can see. . . . The mist that hangs over the sea is like a winding sheet, cold with the death sweat; the pale sun gleaming low through the fog is like the glazed eye of death itself, or, as one might say, of commerce mortally wounded.
>
> Half a million pounds' worth of freight along fifty miles of coast is held up in two million pounds' worth of shipping, and I am one of those who have commanded this death, who have wielded this spell (EL 243).

Evidently, there is a feeling of personal power, an exultant sensation behind these words. Even as the difficulties of the situation mount--the strike pay falls, the contributions from the chapels decline, the workers grow restless as the prospect of an indefinite period of unemployment looms larger--the strike committee decides by

a majority which includes Chester to continue the struggle and impose discipline on the waverers through "more activity on picket and more private persuasion" (EL 252), both of which are euphemisms for increased union violence. Soon afterwards union thugs ambush and attack carters whose work, the union leaders feel, is undermining the strike. The attack shocks the community but Chester writes a report commending the thugs. When a police raid on union offices discovers the typewritten report with his initials, Chester counters by saying that the document is a police forgery and refuses to confess either to Georgina or to his father (EL 256).

The use of violence by the unions leads, inevitably, to the resignation of Brodribb whose fundamentalist Christian beliefs make him avowedly opposed to all forms of violence. When Chester learns of secret union plans to attack Brodribb, he goes to the office and demands an explanation, warning that serious consequences could follow an attack on the local leader. The men involved in the plot react with predictable hostility and when Pring enters the office, Chester's early political education comes to an abrupt and painful conclusion. Pring, who respects neither principles nor persons when they cease to advance his basic goal of a Marxist revolution, now coldly but angrily dismisses his aide-de-camp for raising what he calls technical points:

> But what had startled me still more than this scornful attitude towards the whole principle, as I saw it, of our democratic and representative constitution, was his glance at me as I attempted to explain my grievance. In the cold stare of his blue eyes flashed upon me, his expression of bored and angry contempt, I perceived the truth about the man; a truth I had always known and even gloated upon, but never applied to my own case, that no one on earth counted with him beside the cause (EL 271).

When Chester returns to his lodging after this summary dismissal, he finds his things thrown out and the door locked, thus ending this sordid apprenticeship.

A number of points stand out from this account of Chester's trade union experience. The first is that despite Chester's eager desire for personal recognition and success, his loyalty to people, in sharp contrast to Pring's commitment to an ideology alone, is still a powerful undercurrent that humanizes his zealous Marxism. He can lie and betray a perverse sense of pleasure over the misfortunes of others; but he is not entirely without principle or a sense of loyalty. The second and far more important point is that Cary deliberately counterpoints the story of the strike with the story of Chester's disaffection from his family and its principles so that one illuminates the other in much the same way that Tolstoy's counterpointing of the themes of war and the struggle for domestic peace enhances his story of *War and Peace*.

Although the indigent Nimmo family has none of its members working at the docks, Cary, nevertheless, adroitly involves Georgina, the pillar of the family, through her connection with Will Wilson, a former schoolmate and friend of Richard. Wilson, who has suddenly appeared after years of absence, is developing a small but growing business as a carter and assiduously courting Georgina. While Wilson treats Chester with the candour that is due to a trusted friend, Chester remains circumspect and continues to press for a prolongation of those policies which he knows to be particularly harmful to the small businessman like Wilson. Even the news that Wilson might go bankrupt only fills Chester, as he puts it, with "a pleasure added to my

exaltation at the news of the attack on the carters, and their flight" (EL 255). Chester's attitude in this matter amounts to a betrayal of his class. He is, though in a bland way, showing that unfeeling disregard for people which seems shocking when it is directed against him by Pring. The irony is that when Chester is thrown out by Pring, it is Georgina who rescues him and puts him up in a warm room heated with a stove provided by Wilson, and it is Wilson who finds a new job for Chester, a job from which he makes his very successful move into politics.

Another point of great importance is that Chester's brief taste of power reveals in him that self-conceit which contributes so much to his downfall at the end of the trilogy. Soon after his appointment to the dockers' office at Lilmouth, a job literally secured for him by Georgina, he begins to behave as if he is distinctly superior to everyone in his family and the village community around. During the strike, for example, when it seems as if the unions might win a decisive victory, Chester, riding in a coach with his sister, suddenly begins to look at his familiar surroundings with the eyes of a proud Napoleon going through a mean and contemptible village:

> I felt like a Napoleon. How mean and small the hamlet seemed to me as we topped the last rise by the shop; how remote and uncouth, a place where men scarcely came to life, where life itself was a slow corruption. The cottages in the valley--our own cottage--seemed to be sinking into the ground as if half dissolved already into their natural elements of mud and mould, as if the effort to be something more had been too much for them (EL 255).

This supercilious attitude is equally evident in his attitude towards individual members of his family. He feels a secret uneasiness for his part in promoting union violence, but reacts impatiently when his

father preaches against such violence. And when the Oxford educated Richard returns to the village after losing his job in a London textile firm, Chester not only rejoices over the fact that his brilliant elder brother must now occasionally serve him in a menial capacity; he also finds it impossible to understand how his brother can "occupy his mind with the boring trivialities of family life" (EL 267). Indeed, from this brief exercise of power, Chester emerges as a petty Caesar, arrogantly scorning the base degrees by which he has ascended.

Cary devotes a good portion of the last five chapters of *Except the Lord* to an explanation of the reasons for the moral decay of Chester which this analysis of the novel has been tracing. Perhaps the best way to sum it up is to say that the totality of Chester's experiences brutalized him and in turn made him so brutally callous that his actions often confound the high religious precepts that so frequently punctuate his speeches. As the novel moves to a close, confessions and explanations which are apparently intended to appeal to the reader for greater sympathy and understanding, become more numerous. Chester knows, for example, that the degree of his defection from his family's high sense of honour and its regard for the truth makes his own life "a lie," but suggests that the lie is partly forced on him:

> I say my heart was hardened. This is a true image if it is remembered that hearts are not metal but flesh. By work, by the blows of fate, the flesh can grow a surface as hard as horn, but not hard all through like steel. The cruel man need not have a hard heart. How many torturers, agents of despotism, experts with the rack and the thumb screw, have been tender fathers and loving husbands. The hard heart is that which turns aside the blows of truth, the arrows of conscience, and often it is hard above because it is soft and fearfully weak below (EL 268).

The special plea in this confession is quite discernible; but the tendency to adopt the hard look in order to conceal the frightful weakness beneath is common in Chester.

What then can we say is the "crime" which Chester is trying to trace in this story? Charles Hoffmann suggests that the crime is to be located in Chester's "loss of faith both early and late in life."[4] The story does not, however, permit such a simple view of the matter. It is true that part of the reason for Chester's sense of guilt derives from his loss of faith; but his story leaves no doubt that even with the advantage of hindsight, he still regards his father's religion as fundamentally mistaken. What burdens him with guilt, then, is his failure to observe those concomitant principles of his faith: the humility, the reverent but realistic regard for the truth and for personal integrity, the self-forgetfulness in service and the dedication to people in general and to one's family in particular. In his political life, Chester departs from these ideals to become an egotist. The crime, in fact, centres on the failure of Chester to heed the warning of his father that:

> "Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it;
> Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

The truth of this warning, Chester confesses, comes to him late in life when he realises that unless a man aims "at the life of the soul then all his achievement will be a gaol or a mad-house, self-hatred, corruption and despair" (EL 284).

The central and pervasive irony of the Second Trilogy, then, is that once Chester rises from the extreme poverty of his childhood to become Lord Nimmo, he persistently confounds his own lordship

with the Lord who builds and guards the city. Certainly, *Prisoner of Grace* and *Except the Lord* powerfully evoke the corruption and despair of Chester's later years, especially in the timorous boldness that characterises his last desperate effort to return to power; and if not the whole of England but at least Palm Cottage, the centre of much of his lordship's latter days, is indeed a mad-house. Amid all the angry noises and even the occasional gunshot, Chester's narcissism stands out luridly; his sense of mission, his feeling that without him England would inevitably drift into a bloody revolution come through to the reader to reveal a pathetic lack of self-knowledge, a false evaluation of his lordship's own importance in the general scheme of things.

It is worth noting, before turning to *Prisoner of Grace*, that Chester did not become a rebel in politics; he has always been a rebel even as a child. His radical outlook and his sense of mission are products of a natural propensity, nurtured and strengthened by his experiences as a child and a young man. As early as the age of eight, Chester adopts as his hero and companion a certain Cran, a "trickster" and "petty thief" from London who spends his summer holidays with the Coytes, to whom he is related. Chester seeks the friendship of Cran whose habits contravene the high tenets of Chester's own careful upbringing "Because, in one word, to defy the law was brave and free" (EL 22). Moreover, this is not an isolated instance. The people who, apart from his family, make the most lasting impressions on Chester are either metaphorical or real rebels. One of the reasons for the "fascinated admiration" he feels for Corder is that his conduct on the stage is a symbolic act of defiance against society. Indeed, defiance of the law becomes the common denominator of those whose leadership

appeals to Chester. A mild rebel like Dr. Dolling is attractive because his example satisfies a secret yearning in the young boy: "to defy the established authority of the land was itself a distinction, it gave me the self-respect achieved by a heroic gesture" (EL 149). Needless to say, it is the same attitude which makes Chester such a willing servant of Pring until he learns how ruthless and heartless a radical rebel can be.

This is the naturally rebellious temperament which leads Chester into politics to fight against poverty and injustice. But the effect of his first experience of politics during the dockers' strike is to purge him of all doctrinaire creeds. As he looks back on that strike, he realises that its tremendous and lasting benefits to the workers come not from the violence which marred it on all sides, but from the clear recognition by the nation that the demands of the workers were modest and just. This discovery leads him to repudiate all political creeds in words which echo one of Cary's own personal beliefs.[5]

> So evil is the brood of the slogans that the most splendid and noble battle cries, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, bred nothing but new and more cunning, more hypocritical despots, better organized murder, popular nationalism drunk with the conceit of hooligans, militarism as the tool of demagogues, hatred not to be assuaged by the blood of millions and a century of tears (EL 274).

Seen in isolation, the statement looks like a shrewd and perceptive comment on the cyclical pattern of great historical events--the lofty idealism which sets them in motion and the ignoble deeds which bring them to a grinding halt. In the context of the trilogy, however, the statement represents another attempt by Chester to justify his refusal to commit himself to any political principles. Throughout the forty years of his political career, he is nominally a Liberal but really a

self-willed politician guided largely by his own privately conceived destiny so that the primary goal of achieving social equality for all gradually becomes a minor consideration.

This, then, is the background against which we are to evaluate Chester's political career as it is narrated by Nina in *Prisoner of Grace* and Jim Latter in *Not Honour More*. Essentially, we are confronted with a man who has formally renounced his religious and political creeds but whose behaviour continually unmasks these powerful influences in conflict or in harmony with a naturally rebellious temperament. The resulting tensions and incongruities between words and deeds are, in true Carian fashion, sometimes comic, sometimes pathetic but ultimately tragic when Chester is overtaken by events.

III. *Prisoner of Grace*

The narrative technique which Cary adopts for *Prisoner of Grace* is particularly appropriate. Since Nina comes from a very different background and brings to her marriage a good many of the prejudices of her class, her life with Chester becomes an education in politics. The extensive use of parentheses in the narrative is therefore justified if we remember that one of Nina's main discoveries is that life, especially political life, is a knotty affair. Nothing stands alone. Every statement and every event is part of an intricate pattern which defies any simple categorization; adjustments and qualifications are necessary if the pattern is not to be distorted beyond recognition. Consequently, every time Nina recalls her own evaluative judgments or those of the public on the conduct of Chester, she immediately remembers a number of extenuating circumstances that make any unmitigated

condemnation of her husband seem injudicious. And, in the light of Cary's own warning in the preface to this novel and the internal evidence of the story, the qualifications and modifications that radiate from Nina's judgments provide a strong caution against any simple labels or hasty pronouncements.

Cary's aversion for close definitions is evident in his preface to *Prisoner of Grace*. The story is political, Cary says, and "politics is the art of human relations, an aspect of all life" (PG 5). On the face of it, this is not a helpful definition; but Cary made it with the knowledge that early reviewers had responded to his novel as if it was "a book about government" (PG 5). The implication is that the critic must guard against this temptation and not lightly dismiss Chester as a crook. "The question had to be how does a real politician, the handler, the manager of people, who is also a man of principle, keep his principles? How far do his ends justify his means?" (PG 5). The first question is about politics in the wide sense in which Cary uses the term. The second question raises the central moral problem of the story and provides a vital criterion for evaluating the performance of the politician.

Critics have, by and large, heeded Cary's warning. But almost without exception, they have gone to the other extreme and have treated the Second Trilogy as if it is wholly a study of character. Cary's method, however, seldom encourages such an approach. Even in the First Trilogy where Cary says that his story is "soaked" in character, we are so constantly aware of the powerful influence of society that even Gulley, who wants to forget its existence, is continually aware of its lurking presence and the threat it poses to his self-imposed

isolationism. In other words, Cary's typical procedure is to turn the searchlight inward into character and outward into society so that in the final analysis character assumes its full significance only against the background of its own society. Analyses of the Second Trilogy, however, often leave the impression that the characters exist in isolation. This approach not only minimises the effect of society on the political attitudes of Chester, but it also puts the emphasis on the wrong place and can even raise the wrong questions. Robert Bloom's study of *Prisoner of Grace*, for example, makes Nina the heroine--which she is not--and the victim if not the martyr to Chester's political religion. According to this view, Nina "emerges ultimately as a register of the ravages that politics works on human life."[6]

This view of Nina is insupportable even if we confine ourselves to the story of her marriage to Chester. The fact of the matter is that Cary goes to great lengths to show the corruptive influence of each on the other. Viewed chronologically, *Except the Lord* is the beginning of the story which Nina continues in *Prisoner of Grace*. Chester tells us in the very first paragraph of his part of the narrative that he is "writing" his memoirs "in the conviction that my story throws light upon the crisis that so fearfully shakes our whole civilization" (EL 5). Nina also begins *Prisoner of Grace* by announcing that she is "writing" to forestall revelations which are about to be made "about that great man who was once my husband, attacking his character, and my own" (PG 9). These two statements are in fact related. Chester admits that there is a crisis of civilization which the story of his life might help to explain; and implicit in Nina's reason for writing

is the fact that she shares responsibility for the opprobrium attaching on Chester as a public figure.

To explore the career of Chester and its impact on society, Cary juxtaposes three stories in *Prisoner of Grace:* the story of his marriage to Nina; the story of his political career and its effect on their marriage; and, finally, the story of Jim Latter's incursions into the life of Chester in public as well as in private. This third aspect of the story is reversed when Nina divorces Chester and marries Jim who, in spirit if not in fact, has always been her husband. In this triangular relationship, Chester is and remains the outsider; and because Jim is inclined by temperament to oppose the strong will of Chester, the story is one of continual strife and tension.

The interaction between domestic and national politics in *Prisoner of Grace* is important not only because it enables us to see the disparity between Chester's private beliefs and his public performances, but also because it makes the evaluation of his total record a little less difficult. In *Except the Lord*, Chester denies the popular charge against him that he is a demagogue; he also maintains that in fighting against poverty and injustice, he speaks as "a Christian and a Protestant" who believes that it is the duty and the right of every parent to raise his children in an atmosphere of dignity:

> "For it is only in family life that the freedom and dignity of a responsible citizen accords with his religious duty, and who shall say that one, who knows the burden of authority over helpless dependants, is thereby weakened in responsibility towards the state that is a father to its people" (EL 104).

This excerpt is from a letter originally addressed to Nina who cannot be expected to appreciate its full import. Apart from the fact that her comfortable background makes her unresponsive to the idea of a

state assuming the functions of "a father to its people," the religious motivation behind the suggestion can hardly move her. In the free-thinking atmosphere of Palm Cottage where she grew up, religion was treated, at best, as an essential social activity, and at worst as an outmoded creed. Occasionally, Aunt Latter, the ruling personage of Palm Cottage, would even advocate a total ban on religion so that the Church "couldn't go on much longer talking such ridiculous nonsense about everything and making such muddles in people's heads" (PG 16). This attitude and the luxuries surrounding Nina's childhood are as foreign to Chester as his own early destitution is unimaginable to her.

One consequence of these tremendous social differences is that Chester and Nina remain together in permanent disagreement even on fundamental matters affecting them. Their marriage, based on a temporary expedient for both parties, is maintained by a series of shifting stratagems, unaffected by considerations of love or personal integrity. Nina's distaste for Chester and his politics often arouses in her "a real hatred" (PG 62); and although the spell-binding eloquence, the cleverness and the affectionate manners help to bind her more firmly to the man, she is, ultimately, a prisoner to her own liberal and accommodating nature. Her surrender to the man is disingenuous rather than graceful. The self-regarding and vacillating Nina is clearly discernible behind all those tortuous recollections of the thrilling voice that captivates her. The secret but ineffectual struggle to rebel against that voice is spasmodic and always brief. Indeed, except for the difference in style, the manner of the struggle, the sentiments and justifications recall the sexual laxity of Sara Monday as a young bride:

> I would have done anything to stop this frightful quivering which seemed to shake my ideas and self-control to pieces. It seemed that I was two women, one of them quite furious still and watchful of every move by this cunning enemy, and one of them so close and sympathetic to him that she felt all his feelings like her own (PG 44).

However, she accommodates "this cunning enemy" not only because she is too lazy to act, but also because she wants to safeguard her peace and comfort (PG 46).

The beginning of this marriage and the method of its preservation mirror the corruption which is at the heart of the moral crisis in the Second Trilogy. Although the main characters are forever at variance with each other, they share with Chester the belief that the family is the moral centre of the nation. But by legalising and maintaining this marriage, the parties are belying their own professions. Aunt Latter, the match-maker, acts out of a selfish desire to protect her family respectability; Chester regards Nina as a class enemy but marries her largely to get the leverage which her money and her connections can provide; and Nina remains captive to the man she hates, enjoying his lullabies and waiting for the greater luxuries which his cleverness might bring them in the future. Charles Hoffmann captures the paradoxes of this strange marriage when he remarks that

> It is no ideal love affair, and yet on the whole it is a successful relationship; and if it is not a marriage of passion, neither is it a marriage without love. The compromises and expediencies, the changes and shifts of emotions, the complications of divided loyalties reflect . . . the larger world of politics.[7]

Chester is the undisputed master of that larger world of politics. With his sense of mission, his lively imagination and his bustling energy, he brings into politics the single-minded dedication and the unscrupulous methods which Gulley Jimson uses in the pursuit of

his art. But unlike Jimson whose women, especially Sara, remain completely devoted to him even when they cannot understand his work, Chester's political problems are made more difficult by his marriage to a woman who has a natural loathing for politics. One aspect of the conflict between them, therefore, issues from Nina's desire to keep her marriage free from politics while Chester treats the marriage as an intricate political problem. The wide-ranging manoeuvres by which he maintains his hold on his wife--the cajoleries, the nagging, the emotional appeal to her sense of patriotism, the systematic exploitation of their class differences to make her feel guilty and therefore more pliable, the threat of reprisals against her beloved Jim Latter, the clever words that confuse her and dissolve her oppositions--reflect his tactics in politics. Some of these tactics are morally indefensible, but Cary makes an outright condemnation of their use extremely difficult by stressing the unpredictability of political events, the great variety of clashing opinions in a democratic state, the difficulty of harnessing and reconciling those opinions by the men who wish to remain in office, the intransigence of the powerful few and the fickleness of the majority. In addition to these perennial problems of politics, Chester has to contend with the class hostilities which he and his wife and her family feel for each other.

Depending, therefore, on the influence and the resources of his wife's family, a family which is strongly opposed to his radical views, Chester enters politics severely handicapped. That he succeeds at all, is a tribute to his uncanny ability to "manage" people in private as well as in public life. Cary emphasizes this ability by counterpointing the domestic and political crises that beset Chester in his early

career, and showing the extraordinary skill with which he extricates himself from difficult situations.

These difficulties begin to show even on the honeymoon which they spend in Italy. Nina recalls the shocked reaction of Chester to the poverty of the Italians, a poverty which seems to her "as 'natural' as the richness of the millionaires" (PG 28). Chester senses the tension which this difference is creating between them but calms the situation by telling his wife: "never pretend to agree with me unless you really feel agreement. Everyone must be true to what he believes--at least that is the central principle of religion as I see it" (PG 28). Impressed by this seemingly liberal attitude, Nina becomes more responsive; but when they return to England, Chester launches a vicious campaign against the local town council which consists of relatives and acquaintances of his wife, charging that "the policy of the council is to 'keep the poor poor'" (PG 32). When Nina protests, he explodes in an angry tirade:

> "You don't know what class is. . . . You don't know how different you are. . . . You think me a cad" (and he made a face as if he were going to burst into tears). "No, no, that's not fair--not true" (He put out his hand and just touched me on the breast, as if to say, "Forgive me"). "You *feel* me a cad" (PG 33).

By dinner time of the same day, Chester is gay and charming, showering compliments on Nina and sharing pleasantries with her. But the easy mood is deliberately deceptive. Its purpose is to disarm Nina while Chester continues to attack the council. The battle ends only when Chester is elected into one of the new county councils.

This first political manoeuvre is typical in many ways. On the domestic front, it shows the incongruous methods by which Chester forces Nina to submit to his politics: he would pretend to grant her

free rein but would tighten his grip and even ride rough-shod over her the moment she appears refractory; he would exert moral pressure by accusing her of indifference to the plight of the poor and soothe her frayed nerves with gifts of flowers, perfumes or jewels. In all these moves, Chester's timing is faultless. He knows the right words and the suitable gifts for every occasion; but his success is always assured by Nina's own propensity: "I was not so much a forgiving person as a lazy one who liked to be comfortable and peaceful in her mind, and that was why I could not bear any 'mysteries'" (PG 46). On the public front, the policy of Chester on this and subsequent occasions is to whip up a political storm, then stay in the eye of the storm, directing it with a view to reaching his own goal and disregarding much of the ravages it might cause to others. Having picked the right cause on which to vent his radical anger against the middle-class members of the council, Chester badgers his wife with conflicting explanations of his ever-changing moves and excuses himself by saying that he cannot afford to be candid because he is surrounded by enemies, including Nina (PG 46-7).

But there is one important difference between this first move and the much more unscrupulous ones that follow it. In spite of the frightening ambition and the class hatreds that lie behind the move, Chester is fastidious in holding on to his principles, such as they are. He refuses the subtle but attractive offers of a bribe from Nina's wealthy cousins who are anxious to keep him quiet. He would neither deal with Wilfred who made his fortune in the brewery business, nor compromise with Lord Slapton, the chief landlord of Tarbiton where most of the tenants are miserably poor. Nina knows, however, that these are vote-catching gestures. That she is "converted" to the politics of

Chester, despite her own clear recognition of the inconsistencies in his conduct, offers one dear evidence of her moral laxity.

This moral laxity also provides an important clue to what so many critics see as a basic contradiction in Nina's narrative:[8] her declared purpose of answering public "revelations" attacking her and her husband, and the unsavoury disclosures she ends up making about both of them. This contradiction becomes quite understandable once we realise that after her "conversion" to politics Nina regards herself as "a political wife" (PG 118). This is an important designation. It implies not only that Nina has to sustain the career of her husband with her great entertaining and sensual arts, but also that her wifely conduct would parallel his political behaviour. In justifying the politics of Chester, therefore, Nina frequently justifies her own bad behaviour as a wife. The structure of the novel strongly supports this view. Almost without exception, the major scandals of Chester's political career are preceded or followed by accounts of the secret liaisons between Nina and Jim or between her and Chester after their divorce.

In one of the most dastardly breaches of decorum in *Prisoner of Grace*, Jim, on leave in England from his regiment, visits Nina to see his illegitimate son, Tom, and accuse his cousin "of jilting him for that 'dirty little snake,'" Chester (PG 38). When Chester suddenly arrives, Jim deliberately begins to kiss Nina and openly claims paternity for Tom in order to provoke a scene. Chester, with great presence of mind, drives Jim away by asking him to put his claim in writing. When after Jim's departure Chester begins to ask questions, Nina becomes indignant because she feels that Chester knows all the facts

but he is refusing to admit them to himself. Finally, Chester admits that he had knowledge of Nina's pregnancy before their marriage but excuses himself on the grounds of his love. To Nina, the incident raises the problem of mutual confidence in marriage. According to the scheming Aunt Latter, however, mutual confidence is a moral issue which is significant to missionaries but which is unimportant in a marriage. To Nina's complaint that her marriage has become intolerable for want of mutual confidence, Aunt Latter replies:

> "Mutual confidence! So that's the position--like Stanley and Livingstone on the missionary posters. . . . For goodness sake, child, don't drive me mad. I seem to remember that you put yourself in a position--and you can thank your stars and Chester and me for getting you out" (PG 42).

This clash of moralities puts Nina in a parallel position to that in which Chester finds himself during his first political campaign. She is, like Chester at the beginning, still faithful to her principles. But since at the end of the arguments she accepts Aunt Latter's view that marriage is an amoral partnership, she cannot be far from the point where, like Chester in politics, her ends justify her means. In fact, the political conversion of Nina follows close on the heels of this moral compromise and it is instructive that her subsequent defence of Chester's political activities turns increasingly on the special plea that "he *felt* that he was surrounded by tricks and bad faith" (PG 53)--a plea she had earlier found repugnant.

Soon after these developments, Chester launches a very violent campaign against the Boer War in South Africa. His aim this time is to secure a seat for himself in Parliament. Since on this and later occasions Chester embraces pacifism not because he believes in it but because of its wide popular appeal, it is necessary to preface the

discussion with his own statement which will show, among other things, that he later recognises the evil nature of his pacifist stratagems. Before discussing the violent dockers' strike in *Except the Lord*, Chester makes this important reflection:

> This book would be worthless if it did not show how men, especially young and ardent men as I was then, come to do evil in the name of good, a long and growing evil for a temporary and doubtful advantage. And I may say here that those who have accused me of extreme and doctrinaire pacifism are deceived. I was not then, and never have been, a pacifist. I believe still that there are occasions of oppression and despair when violence, even war, can be justified (EL 252).

It is evident from this declaration and the cold calculations which lead to the campaign against the Boer War, that pacifism merely masks his private ambitions. Even the religious reasons for opposing the war are calculated to appeal to Chester's fundamentalist supporters, especially the influential Goold. Furthermore, his move comes at a time when English forces in South Africa are suffering unexpectedly severe reversals and the nation is grieving over the shock of humiliation. His moves, including his defiance of the ban against pro-Boer meetings, are intended to achieve the maximum amount of publicity. At a Lilmouth meeting summoned by a pro-Boer committee, Chester provokes a riot by calling the English troops "murderers and cowards" (PG 51); and when he learns afterwards that a London reporter who attended the meeting had sent a report of the incident to his newspaper, he is unabashedly exultant. In a later meeting, he and Nina are attacked but escape serious injuries. The publicity over the incident turns Chester into a national "hero," ensuring him a parliamentary seat at the first opportunity.

Nina suspects that Chester and his supporters might have deliberately provoked the violence for their own political ends, but she excuses their actions because of the complexity of politics. The episode is also vitally important in her political education, as this comment indicates:

> It was at this time I began to feel among "political" people the strange and horrible feeling which afterwards became so familiar to me (but not less horrible), of living in a world without any solid objects at all, of floating day and night through clouds of words and schemes and hopes and ambitions and calculations where you could not say that this idea was obviously selfish and dangerous and that one quite false and wicked because all of them were relative to something else. The lies were mixed up with some truth (like Chester's belief in a class plot), and the selfish calculations (like Goold's planning to make trouble at Lilmouth) melted at the edges into all kinds of "noble" ideals (PG 59-60).

Here Cary confronts us with one of the moral intricacies of political life. Nina's views on the strange behaviour of men in politics are in fact very close to those of Cary.[9] Nevertheless, it is fair to distinguish between the hypothetic views of Cary and the response of Nina to a particular situation. Nina knows all the scheming behind this campaign. Even if the politically profitable action is often based on expediency, the determination to extract the maximum benefit from an obviously selfish and dangerous move far outweighs the little regard for noble ideals that might still survive in Chester. As a general observation on the nature of politics, therefore, Nina's statement bears a tremendous weight; but as a particular comment on Chester's political activities during the Boer War, the remark merely avoids moral commitment. "The real truth," as Nina admits later on, "is that Chester's imagination suggested to him every day hundreds of truths and it was always easy for him to find among them one that 'suited him'"(PG 70).

The long account of this pro-Boer campaign is followed by the story of Nina's abortive attempt to desert Chester following a renewal of her love affair with Jim. By this juxtaposition of events, Cary directs attention to the unscrupulous methods by which Chester sustains himself in private and public life. When he finds Nina at the railway station where she is waiting for a train to take her to her rendezvous with Jim, Chester begins a subtle campaign to restrain her. It is a campaign of moral blackmail since Chester has no other means of detaining his wife. He would not stop her if she wishes to go, but asks if she *wants* to leave him for Jim; he admits that Nina has never loved him but intimates at once that she could not do so because of their class differences; finally he appeals to her sense of duty--a duty which exists largely in his mind--but intensifies the pressure by going back to the class gambit: "There's a great difference in the way that people do their duty. You stooped to me, but you might have made it an insult" (PG 90). The obvious implication is that by deserting him, she would not only be failing in her duty to love, but would be insulting him and his class.

Given Nina's vacillating nature, the result is inevitable. Instead of going to Jim, she returns to Aunt Latter at Palm Cottage, pretending that she is ill. The old trickster goes to work at once. Since Chester is contesting a parliamentary seat in a constituency where the conservative voters want a candidate with a "respectable home life," Aunt Latter argues, Nina owes it to her husband to help him through the election. The result is that Nina returns to Chester feeling for him "that special hatred one feels towards people who take up a position of moral superiority and use it to domineer over one"

(PG 98). Despite this strong language of hate, and with the full knowledge that she is carrying her lover's baby, Nina submits to Chester's sexual demands and voluntarily teaches him Jim's "Indian" style of love-making, thereby increasing their mutual enjoyment. There is therefore some justification for the public charge that she corrupted Chester body and soul. Nina strenuously denies this charge by arguing that "a marriage is like a climate as well as a tradition--it does change bodies as well as souls" (PG 114). The pity is that for them the change is always for the worse.

Cary maintains with insistent irony that reconciliation is simply impossible in this marriage of incompatibles. Even the libidinous passion that unites them in the flesh creates new tensions. Chester grows jealous as he becomes more fond and more possessive; Nina, for her part, can never stop secretly arranging the affairs of Jim. So instead of greater harmony, we have more conflict; instead of greater freedom for Nina, she faces severer restrictions when Harry Bootham is employed ostensibly as private secretary but really to watch her and report every suspicious move she makes. And when it becomes apparent that Jim and Nina could not be separated, Chester solves the problem by offering to pay Jim's debts (he was about to be arrested for non-payment) provided he would accept a post in the African Colonial Service. Thus Jim is banished and the threat he poses to the marriage of his rival is temporarily shelved, and Chester is free again to concentrate on national politics.

The great Liberal victory of 1905 marks for Chester the beginning of a new phase that will see him rise steadily in politics but plunge deeper and deeper in his moral degradation. From the moment of

his first election into Parliament, Chester had engaged in unnecessarily extravagant displays that had sharply increased his financial problems. Now an Under-secretary in the Ministry of Mines, he seems more self-assured and arrogant than he was in his brief taste of power as union clerk and liaison officer in *Except the Lord*. Nina recalls that with their unexpected victory, the Liberals generally behaved as if the whole country was prostrate at their feet. Her husband, however, was determined to outclass everybody in his self-conceit: "Chester saw 'the world at his feet'. And though he still believed in 'class plots', he was confident that he could deal with them" (PG 172). The distinction between those successful Liberals who behaved as if Britain was at their feet, and Chester who, in his swagger, saw the whole world at his feet, is indeed instructive.

For a man who entered politics by attacking the capitalists and calling them "baby-starvers" (PG 71), one of the greatest contradictions of Chester's political career must be his devious but vigorous exploitation of his office for material gain. As soon as Chester feels sufficiently strong to deal with the capitalists from a position of strength, he goes into a number of very questionable business partnerships with them. Moral scruples or his much vaunted principles no longer pose barriers against such partnerships. In one of the most notorious of the many scandals that mar his political career, Chester, armed with a cabinet decision to award a contract for wireless equipment to the radio firm of Western Development, invests heavily in Banks Rams, the main supplier of electrical parts to Western Development. This he does in spite of the fact that Battwell Engineering, a firm in which he is a partner and which is also a supplier to Western

Development, stands to profit from the contract. It is a small but revealing point that Western Development is owned by Wilfred (a cousin of Nina) whom Chester had strongly opposed at the beginning of his political career because this wealthy capitalist "made money out of drink" (PG 37). When Wilfred hears of Conservative plans to ask for an enquiry into the circumstances surrounding the award of the contract to Western Development, he warns Chester who orders his agents to sell all his new holdings in Banks Rams. He then goes to Parliament not only to say that he has not bought any new shares in Western Development since the contract, but that his actual holdings in the electrical industry were smaller at the time of his statement than they were a year before (PG 213-14).

This is probably the most notable of the many instances in which Cary demonstrates how deceptive *facts* can be when they are separated from the motives and feelings of those directly involved in the events. We saw some examples of this in *To Be A Pilgrim;* and the verdicts against Charley Brown and Sara Monday are other striking illustrations of how misleading facts can be. Chester's statement to the House is factual but not true. The special "truth" he presents to Parliament is arrived at by selecting, withholding and wresting all the incriminating parts of the evidence. Yet Nina justifies Chester's manoeuvres on political and business grounds:

> But owing to the very special conditions of politics, and the way people treat politicians, looking for a chance to find the smallest fault with them, and quite ready to invent faults that don't exist, it would have been *quite misleading* for Chester to have told the whole story of Banks Rams. It might have produced a *great injustice*, that is, the ruin of Chester's career (PG 214).

On this occasion also, we recognise the validity of the special plea in its general application to democratic politics, but the particular events which force her to make it show none of the pressures she so clearly outlines. Chester has simply reached the point where principles remain valid only if they continue to serve his inordinate ambitions and desires.

Judging from the preface to *Prisoner of Grace* where, among other things, it is claimed that Chester "is not meant for a crook" (PG 5), and the special pleas of Nina in the story, it is reasonable to deduce that the principal aim in this novel is to show that the tendency among politicians to disregard ethical considerations results not necessarily from an evil will or the absence of a moral consciousness, but rather from the inevitable consequence of operating in a field where events and the attitudes of people are perpetually changing, where even the most carefully constructed plans can easily go awry or be upset by the whimsical nature of man. Writing about the special problems of politicians, Cary remarks that where the public sees a straightforward issue, the politicians "perceive a highly complex and difficult problem, full of blind issues. It is, moreover, always a unique problem."[10] Consequently, Cary warns later on in the same essay, "no *a priori* rule, no moralistic sermonizing can lay down in advance what should be a statesman's right course of conduct."[11] But even with this caveat in our minds, Chester remains vulnerable to the charge of corruption and unscrupulousness because we are shown far too much of his selfish calculations, his deliberate lies and his systematic abrogation of almost all the principles he had at the beginning, and far too little of the blind alleys into which he finds himself unexpectedly.

On the one notable occasion when the capriciousness of political events is ably demonstrated, the reader is left with distinctly ambivalent reactions which Cary is apparently trying to evoke for Chester all along. This time Chester changes from a pacifist to a belligerent stand in the confusing days before the outbreak of World War I. In view of the great urgency of the events and their grave implications for the country, the decision by Chester to ride on the crest of whichever emotional wave sweeps the country is morally culpable. Surely, if, out of conviction, Chester takes an unequivocal stand for or against the war and then finds it necessary to shift his ground because of an unexpected turn of events, he can justify such a change to his governing party without much difficulty. He is too clever and too skilled to be bothered by such a small problem. Instead he vacillates in public while at home he is all for war against the Germans. Then when the anti-war faction emerges as the strongest force in the country, he becomes a pacifist. Here is part of Chester's conversation with Nina after his meeting with Goold, a fanatical member of the Radical Council which is opposed to all wars on religious grounds:

> "I hope he was more reasonable with you than he was with me."
> "Feeling against war is a tremendous thing--in the country generally. Anyone who could mobilise it--" He stopped to pull off his shirt.
> "Isn't that just what you thought so dangerous?"
> "So is war. And, after all, if we call ourselves Christians--" (PG 223).

In fact, Chester is committed to resigning from the government when the estimates for the navy are presented to the House for debate. The move is cold-blooded and unpatriotic. It is based on the calculation that it would be politically rewarding regardless of the outcome of the national debate or even the war itself. If the war hysteria dies down,

Chester tells himself, then he can expect to return as prime minister; if, on the other hand, the war breaks out and Britain is defeated, he "should come back as first President of the British Republic." These "machiavellian tactics," Nina recalls, made Chester a "by-word for hypocrisy and chicane" (PG 224). Among conservative voters throughout the country, however, Chester is seen as a hero and he quickly seizes the opportunity to turn the contract scandal into a political asset. The attacks on his character, he argues, stem from "wicked attempts by the Conservatives, and the war-makers, and the Right Wing of his own party, to discredit him" (PG 250). But when the war breaks out--and this is perhaps the most devastating irony in the whole novel--Chester becomes the Minister of Production in the war cabinet.

Despite the frightful scheming that leads to this typical Nimmo triumph, Cary handles the political story in this middle part of the novel with unusual skill, preserving the proper balance between private ambitions and public concerns. For once Cary is able to show the tremendous pressures that overwhelm Chester from constituents, fellow politicians, the press and a wife who is often craving for consistency in an undertaking which calls for flexibility. The resolution of the problem preserves the delicate balance between the frightful egotism and the sincere public concerns that impel Chester into political action. Confronted with the tempting offer of the key Ministry of Production, Chester realises that he has an awkward new situation to handle; but he proves equal to the occasion. His fertile imagination quickly suggests plausible reasons of state and conscience for accepting the new position. With characteristic flair and arrogance Chester announces his new position to his startled family: "The P.M. says the

country needs me--that I am indispensable. As Bootham says, it may be my duty--a moral duty--to change my mind and face the consequences . . ." (PG 267). The consequences he fears are chiefly those which might result from the virulent and persistent charge of corruption made against him by Round, a conservative journalist with an inflexible morality. With Chester's superior understanding of the fickleness of public opinion, however, he readily sees how politically insignificant the moral objections to his ever-changing positions can be in the long run; he therefore dismisses his most dangerous enemy with careless disdain: "What Round does not realise is that this is going to be a new kind of war--and its going on for a long time. All this fuss will be forgotten in six weeks" (PG 267).

After all this moral humbug comes the idealism. The chosen excuse for accepting a post in the war cabinet is so strong in itself and the official explanation is so full of noble sentiments that even the severest moralist would hesitate to condemn Chester out of hand. Having secluded himself from the public to prepare his explanation, Chester emerges with a statement in which

> he "confesses to being deeply misled" and to never having believed it possible for any civilised people to be guilty of so dastardly a crime (the invasion of Belgium) against the very basis of civilised religious liberty, which was the sanctity of the pledged word (PG 267).

The rest of the statement is an eloquent plea obliquely addressed to the devout in his constituency and the country at large. This is an irksome statement but it is saved from remaining a mere platitude by the extraordinary energy and the earnest dedication with which Chester goes to work. True, the habitual blemishes are, from his new heights, even more luridly discernible: the attitude of disdain towards people

once Chester is safely in authority; his distaste for every kind of opposition and, most shocking of all to Nina, the tendency to put causes above people--a tendency he had castigated in the strongest terms when it was directed against him by Pring. Ironically, but not unexpectedly, it is when Chester repeats the callous behaviour of Pring by sending a policeman after Goold for daring to accuse him (Chester) of flouting their common principles that Nina's distaste for politics reaches a new intensity that persists until their divorse.

During this difficult period, however, Cary provides redeeming actions and extenuating circumstances which combine to preserve some sympathy for Chester. While Chester works with exemplary devotion at his job, he remains under siege from inflexible men like Goold and Round, obstinate in opposition, capable of fomenting unnecessary resentment against public figures. Furthermore, Cary is able, on this occasion, to inject the chance occurrences that suddenly raise intricate problems for the politician. The Brome case is a good example of this. While the government is desperately fighting to prevent any disruption of work that might slow the supply of materials to its soldiers, Brome starts a strike. The government reacts by withdrawing his military exemption originally granted on grounds of ill-health. Soon afterwards Brome dies of a heart attack on the front lines. Round seizes on this incident to stir fresh hatreds for Chester, charging him with deliberately murdering the young man. The fact of the matter is that Chester heard of the case only after the man had died.

Thus in the story of Chester's political conduct before and during the First World War, Cary successfully maintains the precarious balance between private and public concerns, between ruthless egotism

and deep patriotism, between feather-nesting and admirable devotion to service. Moreover, if the rush of events which necessitated the change from pacifism to belligerency were always as pressing and as credible as they were when Chester shifted his ground; if the men he has to manage were always as unyielding as Goold or as fractious and unreasonable as Round; if, finally, the politician were less unscrupulous in his wilful exploitation of the foibles of his own constituents, there would have been no need to warn the reader against any hasty condemnation of Chester. Even if, as Cary maintains, Chester is not a crook in any ordinary sense of the word, his actions--before and after the war when his energies are not fully engaged in the performance of national tasks--are, most of the time, crooked. In almost all his important political decisions, Chester looks more like the "clever adventurer" than the statesman (PG 6).

It is possible, however, that Cary felt that with our knowledge of the man's background in *Except the Lord* and the cruel forces that shaped his ambitions; with the burning patriotism that kept him going during the war even when, as Nina recalls several times, he was nearly helpless with exhaustion; and with the momentous decisions of the war years, the unpleasant but unavoidable compromises, and the difficult task of choosing between baffling alternatives, we would be more willing to sympathise with Chester than to condemn him. This certainty seems to be one of the intentions of Cary in the Second Trilogy.

What then are we to make of the fact that two close observers, Nina and Round, condemn Chester in strong, almost unmitigated terms? The answer, in part, is that the differences between Chester and Nina are so vast and so completely irreconcilable that even after thirty

years of marriage, she remains averse to politics although she is forced to observe it in her enigmatic husband. We are aware throughout the novel that Chester and Nina are, at the best of times, intimate enemies. Round, for his part, is in the story to illustrate the unreasonable prescriptions which people--well-intentioned people who are ignorant of the complexities of politics--sometimes make for the conduct of politicians. Round understands the class and the background of Chester and sympathises with his political aims; he fails to realise, however, that the fixed and narrow principles on which they were brought up cannot be rigidly applied in political situations. But although the verdicts of these two partial observers need to be revised, they contain, nevertheless, elements which are indispensable for a fuller evaluation of Chester. Let us look at these damning pronouncements.

Writing with a great deal of hyperbolic distortion, Round asserts in the dark days of Chester's career:

> "We need not waste pity on the fate of Lord Nimmo. I say with all due respect for the meaning of my words that this man, so early corrupted--this evil man--was one of the chief architects of our destruction. Not content with selling his personal honour for power and cash, he left nothing undone to destroy the very soul of our great cause. And we see the consequences today in the final divorce of politics and morality--the universal collapse of Christian values--materialism rampant and unashamed--the naked pursuit of gain by all conditions of men--the philosophy of grab which dominates all programmes" (PG 262).

This is an intemperate and harsh view of the man, but its force is vitiated by its sweeping character, its lack of balance and objectivity. Chester can be labelled an evil man: he is corrupt in himself and corruptive in his influence, materialistic and sometimes completely unethical in his politics. But he is not without great redeeming

qualities: he is devoted and patient provided no one thwarts his indomitable will; he is anxious to improve the lot of the poor and remove social injustices; he can be brutal even to his family, but he is capable of the grand and charitable gesture; and in what is perhaps the highest tribute she ever pays him, Nina calls Chester "the best of fathers" (PG 158). Nevertheless, the verdict is important because it foreshadows the main charges on which the final tragic battles of the Second Trilogy are to be fought between Chester Nimmo and Jim Latter.

Nina's judgment needs to be treated with even greater caution. Evaluating the political career of her husband after his defeat in the post-war reaction against the Liberals, she says that

> He had, so to speak, in thirty years of war, made such devastation round himself that to talk to him at all was like calling across a waste full of broken walls and rusty wire and swamps of poisoned water; full of dead bodies, too, like that of poor Brome (PG 334).

This is an extremely damaging verdict, but it is not usually realised that it comes at a time of growing personal animosities between husband and wife and that it follows immediately after one of their bitterest quarrels. It is true that after his defeat, Chester is dejected, brooding and unusually peevish. He is still recovering from the debilitating effects of the war, and acting the part of the wounded soldier, moving about with an air of ferocious anger and sublime pride. It is worth noting, however, that his gloom and anger emanate not only from his sense of personal slight, but also from the terrifying recognition of the ravages of the war on the moral and social life of the country (PG 326). The anger is inevitably directed against Nina who has adjusted to the new morality only to arouse the priggish survivals from

Chester's early training. At the same time, Tom, their bastard son, is, with the connivance of his mother, moving into disreputable circles which reflect the decadent morality and mimicking its manifestations in the politics of his father.

All these factors combine to make Nina's verdict on Chester biased and unsatisfactory. After his defeat, Chester is morally and physically isolated from the public and his family. He is now a very pitiable figure as the duality of his nature becomes clearly discernible. Once he is removed from the tainted sphere of politics, he instinctively turns to the formative religion of his childhood. Now Nina finds her husband even less comprehensible while he frowns on her for adapting to the new morality. Indeed, the conflict between them has become so violent and so persistent that their pronouncements on each other would have had little value were it not for the fact that by blowing their individual vices out of all proportion, they enable us to see more clearly the evils they decry. Here, for example, is one of Chester's acrimonious outbursts when Nina tries to defend her son's mimicry of former Liberal ministers by assuring her irate husband that Tom is a devoted son:

> "He's not my son--I have no children. By a truly brilliant contrivance, I was placed in a situation guaranteed to make me the obedient slave of family interest, and highly vulnerable to family resentment. I was to live under the perpetual threat of being exposed in the supremely ridiculous role of the duped husband--the captive cuckold. No, please" (he waved his hands to stop my protest); "let's be honest for once and have done with this life of deceits" (PG 333).

The irony in this partial view of the matter is that in condemning Nina and her family, Chester condemns himself because he has been a willing and eager partner to their corruption.

It is in this bitter atmosphere of mutual recriminations that Nina formally sums up Chester in what is unquestionably the most withering attack ever made on a character in the whole of Cary's fiction. By her own confession, the effect of Chester's protest against the mimic acts of Tom in cheap night-clubs is to make them more attractive to her (PG 338). So she steals out one night to watch her son imitate the platform mannerisms of Chester. On the stage, Tom simply becomes an exact replica of everything that is ugly in Chester:

> so wild a caricature, such a picture of everything that was loathsome, of the vulgar false cunning hypocritical demagogue, full of spite and trickery and conceit and an indescribable beastliness, a kind of lickerish sensuality; a lustful pleasure in his own nastiness; everything that had been imputed to Chester by his worst enemies . . . that, to my horror, I was suddenly seized with laughter (PG 342).

Chapter 110 in which the account of this wild caricature is given seems to me to be the climax of *Prisoner of Grace*. In it Cary adroitly brings the domestic and political conflicts into a grotesquely comic resolution. The effect of the chapter is similar to that of a good burlesque scene in a morality play: it enables us to see that evil is often grotesquely comic and revolting. It is noteworthy that Nina is at first filled with horror but before the performance is over, she is laughing with complete abandon. It is for her, a moment of recognition; but the reader knows by now that Nina's vision is refracted and the virulence of her attack betrays the extreme loathing she feels for Chester at this stage. It is not surprising therefore that when the political necessity for maintaining this strange marriage ceases to exist, following her husband's failure to return to Parliament in 1924, Chester readily divorces Nina even though he still lusts after her. Once the tension of having to live with a man she recognises as

wholly evil and revolting is removed, Nina gradually tones down her criticism of Chester until close to the end, she makes a pronouncement which is much nearer the truth when she notes that

> all Chester's feelings and energies seemed to run into each other; his religion stirred up his politics and his politics stirred up his religion, and both of them stirred up his affections and his imagination, and his imagination kept everything else in a perpetual turmoil (PG 395).

This is a much more balanced view of the man. It lays bare the inner contradictions of Chester's life.

When soon after their divorce Nina marries Jim, she quickly discovers that her life is going to be more rather than less complicated than it was under Chester. For one thing Jim is a violent and madly jealous husband. In him we see another example of the wide disparity between the high creeds men profess and the rapacious lives they live. He talks about truth and honour but these could not deter him from violating the hospitality of his host by seducing his wife into an adulterous relationship. As a husband, however, Jim is maddened by the smallest sign of infidelity in his wife. Nina's new marriage therefore intensifies the old conflicts since Chester's passion for her remains unabated after thirty years of marriage. In a reversal of positions with Jim, Chester makes sexual demands to which Nina yields after a very slight resistance. "So the formal device of the book," Andrew Wright notes, "clearly emphasizes the personal boundaries of Nina's life. She stands between the two men, sometimes as mediator, but always as comforter to them both."[12]

The willingness of Nina to mediate between these two irreconcilable enemies brings *Prisoner of Grace* to an ominous end and prepares us for the violence of *Not Honour More*. The last few chapters which

describe the strange happenings at Palm Cottage (now the home of Jim and Nina) show the characteristic Carian blend of pathos and bleak humour. Chester has also installed himself at the cottage on the pretext that he has to consult his old letters to Nina and get her to help in composing his memoirs. The comedy of the situation is as crude as it is menacing. Whether we laugh at the characters for their silly pretences or recoil in indignation for their blatant disregard of elementary decencies, there is always the uneasy feeling that we are getting closer to danger. Chester would dictate a long complex sentence to Bootham, spicing the empty rhetoric of politics with lofty religious sentiments and then turn round to attack Nina sexually, risking detection and brushing aside Nina's protestations with shouts of "We haven't time to waste on this nonsense" (PG 387). When Chester foils attempts to remove him from Palm Cottage by feigning a heart attack, Nina realises

> how difficult an old man can be--like a wilful and delicate child who does not care what happens to him so long as he gets his own way; an autocrat and spoilt egotist who has to be humoured or cajoled or he may kill himself out of perversity or mere pique (PG 382).

The story ends on this note of depravity. Nina's bondage to the two men is so irrefrangible that even after Jim has threatened to kill her, she still finds it impossible to free herself from the one or the other. To turn Chester out, she tells herself, is to commit "a mean crime against something bigger than love;" on the other hand, she says with a fatalistic resignation, "Jim can only shoot me dead" (PG 402).

The fierce moral indignation which *Prisoner of Grace* arouses in so many readers[13] is due largely to its structure. Starting with the

ruthless machiavellism of Chester, the novel moves to a second stage where Cary dwells on events showing the enormous difficulties of political life, the endless struggle to balance personal ambition against the public good and, moreover, the ingratitude of voters to even a successful government; in the third and final movement, the main characters reach the nadir of corruption in their private lives as Chester is driven by crude appetites which he seeks to satisfy without regard to persons, place or time. The structure thus predisposes our minds to condemn Chester and just when we are beginning to re-examine our first impressions, Cary shows us a new and far more revolting kind of depravity in the man's private life. The effect is to reduce if not destroy the impact of his exemplary services and his patriotic fervour in the middle section of the novel.

The curious thing is that Cary obviously wants us to sympathise with his hero. If we read the trilogy in its chronological order, we can understand Chester's unrelenting drive for political success; but that order also leaves us wondering how with his strict upbringing he can behave the way he does without a pang of conscience. Even Nina's explanation that politics and religion and sexuality are inextricably mixed in the mind of Chester seems pitiably inadequate. Perhaps Cary unconsciously diminished sympathy for his hero in a bid to achieve structural unity in the trilogy. For unlike the strange move from *To Be A Pilgrim* to *The Horse's Mouth* in the First Trilogy, the transitions from one novel to the other in the Second Trilogy are carefully and convincingly prepared. Thus the moral and psychological violence of the closing pages of *Prisoner of Grace* fully prepares us for the

physical violence of *Not Honour More*, just as the closing words of Nina in her narrative actually foreshadow the manner of her death at the end of the trilogy.

IV. *Not Honour More*

At the beginning of *Not Honour More*, the conflict between the three main characters of the trilogy has been settled in the only plausible way--through violence. Jim has literally chased Chester to death and then shot Nina in a cold and calculated manner; he, too, is in jail waiting to be hanged for the murder of his wife. From his confinement, Jim, with the certainty that he has nothing to gain by telling lies, is hurriedly "dictating" his own version of the events which led to the catastrophe. But the historical present tense of the opening paragraph seems to have concealed the obvious fact that the whole story is told in retrospect, an important structural device which should have allowed a more reflective man to re-examine his attitude to events and admit his errors. Cary had done this in the first two books of the First Trilogy. Sara Monday in *Herself Surprised* and Tom Wilcher in *To Be A Pilgrim* look mainly at events of the past and while each succeeds in building a strong defence for his position, each, nevertheless, has the necessary humility of character to confess to serious errors in life. This is not the case with Jim Latter. Dwelling largely on events before and during the British General Strike of 1926, with the occasional flash-back to find, as he sees it, corroborative evidence for his own defence, Jim brings into the narration of his sad story the same frenetic rage which Nina had so poignantly exposed in her narrative.

The advantage of Jim's narrative method is that it is direct if not always candid because he lacks the great complexity of Chester or the flexible sympathies of Nina which make her willing--perhaps too willing--to accommodate the views of others. The public reason for his inexorable opposition to Chester, for example, is stated with clarity:

> My whole case is this, that if a man or country gives up the truth, the absolute truth, they are throwing away the anchor and drifting slowly but surely to destruction. I say nothing can save but truth and the guts to take it (NHM 27).

This ideal of adhering to the truth is a laudable one and Jim deserves respect for insisting on it even in his own rigid way. Cary, however, undermines the position of Jim by showing him repeatedly disregarding the truth in his private life. Since the whole story invariably counterpoints private and public morality, the discrepancy between the code of ethics which Jim proposes for men in public life and his own quite different behaviour in private life points to the lack of sincerity which Cary has been unmasking in the main characters of the trilogy. What is more, the reader of *Prisoner of Grace* knows that there are private reasons behind Jim's unyielding opposition to Chester. It is simply not true to maintain, as he does, that he is acting not "from any grievance or petty jealousy but in the public interest and decency" (NHM 23). In fact, his jealousy is so strong from the beginning that the first time the rival lovers meet in *Not Honour More*, Chester is frankly suspicious of Jim's motives in carrying a rifle about his person. The rifle which Jim claims he is using to shoot rats at Potter's boat-yard turns out to be an appropriate personal emblem, symbolising the sportive and violent aspects of his nature. There is even a trenchant irony in his deliberately false answer since

he regards Chester as a "rat" whose only purpose in politics is to wheedle the public.

When Jim returns from his so-called hunting exercise, he finds Chester "interfering" with Nina and shoots him, wounding him slightly. The denial of a private grievance against Chester falls to the ground the moment Jim tries to explain his action. In justifying his attempt to murder Chester, Jim invokes the fact that he has "always objected to Lord Nimmo's presence" in his house as he considers him "a faker and hypocrite" (NHM 8). This is true and it is fully supported by Nina's version of the story. Even so Jim had relented after hearing from Nina the reasons for his lordship's presence in their home. Furthermore, Jim had not only allowed Chester to stay in the house but had also agreed that Nina could act as secretary to her former husband (NHM 48). Reluctantly, but incontestably, Jim has become host to Chester. The positions of the two men are now reversed from what they were when Jim moved in on the Nimmos. There is a difference, however. While Chester is content with taking sexual liberties and paying handsomely for them--at a time when Jim has wasted his inheritance--Jim did much more than seduce Nina to commit adultery with him. He tried to take her permanently from Chester. If, therefore, Chester is "a faker and hypocrite", or if by assaulting "a friend's wife" he is performing "a vile act" (NHM 48), then Jim is equally guilty of these faults and infractions. He has no moral justification to mount the high horse.

Since Jim and Chester only agree on the need to preserve the sanctity of the home, it is ironical that these mortal enemies should variously but continually be working to undermine the very basis of

home life. The press release in which Jim explains the reasons for his attempt on the life of Chester supports this view. Here is part of that explanation:

> "For many years I have considered Nimmo and his gang of a character without the first idea of honourable conduct, public or private, and this proves it. They have been the ruin of our beloved country--have always supported our enemies everywhere and once more in the present terrible danger are only seeking their own advantage to worm their way back into power.
>
> "I do not therefore regret anything in my action and would do it again if it called attention to the increasing corruption of everything in the country, the destruction of family life, and the policy of shameless jobbery and double dealing in high places, only for personal ambition" (NHM 26-7).

It is surely ironical that Jim fails to see that the charge of destroying family life which he levels against Chester applies to him with equal force. We cannot but recall Nina's testimony that even with the knowledge of his "special" relationship to his bastard children, Chester continued to be the best of fathers. By contrast, Nina's tearful appeals to Jim to think of Robert, their only lawful son, before taking any rash actions, go unheeded.

Even in this early stages of the conflict, Cary offers Jim several opportunities to reconsider his moves. His hope of stemming the tide of rising popular support for Chester by tagging him with the obloquy of a sex scandal is shown to be illusive. The crowds continue to throng after Chester and newspaper headlines echo the chorus of popular acclaim. Nina pleads with Jim and warns him with a candour she never uses with Chester. Most important of all, the newspapers he hopes to exploit in his fight against the corruption of men in public life turn out to be one of the constant realities of a democratic state, firmly entrenched, eager for sensational news, but

restricted in what they can print by the laws against libel. Jim, with his usual naïveté, insists that his press hand-out must be printed in full because, in his view, it is entirely true. A pressman tells him, however, that the first sentence alleging interference with his wife is libellous and therefore cannot be printed even if it is true: "Truth can be the worst kind of libel because doing more damage" (NHM 28).

All these warnings should have been sufficient to check a less headstrong man. But we know from Nina's recollections that Jim is unreflective, precipitate and high-strung; he is guided more by his feelings which are easily aroused. In a statement freighted with meaning, Nina recalls that as children under the leadership of Jim, they "had often bathed in a swell. . . . He liked waves" (PG 12). She also recalls later incidents in which Jim would recklessly brave stormy seas simply to carry off an affair in style.

These recollections are crucially important because Nina sees a direct connection between these needlessly reckless enterprises and the daring political stratagems which Chester devises for his own survival (see PG chs. 78 and 79). But there is a difference. Jim acts out of vanity, out of a desire to preserve his self-image of a brave man, while Chester, for all his crookedness, is impelled into political action by "a burning conviction" (PG 230). The conflicts in *Not Honour More* dramatise the dangers which emanate from these two tendencies: the headstrong and reckless manner of Jim and the "burning conviction" of Chester which makes him behave as if he is divinely ordained to fight against poverty and injustice--a fight in which

every weapon is justified if it takes him to the next step or enables him to battle his way through a present impediment.

Apart from these different but equally dangerous tendencies, Chester and Jim bring into their conflict assumptions which make reconciliation impossible. After nearly forty years in politics, Chester believes that he could "wangle" his way through any problem or accommodate any views if they are politically expedient. Jim, with his military background, his regimental attitude to the problems of social order and his narrow and inflexible code of honour, sees any compromise between rival ideologies as an inexcusable instance of corruption. Furthermore, Jim is unjustifiably self-righteous and looks on "everyone as a 'profiteer'" (PG 318).

Whether in private or in public life, Jim is so self-contradictory that the reader has a hard time finding where to place him. I have already referred to some of the more glaring inconsistencies in his private life. The contradictions in his political views are just as puzzling.

Politically, Jim is in favour of the autocratic socialist policies advocated by Major Brightman. But it is a mark of Jim's quixotism that he views Brightman with frank distaste and suspicion for pursuing the very actions that might turn his theories into political reality. After Jim had received a note from Brightman warning him that Chester was out to make political capital out of the unsuccessful attempt on his life, Jim explains his paradoxical reaction to his political mentor this way:

> I'd met this man Brightman . . . and I'd read a bit of his book called *True Democracy* which proposed to settle the unemployed by

> national work, and the housing problem by taking over the millionaires. Also he had led some unemployed marches and had a row with Nimmo.
>
> The book was all right but I didn't much take to the fellow who smelt of brass. Also push (NHM 38).

Jim is not only inconsistent, but he also betrays a pathetic lack of political acumen. When Chester issues a public statement denying that an attempt had been made on his life and appeals to the public not to allow itself to be diverted from the grave events in the country, Brightman senses the implications. Chester, Brightman realises, is cleverly acting the role of a political martyr and carrying the public with him. He is posing as a charitable and forgiving leader who is so centrally preoccupied with the problems of the nation that he cannot waste any time over a slight personal injury. Already, Brightman warns the politically obtuse Jim, Chester "has taken an attitude which will win him the greatest respect on top of much popular sympathy" (NHM 37). But all to no avail. Jim's reaction is to go to the Tarbiton armoury and steal a revolver since his rifle has been taken away by the thugs who now guard Chester. Yet Brightman is so right in his analysis of the possible consequences of Jim's action that within twenty-four hours of the attempt on the life of Chester, the newspapers are hailing him as the only man capable of averting a national disaster. The only thing that matters to Jim, however, is that his sense of honour has been violated and he himself must judge and "carry out sentence on Nimmo" (NHM 47).

It is interesting to note that although the hostility which Jim and Brightman feel towards Chester stems from their common disapproval of his willingness to compromise with all classes (while they favour Procrustean methods to secure political order), they are unable to

agree on how to fight their enemy. Jim allows his private grievance to blind him to the political consequences of his violent actions against Chester; Brightman puts political considerations above private spite. Thus after being warned again by Brightman that "any violent attempt against Nimmo now would be enormously to the advantage of his party" (NHM 53), Jim makes another futile attempt on the life of Chester. If Jim were sincere in his claim that he wants to murder Chester to rid the country of corruption, he would have heeded Brightman's wise counsel that to kill a political enemy at the height of his popularity is to ensure the election of his party. In other words, Chester represents a force which cannot be destroyed by killing him but only by discrediting him and his party. The fact is that Jim trusts no one and no institution in the whole country. He relies entirely on his judgment which is lamentably shallow at the best of times and is, in the present crisis, completely befuddled by his mad jealousy.

By the beginning of the General Strike, Chester, now chairman of the Emergency Committee, has become the *de facto* if not *de jure* leader of the country. From now until the end of the story, the private and public conflicts mesh inextricably. In this tangle of passions and events, Chester's extraordinary skill in managing people shines at its brightest. Exploiting the sense of duty which Jim so frequently professes, Chester adroitly manoeuvres his enemy into accepting the leadership of the special constabulary force which has been assembled to maintain order in the Tarbiton area. Jim knows that Chester is thrusting him into a position of responsibility to keep him quiet but

he accepts the job because he does not want to look like the man who would shy away from the call of cuty.

Before this remarkable political feat by Chester, he and Jim had just had one of their most acrimonious confrontations. For the second time Jim has been thwarted in his desperate bid to murder Chester. Fooled by Chester into picking an unloaded pistol as a murder weapon, Jim is mad with rage and throws the pistol at Nina, cutting her on the forehead (NHM 59). When Jim threatens to kill Chester if he does not leave the house at once, they engage in an angry exchange in which Chester makes an accurate evaluation of Jim and the political situation while Jim betrays a vulgar lack of self control:

> "'Look,' I said, 'unless you are out of my house in twenty minutes, I'll put another hole in you, a finisher this time.'
> 'Do you threaten me? . . . You take advantage, in short, of my position as a public man, to blackmail me. No, no, . . . don't talk about your honour. What is it worth? The country is tottering on the edge of revolution and you seize this moment to gratify a private spite. . . . And this at the cost of your country. . . . Forgive me if I say that you don't realize the situation.'
> 'God damn it,' I said, 'I think of nothing else. Fifty years of it. Since you and your gang set out to pimp for every gimme in the game. And bought your first poncés pants with Nina's money--and Nina's soul. The situation. A whoreshop for syphilites--everything goes because you'll all get it. And how smart we are at the dirt. You've poisoned everything you touched and it's still working. A living shanker'"(NHM 66-7).

The mad frenzied rage, the jealousy and the envy stare at us in all their ugly forms in this splenetic outburst. When it is over, Chester looks more dignified than he is because we can recall his self-control in equally provocative circumstances in *Prisoner of Grace*. One gets the impression from these exchanges that Jim hears nothing other than his own mad raging voice.

Once in a position of responsibility, however, Jim proves to be extremely inconsistent while he continues to demand consistency from

others. He recalls that as a District Officer in Nigeria, he had learnt that one of the easiest ways to turn a small protest into a big riot was to call in troops: "The calling in of troops destroys all confidence between a political officer and his people and sets back his work for years" (NHM 150). Yet three pages later on he is telling of how at the height of the British General Strike he had told the Watch Committee "that serious riot might occur unless strong display of force to prevent any gathering near chapel road and Potter's main entrance" (NHM 153). In fact, Jim brings to the performance of his public duties not only his tyrannical habits which frightened Nina in the early days of their marriage, but those animosities he also feels against certain individuals and classes. Thus from the beginning, Pincomb, the leader of the Communist Party, is watched and harassed by the special constabularies under the direction of Jim in flagrant disregard of official instructions asking him to avoid "any provocation to extremists while situation so delicate" (NHM 114). But there is more. His personal feeling that old family firms like Potters' (boat builders) must be protected against the agitation of revolutionaries like Pincomb has so interfered with the conduct of Jim in the maintenance of public order that the Watch Committee felt constrained to send a note reminding him "not to interfere with local pickets unless they offered actual violence" (NHM 120). On at least two occasions (NHM 113 and 116), Jim had given provocative ultimatums to leaders of quiet but restive crowds and had insisted that the men deserved to be treated like bad little boys.

It is a mark of Jim's conservatism that once the strike gets under way, he becomes severely hostile not only to Pincomb but to Brightman whom he now calls a Fascist. With caustic irony, Cary exposes

the stupidity and instability behind the seemingly rigid attitudes of Jim. Every time Jim appears before a crowd his militaristic orders provoke cries of "Fascist" after him. Against the charge by Jim that Pincomb is "out to make all the bad feeling and trouble possible in order to smash up everything and bring about a revolution," Pincomb replies that a revolution is necessary because of the general corruption in Europe:

> "I should think any sensible man who saw the present state of Europe would want one. It's about the foulest mess in history. And it's dying of its own filth. But so are a few millions of people who can't help themselves. Don't you think it would be a good idea to help some of the filth down the drain and clear the air a bit?" (NHM 118).

This is the language of putrescence and decay which Jim uses with unrivalled proficiency. The irony is that Jim has been offering the same reasons in much coarser language for wanting to kill Chester who seems to Jim to be the epitome of social corruption. The superiority of Pincomb's perspective is that he sees in the degenerate state of Europe a widespread social phenomenon which no sensible person can blame on one man.

The same contradictions are apparent in the attitude of Jim toward Brightman. We have already seen that Jim accepts Brightman's political philosophy. We also saw that for nearly a third of the novel Brightman was frequently stalking Jim in a vain effort to show him how to use his private quarrel with Chester to great political advantage. Now at the height of the crisis Brightman moves about lecturing workers on the need for revolution. Jim at once becomes more hostile. Asked why he could not trust Brightman, Jim replies: "I'm not sure--I just

don't like the looks of him or his little ways; or his gang or his paper. The paper is the worst" (NHM 144).

It is necessary to emphasise these irrational hates and their influence on the behaviour of Jim if we are to understand the final crisis of the novel. After a violent clash between the special police and the Communists, it is decided that all the Communist leaders be arrested; and Pincomb whom Jim describes as "a dangerous criminal" (NHM 158) becomes the most wanted of these leaders. Maufe, one of the specials under Jim, goes after Pincomb and inflicts severe injuries on the Communist leader while trying to arrest him.

The Maufe-Pincomb affair finally brings to a head the private and public conflicts between Chester and Jim. To Jim, Maufe is the finest of heroes, a man who performs his duty without regard for accolades. To Chester, however, the attack by a policeman on an unarmed British citizen raises fundamental questions of justice and freedom:

> "What we have to do is prove to the country and the world, at this moment, that there is still such a thing as *British* justice. That this is not yet a police state where a constable can beat up a citizen merely because he disapproves of his political opinions" (NHM 217).

Whatever the faults of Chester might be--and they are grave faults--it is impossible, in the light of our full knowledge of the man in the trilogy as a whole, to doubt his sincerity on this particular question of principle. What lies he tells in this matter have to do with a desperate search for personal survival and not with the underlying principles of the case. Thus when Jim surprises Chester and Nina in his bedroom, Chester tells a number of abominable lies in a bid to

escape once more the pistol-waving Jim. When everything fails to work, Chester becomes timorously bold and tells Jim:

> "I came here tonight because of your idiotic proceedings in Tarbiton. Because as soon as I turn my back you proceed to murder the only man [Pincomb] in the district who knows how to keep the really dangerous elements in hand. I came to save what I can of decency and fair dealing while there may be time to avoid a general crash" (NHM 165).

The upshot is that Chester, Jim and Nina drive to the Tarbiton Hall to check the claim by Chester that he had telephoned in the presence of people to say that he wanted to go over and consult his papers which might contain some useful inside information on Pincomb. On the way to the hall, Nina throws herself under a military lorry in an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide.

The immediate effect of Nina's attempted suicide is to force Chester and Jim to consider how much injury they are, in their various ways, causing this weak woman. For the first and perhaps only time in the novel, Jim examines his actions and makes one right conclusion: "I said to myself as I myself had been a sinful man, so I should forgive. I said what I'd known for forty years though I wouldn't admit it, this woman was more weak than wicked" (NHM 179). But Cary is too much of a realist to allow this flash of insight to last in a man that is widely regarded by friends and foes alike "as slightly cracked" (NHM 92). Jim's next move betrays the childish simplicity of his mind. He concludes that Nina had attempted suicide because she could not face more lies; she is now honest and truthful. The right course for them is to flee civilization before they are corrupted again.

But no escape is possible from the stark realities of society. With cutting irony, Cary shows how easily the primitive fisherman in a

lonely English cottage is just as ready as any Londoner to accept a bribe if it serves his immediate needs. So for the attractive sum of five pounds the fisherman readily reveals the whereabouts of Jim and Nina to an importunate photographer because the fisherman needs the money to look after his consumptive daughter. Jim returns to civilization full of bitterness and scepticism. The fisherman, he notes, "sold the woman I loved for the girl he loved. And Nimmo tells you that God is love. Nimmo's God. A god that doesn't need any principles, that doesn't need to keep his word" (NHM 189). The pathos and ominousness of this disillusionment should be evident in the light of Cary's repeated exploration of the dangers which men with an exaggerated sense of justice pose to themselves and to society.

Soon after the return of Jim and Nina to civilization, Maufe is tried and convicted for injuring Pincomb. Predictably, Jim goes sour on everybody, but especially Nina who had given evidence in the trial and who is suspected by Jim of perjuring herself to hide Chester's secret attempts to interfere with the case.

In a recent study of *Not Honour More*, Francis Battaglia has demonstrated that the popular acceptance of Jim's version of events in the Maufe-Pincomb case is not supportable from internal evidence.[14] More can be added to what Battaglia's study has already shown. Apart from the fact that Bell, the principal defence witness, had broken down under cross-examination and contradicted all his major statements in support of Maufe, there is independent evidence to suggest malice and an unnecessary use of force. I have already referred to one of Jim's jaundiced views about Pincomb. It is also clear that Jim had instructed Maufe "to arrest Mr. Pincomb whenever and wherever you found him"

(NHM 181). Moreover, there is not the slightest doubt that Pincomb's skull had been broken by a blow from behind and not by a fall on the pavement as the defence had tried to prove. This is not only the view of the doctor who treated Pincomb but the fact of the report which Maufe gave to Jim *before* he was formally charged: "Well, sir, I had a hunch I'd find the chap round about Drake Lane and there he was. I'm sorry I had to hit him but he was getting away" (NHM 160). Maufe is admitting in private that he had hit Pincomb from behind to prevent him from escaping arrest. This is also the main argument of the prosecution.

In spite of these facts which Jim has in his possession, he decides that the verdict against Maufe constitutes a "fearful piece of injustice" (NHM 213), which he must correct by trying and sentencing Chester and Nina for their alleged part in the affair. It is all too evident that Jim is in no position to assume this judicial function. His verdict on Chester and Nina has no bearing on the facts. Chester, Jim concludes, "sold" Maufe to the mob to make an example of the man and hit the headlines. But this is wrong. Chester genuinely wants to show that even in the turmoil of a general strike, a policeman cannot beat a British citizen merely because he disapproves of that citizen's political views. In chasing Chester to his death and shooting Nina, therefore, Jim has again chosen the wrong reasons and the wrong moment for his action.

The tragic outcome of this conflict is so inevitable that the only surprise is that it took so long to come. As Andrew Wright aptly remarks, "Latter's version of Nimmo is a bitter portrait of a supple politician drawn by an inflexible soldier who is corroded by the acids

of jealousy."[15] So true is this judgment that in one of the most pathetic scenes of the novel--pathetic because of the incurable blindness of Jim--Bootham tactfully but unsuccessfully tries to persuade Jim that a man in Chester's position cannot but follow popular feeling in an era of revolutionary fervour (NHM 108). It is the only way to turn the destructive potential of the masses into a constructive force. But neither the eloquent lecture on the nature of politics nor the astute analysis of the character of Nimmo makes any impression on Jim. Yet there is no one, beside Nina, who has lived so long and so close to Nimmo as Bootham. And whether he praises or blames Nimmo, Bootham always shows the penetration of a close and perceptive observer. Here, for example, Bootham focuses accurately on the tragic flaw which cuts through Nimmo's political genius:

> "In some ways, . . . Nimmo is extraordinarily simple--his reactions are those of a child. His conceit, for instance; no flattery is too much for him--he really believes he is ten times cleverer, and wiser, than other people. He really believes that God has given him a special mandate to save Britain--yes, and the world" (NHM 109).

Jim understands none of these things about the man who is his perpetual rival in love and politics. The result of that incomprehension is the unnecessary tragedy which overtakes them all.

The achievement of Cary in the Second Trilogy is considerable. The subject is momentous and its treatment is original. The tendency in the novel of class and industrial strife from Charles Dickens through Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence is to shed copious tears for the plight of the poor worker, suffering in quiet dignity, struggling valiantly but ineffectually against a mechanistic and unfeeling system. Cary does not waste even maudlin tears over his aggressive labouring men. His trilogy is one of the most searching studies of class and industrial

conflicts in the second half of the nineteenth and the first quarter of this century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Cary seems to be saying, the labourer was overworked and underpaid, victimized and brutalized, maltreated and ignored, and he suffered all that in silence. In the early twentieth century, with labour leaders schooled in Marx rather than the Bible, the worker fought aggressively and earned social respect and wealth for himself. The result is a vitally different perspective on an old problem. Instead of concentrating on the dislocation and the dehumanization of the worker by what Lawrence calls mechanicalness, Cary emphasises more of the vitality, the resourcefulness and the industry of the labouring class as its members fight their way to new commanding heights. True, the dislocation is portrayed with the usual Carian pungency, but it is shown for what it is--a passing phase.

Significantly, the established middle-class men in the trilogy steadily decline in moral and material well-being, while the characters from the labouring class, starting with the severe handicaps of ignorance and poverty, show substantial material and social gains. Chester Nimmo, who rises from the barren waste of the moorland to become a cabinet minister and later, Lord Nimmo, heads the list. He is in many ways the most notable and the most notorious of these new men. But he is also in many ways the exception rather than the rule. Will Wilson, for example, springs from the same lowly origins as Chester; yet he is portrayed as a man of towering ambition with an unshakable fidelity to people and principles. He builds a massive fortune and earns a baronetcy for himself, but retains his humility and his punctilious regard for decent standards of behaviour. Goold

and Bootham are other examples of this general rise of the poor to wealth and distinction. By contrast, the most important member of the land-owning class in the story, Lord Slapton, remains a shadowy figure and gradually vanishes into anonymity. Even snobbish capitalists like Wilfred learn to accommodate and court Nimmo when he becomes a power in the land.

What Cary does so well is to show this class of *nouveau riche* politicians and workers, steeped in narrow and often mistaken and outmoded religious and social dogmas, but full of the crusading zeal of the dogmatist, wrestling with problems that demand flexibility in a world of swift change. The thirst for wealth and power in this class of people is always keen; and Cary rises to the demands of his subject by showing how violent the drive for wealth and power can be when passions, class prejudices and ambitions tangle inextricably.

The Second Trilogy is a very typical product of Cary's imagination. From the beginning to the end, the trilogy dramatises conflict within the home and the nation, showing the frightful injustices and inequities that make change urgent and necessary. As we follow the main characters through the climactic days of the General Strike and watch the emotional involvement of the population at large, we realise that the conflict transcends individuals; it embraces the whole nation, jerking it violently in order to arouse the wealthy but antipathetic few to the plight of the poor and impatient majority. Chester, who has lived at the opposite extremes of the social scale, is quite appropriately the central figure in that conflict, sometimes in control because of his imagination, but occasionally buffeted by the social storm when it grows in intensity or makes unexpected turns. His

unorthodox leadership and nonconformist attitudes to religion and politics are idiosyncratic in their particular manifestations, but the general pattern of the Carian hero, refusing to be moulded by others, is clearly discernible.

The title of Cary's posthumously published novel, *The Captive and the Free*, neatly summarises one of his basic attitudes to man. He insists, throughout his fiction, that man is free and creative. This is the view which dominates his fiction, whether his characters are gregarious Africans like Mr. Johnson or thoroughgoing individualist Englishmen like Gulley Jimson. As a member of society, however, man can be made captive by the conventions, beliefs and laws which determine his conduct in a more or less prescriptive manner. The free man is he who has the courage to live according to his intuitive grasp of reality, and not by the dictates of society. In most cases, those private intuitions differ from the generally accepted modes of behaviour. The free follow their intuitions; the captive slavishly follow rules and conventions, or create and adhere to narrow and inflexible codes based on frayed slogans. Unconventicnality and adaptability are the distinctive marks of Cary's free and creative persons. Conformity and inflexibility are the commonest dispositions of the captive. Unorthodoxy is dangerous in any age, and the creative person knows that; but he is undaunted by the dangers, and unyielding in his determination to surmount the obstacles strewn on his path. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, offers an easy escape from the complex problems of living in a world of rapid change where the adventitious event can be as shattering as the willed evil of one's neighbours.

Since the men and women who fascinate Cary are almost invariably nonconformists and spellbinders, delighting in their own cleverness and stubborn determination to go their own aberrant ways, they live in endless conflict with other members of society. It seems to me, from the behaviour of these characters and the views of their creator, that what Cary is doing in his fiction is to reject determinism in all its forms. There is no contradiction between this and his belief in luck--good or bad--which sometimes shapes the life of man. That element of luck is part of the mystery which makes life both baffling and fascinating. Even the God Cary believes in is not the traditional God of Christianity whose Providence shapes and rules the world and guides the life of the individual:

> God is a character, a real and consistent being, or He is nothing. If God did a miracle He would deny His own nature and the universe would simply blow up, vanish, become nothing. And we can't even conceive nothingness. The world is a definite character. It *is* and therefore it is *something*.[16]

In that self-sustaining world, man is his own master. He must fight against social determinism either in the form of tribal taboos or fixed religious and social laws; he must also reject the mechanistic determinism of the twentieth century if he is not to become, in one of Cary's favourite words, a robot. That is the only way to guarantee the full exercise of the creative imagination in a world of conflict, freedom and responsibility.

Footnotes

Chapter I: The Wars of Belief

1. Joyce Cary, *Art and Reality.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958, 7.

2. *Ibid.*, 8.

3. William Sargant, *Battle for the Mind.* London: Heinemann, 1957. With numerous examples from the private records of John Wesley, Sargant gives a vivid account of the psychology of public conversions, especially in chs. 5 and 6 of his book. Some of his accounts read like adaptations from *Aissa Saved.*

4. M. M. Mahood, *Joyce Cary's Africa.* London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1964, 109.

5. *Ibid.*, 110.

6. Charles G. Hoffmann, "Joyce Cary's African Novels: 'There's A War On,'" *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXII, Spring, 1963, 231.

7. Mahood, *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 122-23.

8. Joyce Cary, "My First Novel," *Listener*, April 16, 1953, 637-38.

9. Quoted by Mahood in *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 119.

10. Cary, "My First Novel," 637.

11. Rackham's ideas on the comportment of Europeans in the midst of subject races are strikingly similar to those of Kipling, especially as they are summarised in the short story, "His Chance in Life."

12. Mahood, *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 157-58.

13. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 23-24.

14. See Cary's own clear affirmation of this position in his defence of Chester Nimmo's political methods in a statement quoted by Andrew Wright in his *Joyce Cary: A Preface to his Novels.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1958, 154.

15. Mahood, *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 68.

16. G. D. Killam, *Africa in English Fiction, 1874-1939.* Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1968, 71.

17. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 164.

18. Mahood, *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 161.

19. *Ibid.*, *162*.

20. Killam, *Africa in English Fiction 1874-1939*, 155.

Chapter II: Private Creeds and the Problems of Revolution

1. Joyce Cary, "My First Novel," *Listener*, April 16, 1953, 638. The view is repeated in *The Case for African Freedom and Other Writings on Africa*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962, 38, *passim*.

2. See, for example, two widely admired studies of *An American Visitor:* first, Warren G. French in his "Joyce Cary's American Rover Girl," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, II (1960), 281-291, sees in the novel a new, valid but disquieting criticism of the American character by yet another European; second, M. M. Mahood in *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 125-144, concentrates on individual characters and the criticism in the novel of the system of indirect rule.

3. Mahood, *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 135.

4. Killam, *Africa in English Fiction, 1874-1939*, 145.

5. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 105.

6. Frederick Karl, "Joyce Cary: The Moralist as Novelist," *Twentieth Century Literature*, V. 1960, 189.

7. Joyce Cary, *Power in Men*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963, 1.

8. Mahood, quoting from Cary's manuscripts in *Joyce Cary's Africa*, 178.

9. *Ibid.*, 180.

10. *Ibid.*, 183. M. M. Mahood rightly remarks that the African setting of *Mister Johnson* is responsible for the wrong-headed insistence by critics, reviewers and illustrators that Johnson is a racial symbol. Then with a mass of evidence from Cary's manuscript notes, his letters and, of course, the novel itself, she goes on to demonstrate that "*Mister Johnson* is Cary's first real comedy of freedom" (195). In fact, the last two chapters of her book are strictly relevant to an understanding of the importance of *Mister Johnson* in the artistic development of Joyce Cary.

11. Arnold Kettle, *An Introduction to the English Novel*, Vol. II. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967 [1953], 165.

12. Mahood, "Joyce Cary in Africa, 1913-1920," *New Statesman*, October 1, 1960, 477.

Chapter III: The Captive and the Free: A Composite Picture of Childhood

1. Charles G. Hoffmann, *The Comedy of Freedom*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964, 54.

2. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 15.

3. Kenneth Watson, "'The Captive and the Free': Artist, Child and Society in the World of Joyce Cary," *English*, Vol. 16, No. 91 (Spring 1966), 52.

4. Mahood, "Joyce Cary in Africa, 1913-1920," *New Statesman*, October 1, 1960, 478.

5. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 8. Cary revealed in the preface to *Aissa Saved* that Thomas Hardy was one of the writers who influenced him greatly; and although Cary avoids Hardy's excessive use of coincidences, his insistence that chance (the war, in this case, which deprives Charley of the firm discipline his father can provide) plays a decisive role in the affairs of men seems to be the most obvious sign of that influence.

6. Cary, "What does Art Create?" in *Literature and Life: Addresses to the English Association*, Vol. II. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1951, 40.

Chapter IV: Every Man His Own Candle

1. Barbara Hardy, "Form in Joyce Cary's Novels," *EIC*, Vol. 4, 1954, 184.
   It must be noted, in fairness to Barbara Hardy, that the third volume of the Second Trilogy, *Not Honour More*, was published a year after her article had appeared.

2. Walter Allen, *Joyce Cary* (British Council Writers and their Work Series, No. 41), 1963 [1953], 5.

3. Quoted by Andrew Wright in *Joyce Cary*, 112.

4. Robert Bloom, *The Indeterminate World; A Study of the Novels of Joyce Cary*, 86. See also Frederick Karl's essay, "Joyce Cary: The Moralist as Novelist," *Twentieth Century Literature*, V (Jan., 1960), 185, where Karl condemns Sara for what he calls her "sexual blowziness and sensual manner," while conceding that "she provides Gulley with some of the happiest years of his life as well as with the model for his best work."

5. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 9-10.

6. Bloom, *The Indeterminate World*, 84.

7. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 48.

8. Hazard Adams, "Joyce Cary's Three Speakers," *Modern Fiction Studies*, V (Summer 1959), 115.

9. Joyce Cary, "The Way A Novel Gets Written," *Adam International Review*, XVIII (November-December 1950), 5.

10. Barbara Hardy,"Form in Joyce Cary's Novels," 183.

11. Bloom, *The Indeterminate World*, 92.

12. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 73-4.

13. Orville Prescott, *In My Opinion: An Inquiry into the Contemporary Novel*.
    New York: The Bobbs Merrill Company, Inc., 1952, 196.

14. Allen, *Joyce Cary*, 22.

15. Marjorie Ryan, "An Interpretation of Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*," *Critique*, 11 (Spring-Summer 1958), 32.

16. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 73-4.

17. Cary, "What Does Art Create?" *Literature and Life*, Vol. II, 44.

18. William Spanos, *A Casebook on Existentialism*.
    New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966, 6.

19. Joyce Cary, "The Novelist at Work: A Conversation between Joyce Cary and Lord David Cecil," *Adam International Review*, XVIII, 19.

20. Spanos, *Existentialism*, 6.

21. Cary tends to associate abstract metaphysical speculations with German and American intellectuals. Marie Hasluck, the American anthropologist and heroine of *An American Visitor*, has her head in the clouds and her feet in the treacherous mud of Birri; Dr. Schlemm, the energetic missionary in *The African Witch*, described as a German-American, glides easily to "dissolved philosophies" in his sermons.

22. Wright, *Joyce Cary*, 130. But Wright's conclusion, from which I differ, is that these people, in their own bewildered way, might perhaps build Jerusalem.

23. This construction is derivable from Gulley's arguments, some of which are quoted a few lines below. This interpretation is also strengthened by some of Spinoza's views in the *Ethic*, especially Part Five, 'OF THE POWER OF THE INTELLECT, OR OF HUMAN LIBERTY." Prop. XIX, for example, states: "*He who loves God cannot strive that God should love him in return.*" The demonstration which follows this proposition states: "If a man were to strive after this, he would desire . . . that God, whom he loves, should not be God, and consequently . . . he would desire to be sad, which . . . is absurd." (265). Such views are obviously incompatible with Cary's belief in the freedom and autonomy of the individual.

24. For the tendency to overstress the opposition between Gulley and Sara, see Andrew Wright's *Joyce Cary*, 127 and Hazard Adams's "Blake and Gulley Jimson: English Symbolists," *Critique*, III (Spring-Fall 1959), 3-14, especially 6 and 7.

25. Wright, *Joyce Cary*, 133.

26. Cary in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews.* New York: Viking, 1958, 65.

27. *Ibid.*, 65.

Chapter V: A Study in Domestic and Political Conflicts

1. Robert Bloom, *The Indeterminate World*, 140.

2. Andrew Wright makes much the same point in his *Joyce Cary*, 143.

3. Charles G. Hoffmann, *The Comedy of Freedom*, 144. Hoffmann points out that Chester's idealism hinders him in the early stages of his public life.

4. *Ibid.*, 141.

5. Cary, *Art and Reality*, 155.

6. Bloom, *The Indeterminate World*, 109.

7. Hoffmann, *The Comedy of Freedom*, 135.

8. Bloom, *The Indeterminate World*, 112, passim; Giles Mitchell in his "Joyce Cary's *Prisoner of Grace*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Autumn 1963, 265.

9. Cary, "Political and Personal Morality," *Saturday Review* (December 31, 1955), 5, 6, 31, 32.

10. *Ibid.*, 5.

11. *Ibid.*, 32.

12. Wright, *Joyce Cary*, 139.

13. Even the well-tempered criticism of Andrew Wright becomes strident and emotive when he turns to *Prisoner of Grace*: "If the Chester Nimmo of *Prisoner of Grace* is often revoltingly self-deceived, he is equally a pitiable figure by the very profoundness of his self-deception " (148). This tone of vehement moral indignation was set by George Woodcock in his brief essay, "Citizens of Babel: A Study of Joyce Cary," *Queens Quarterly*, LXIII (1956), 236-246. Without making even a passing reference to the other two books of the trilogy, Woodcock makes this unjustifiably harsh judgment: "Nina is not basically a hypocrite like Chester, but thirty years of association with him have affected her way of thinking, and it is an illustration of the flexibility of Cary's writing that her account should have even in its idiom that taint of moral ambiguity which intensifies the atmosphere of intangible evil that hangs about her husband" (245). The Malvolian sneer of this statement has since been echoed by almost everyone who has written about *Prisoner of Grace*, and few have recognised the flexibility of Cary's writing.

14. Francis Joseph Battaglia, "Spurious Armageddon: Joyce Cary's *Not Honour More*", *Modern Fiction Studies* (Winter 1967/68), Vol. XIII, No. 4, 479-91.

15. Wright, *Joyce Cary*, 138.

16. Joyce Cary, *Writers at Work*, ed. Malcolm Cowley. New York: Viking, 1958, 58.

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