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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Joyce Cary's Tragicomic Vision

by

Patrick J. W. Mukakanya

A THESIS

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Supervisor

External Examiner

Date... April 22, 1989.....

Abstract

Joyce Cary's fiction is at once comic and tragic. In this thesis I examine the writer's tragicomic vision in theory and practice, focusing on five of his novels: Mister Johnson, Charley is my Darling, Herself Surprised, To be a Pilgrim and The Horse's Mouth. Cary's tragicomic vision of existence is rooted in his metaphysical assumptions on individual freedom and responsibility. He sees everyone as a free creative individual solely responsible for creating his own meaning in life. This creative freedom is a blessing and a curse, a comedy and a tragedy. It means power for everyone to strive for self-realization at the same time as it means conflicts between individuals and between individuals and society. Furthermore, man's creative freedom means a world of continuous change and turmoil, marked by various tragic conflicts between the new and the old. While Cary conceives all these conflicts as the tragic consequences of freedom, he treats them as comically as tragically, so that we respond to his free souls with laughter and sympathy at the same time.

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I would like especially to thank my supervisor, Professor Juliet McMaster, for her invaluable academic guidance and moral support. Thanks are also due to Professors Fred Radford, Chris Bullock, and Ron Ayling for their helpful comments and suggestions. And I am grateful to Pam Farvolden for the tiresome task of typing the thesis and to my friends Craig McLuckie, Francis Aleba, and Kofi Owusu for their moral support.

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Abbreviations used in the text

AMV	An American Visitor
AR	Art and Reality
CC	Castle Corner
CD	Charley is my Darling
DS	The Drunken Sailor
AFJ	A Fearful Joy
FT	First Trilogy
HS	Herself Surprised
HM	The Horse's Mouth
AHC	A House of Children
MJ	Mister Johnson
ML	The Moonlight
NHM	Not Honour More
PM	Power in Men
PG	Prisoner of Grace
TBP	To be a Pilgrim
SE	Selected Essays

I. Introduction

> I feel that, broadly and essentially, the striking feature of modern art is that it has ceased to recognize the categories of tragic and comic, or the dramatic classifications tragedy and comedy. It sees life as tragicomedy.[1]
>
> Thomas Mann

> No themes are so human as those that reflect for us, out of the confusion of life, the close connexion of bliss and bale.[2]
>
> Henry James

Most of Cary's critics agree with Walter Allen that "in Cary's novels the comic and the tragic are different sides of the one coin."[3] But this tragicomic character of his novels has not yet been the subject of a detailed study. None of the considerable number of books on Cary deals with his tragicomic vision in theory and practice at length. Walter Allen's booklet itself is only an introduction to Cary's work. This is also largely true of Andrew Wright's book, Joyce Cary: A Preface to his Novels, in which Wright notes that in Cary's fiction "tragedy and comedy do not merely go hand in hand; they are very often bedfellows."[4] Cary's biographer, Malcolm Foster, also draws our attention to the "mixture of tragedy and comedy" in Cary's fiction.[5] But Foster's huge biographical task does not permit him to

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[1] Thomas Mann, Past Masters and Other Papers , Trans., H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Martin Secker, 1933), p. 240.
[2] Henry James, Preface to What Maisie Knew, in Richard Blackmur, ed., The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James (New York, Charles Scribner's Press, 1962), p. 143.
[3] Walter Allen, Joyce Cary (London: Longman's, 1963), p. 10.
[4] Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary: A Preface to his Novels (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 111.
[5] Malcolm Foster, Joyce Cary: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 453.

go into detail.

Other commentators on the topic are similarly limited by the demands of their chosen subjects. The majority of critical books on Cary focus on various aspects of theme and form in his fiction, especially in connection with his trilogies. Of the major publications, Hazard Adams' Joyce Cary's Trilogies: Pursuit of the Particular Real is a structural analysis of the trilogies. The title of Charles Hoffman's study, Joyce Cary: The Comedy of Freedom, falsely suggests a detailed examination of at least the comic side of Cary's fiction. Although Hoffman now and again talks about the tragicomic nature of Cary's fiction, pointing out that "the tragedy of freedom . . . is an inevitable corollary of the comedy of freedom,"[6] his subject is really "the genesis" of Cary's fiction and its theme and form. Even Hoffman's article, "Joyce Cary and the Comic Mask," is largely a thematic and formal examiration of the First Trilogy and has little to do with Cary's tragicomic method. Barbara Fisher's Joyce Cary: The Writer and his Theme is also largely a study in the genesis and theme of Cary's novels, while Cornelia Cook's Joyce Cary: Liberal Principles is, as the title indicates, a study in Cary's liberalism as man and writer. Finally, Michael Echeruo's Joyce Cary and the Dimensions of Order is a philosophical discussion of Cary's aesthetics, metaphysics and fiction. The book

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[6] Charles Hoffman, Joyce Cary: The Comedy of Freedom (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), p. 1. See also his chapter on The Horse's Mouth.

concludes with a discussion of the nature of comedy in Cary's fiction: "Cary's comedy is . . . exuberant, even ribald, but very dark."[7] This is also Michael Rosenthal's argument in his article, "Cary's Comic Sense." But he undermines that argument by seeing some of the novels as "truly comic" and others as tragic: "Of the fifteen novels published during Cary's lifetime, only four--Mister Johnson, Charley is my Darling, Herself Surprised, and The Horse's Mouth--are truly comic."[8] In seeing these novels as "truly comic," Rosenthal contradicts himself and unwittingly supports those critics he argues against who see Cary as a comic novelist.

Much of what has been written on Cary, in terms of comedy and tragedy, emphasizes the comic side of his fiction at the expense of the tragic. This one-sided view of his novels began with his contemporary critics and reviewers, and continues to be expressed today. Thus, for example, in 1952, when Cary's life-time reputation as a novelist was at its peak, Time magazine published a cover story entitled "Cheerful Protestant":

> Gusto is not a common characteristic of present-day writers. Their most notable common trait is resignation, a resignation that . . . Hemingway, Faulkner, Graham Green, J.P. Marquand, Elizabeth Bowen, Evelyn Waugh . . . all record, in their various manners, the hopeless valor, the quiet desperation of a rear-guard action, a doomed though indomitable next-to-last stand.

---

[7] Michael Echeruo, Joyce Cary and the Dimensions of Order (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 146.
[8] Michael Rosenthal, "Cary's Comic Sense," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, XIII (Fall, 1971), p. 337.

> Among this stoic crew, there is one novelist who stands out--or rather, leaps like a joyful trout, or a hungry protestant. His name is Joyce Cary, and he has something very different to say. What an extraordinary thing, he cries, life is! What a piece of work is man! It has not been said with such exuberance or noted with such a roving, unblinking and delighted eye, since Dickens did it. . . .
>
> Though literary immortality is as chancy as other sorts, it looks as though Joyce Cary has already added his quota to fiction's Valhalla: Gulley Jimson, Sara Monday, Mister Johnson, Tom Wilcher.[9]

In a Saturday Review article on Cary (May 28, 1955), Harrison Smith praises him in similar terms:

> What Joyce Cary has accomplished is to confront and attack the almost universal conviction, which the shock of the First World War and the long years of the depression had created, that life was not worth living; to prove the unreality of that twisted fictional world of the last 30 years, inhabited by psychotics, perverts, and gloomy existentialists who flourish on the craving for imaginary thrills of people who have lost their faith in the future.[10]

Much more recently (1975), Helen Gardner, one of Cary's friends, also praises him for offering a kind of comic relief during a dominantly tragic literary period:

> Happiness is a very rare subject in the modern novel. It is, to me, the greatest of Joyce Cary's gifts that he can communicate his sense of the "character" of life as capable of perpetually flowering into happiness and joy. He is a comic novelist without a trace of the satirist in his composition, and his subject is a universe freely bringing forth delight.[11]

But in her "Foreword" to Cary's Selected Essays, Helen Gardner acknowledges:

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[9] "Cheerful Protestant," Time October 20, 1952, p. 94.
[10] Harrison Smith, "Artist of Affirmation," Saturday Review May 28, 1955, pp. 12-13.
[11] Helen Gardner, "The Novels of Joyce Cary," in Robert Ellroot, ed., Essays and Studies Collected for the English Association Vol. 28 (London: John Murray, 1975), p. 93.

> The world of his novels is not an easy world to live in. It includes the realities of poverty and sickness and undeserved misfortune, the defeat of men's hopes and ideals, the conflicts between the imperatives of duty and the imperatives of the heart, destruction of what is good and beautiful.
>
> (SE, xii)

This surely is not the world of "a comic novelist" whose "subject is a universe freely bringing forth delight." Gardner has overstated the comic side of Cary's fiction in the first essay. Of all Cary's critics, no one has been more influential in refuting the claim that he is a comic novelist than his friend Enid Starkie. She writes:

> The view generally held of Joyce Cary by his critics is that he was a rumbustious man, with an immense love of life and a zest for living. I, however, saw him very differently. For me this gusto for life was, as it were, a kind of "whistling in the dark" to keep his spirits up, a deliberate attitude of courage, rather than a confirmed belief. I felt, on the contrary, that he had a sad view of life which had not arisen only after the death of his wife, but had struck roots deep in him much earlier. I always felt this pervading sadness beneath the gay and gallant manner. . . .
>
> I feel that he saw life as unjust and finally disappointing. Most of his characters ultimately fail and die unfulfilled--even those with the greatest gusto for living are beaten in the end. . . . He understood, I think, the pathos and tragedy of failure better than the glory of triumph. But he had tried to understand, to discover why, as he once said, "all men do not cut their throats."[12]

The latest publication on Cary, Joyce Cary Remembered in Letters and Interviews by his Family and Others contains many views, of different people, which are consistent with Starkie's "Personal Portrait" of him, as man and writer. His son, Tristram, for example, remarks on The Horse's Mouth, on

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[12] Enid Starkie, "Joyce Cary: A Personal Portrait," The Virginia Quarterly Review 37 (Winter, 1961), pp. 113-4.

which Cary's reputation as "a rumbustious man" and writer largely hinges:

> Most people read this book as a comic book. But it is not a comic book at all. It's about a man who is desperately fighting the tendency for artists to get bitter about not succeeding, and it turning on them and ruining their work. So Gulley took it out on other things.[13]

But to argue that The Horse's Mouth is "not a comic book at all" is to go to the other extreme. For the novel, like all Cary's novels, is at once comic and tragic.

Joyce Cary had a tragicomic vision of life,[14] which he expresses in both his theory of man's creative freedom and in his fictional practice. He saw life as "a fearful joy." But in his theory, as in his practice, it is the tragic side which is preponderant, and much of the comic in his fiction, in the sense of gusto or zest for life and of the humorous, issues from the tragic.

My objective in this thesis is to examine Cary's tragicomic vision in theory and practice. The thesis is

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[13]Tristram Cary, "The Years Following my Mother's Death" in Barbara Fisher ed. Joyce Cary Remembered in Letters and Interviews by his Family and Others (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1988), p. 163.

[14]The germ of a short story in Art and Reality is a good illustration of his tragicomic vision:

> A man making a sensible second marriage for convenience, fell in love for the first time and found that this great happiness also brought him great anxiety and distress. His life was at once enormously enriched and much more troubled. (AR, 131)

He writes to similar effect in his preface to The First Trilogy : "To love anyone is the greatest joy of life, and also the greatest danger" (FT, xii). If we cannot agree with Cary, we can accept that he had a bi-focal vision by which life, like love, is seen at once as "a fearful joy."

focused on five representative novels: Mister Johnson (1939), the African's world, Charley is My Darling (1940), the child's world, Herself Surprised (1941), the woman's world, To be a Pilgrim (1942), the conservative's world, and The Horse's Mouth (1944), the innovator's world. These novels are central to Cary's theory of man's creative freedom, and, with the exception of Charley is My Darling, are generally seen as his central achievement as a novelist. They also offer the clearest illustration of Cary's tragicomic vision and method.

II. "Doomed or Blessed to be a Free Soul": Cary's Tragicomic Sense

> Existence itself, the act of existing, is a striving and is both pathetic and comic in the same degree.[1]
>
> Soren Kierkegaard

Cary's tragicomic vision of existence arises from his metaphysical assumptions on individual freedom and responsibililty, and here we must begin. Like all liberal writers, past and present, Cary sees the individual person as a free soul. But he conceives this freedom not in socio-political terms, as most liberals do, as "absence of restraint" (PM, 16), but in religious-cum-existentialist terms as the inward "power" of the individual to act independently and be responsible for "what he has made of himself" (PM, 255). Cary opens his treatise on freedom, Power in Man:

> 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.
>
> (PM, 1)

Cary's emphasis is on the "real" freedom of the mind and, hence, of the individual to be self-directed and

---

[1] Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, tr. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 84. Kierkegaardian man, "the existing subjective thinker," who is "the existing individual," is "constantly in process of becoming." His striving to become is infinite, and yet his existence is finite. The discrepancy between the infinitude of his striving and the finitude of his existence is, for Kierkegaard, both pathetic and comic. Carian man is similarly perpetually striving to become what he desires to be, to achieve himself. But with him, it is the discrepancy between the perpetuity of his striving and its futility which is both comic and pathetic at the same time.

self-determined, regardless of external restraint.[2] "By freedom I don't mean the figment that politicians talk about--but real freedom--the active creative freedom which . . . is most nearly described by theologians--the source of moral responsibility and of good and evil; but for me also of . . . a special comedy and a special tragic dilemma which can never be solved."[3]

According to Foster, Cary at one stage wanted to write a general preface to his novels under the title "The Comedy of Freedom." But he abandoned the idea, and it is fortunate that he did so, as that title would not have done justice to the tragic side of the novels.[4] As his remarks above reveal, and his novels confirm, Cary sees man's condition as a free soul as both a blessing and a curse, a comedy and a tragedy. "Freedom," he contends, "is all our joy and all our pain."[5] It is "our opportunity and our tragedy" (FT, xi) to be free and responsible for our selves. This is basically his tragicomic sense. As his characters illustrate, freedom is their opportunity to realize themselves and, for reasons that will emerge, their tragedy as well. Their freedom is their joy and pain, their laughter and tears. It is this interpenetration of the joyful and the painful which spells

---

[2] Cary's sense of freedom is anarchic, and has much the same implication as Kaufmann sees in Sartre's sense of freedom: "independence of convention, and that creative freedom which finds ultimate expression in being a law unto oneself." Walter Kaufmann, Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre: The Basic Writings (New York: Meridian Books, 1961), p. 42.

[3] Quoted in Malcolm Foster, Joyce Cary: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 449.

[4] Foster, 451.

[5] Joyce Cary, Saturday Review, May 28, 1955, p. 12.

for Cary "a special tragic dilemma which can never be solved."

Cary calls freedom "a special comedy" primarily because it means power and opportunity for everyone to strive for self-realization: that is, power to create one's own sense of life. For Cary, as for Sartre and his school of existentialists, "life has no meaning" other than what we give it (CC, 7). As Sartre puts it, "there is no sense in life a priori."[6] Accordingly, Cary sees, with existentialist eyes, everyone as an artist, solely responsible for creating his own sense of life:

> [E]veryone, from childhood, creates his own idea of things and realizes, so far as possible, his own desires according to that idea. He makes a world that is his work of art.
>
> (AR, 72)

This is the basis of Cary's major fiction. His novels are an affirmation of man's creative freedom--with all its comic and tragic implications--which makes Carian man a kind of "god." As Cary romantically writes in Power in Man, "every man, however poor, has more than kingship in him. He has the mark of the god, the power of the creator" (PM, 77). This creative power is, seen from a comic angle, the source of Cary's "special comedy," the human "comedy of freedom," which is best defined by the resourcefulness and exuberance of his characters as they "incessantly strive towards a personal achievement in a world which is essentially free and personal" (AR, 155). Their creative freedom finds its

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[6] Kaufmann, p. 309.

ultimate expression through the symbolic artist, Gulley Jimson, the hero of The Horse's Mouth and Cary's principal mouth-piece and best known character. "By God, look what I've done," Gulley imagines every artist exclaiming about his God-like creative accomplishment. "A miracle. I have transformed a chunk of wood, canvas, etc., into a spiritual fact, an eternal beauty. I am God" (HM, 170). Gulley, of course, is specifically referring to the artist per se. But his remark applies to every Carian man: "Not merely the artist, but every man and woman begins from childhood to create for himself a world" (SE, 125). Thus when Cary himself speaks of man's creative imagination, he means more than just that unique power of the artist proper, the Coleridgean "Secondary Imagination" or "Poetic Imagination" which shapes a work of art. In Cary's usage, virtually every human activity is a work of art and a product of the creative imagination. Thus, for example, Charley's delinquent quest for approval in Charley is My Darling, Johnson's singing, road-building, and stealing in Mister Johnson, Sara's home-making and pleasure-seeking in Herself Surprised, Nimmo's political campaigning in A Prisoner of Grace, and Gulley's painting and swindling in The Horse's Mouth are all works of the creative imagination. But while every Carian character is theoretically a creative individual, only some characters, mainly those mentioned above, are dramatized as men and women of imagination. It is through these characters that he endeavours to demonstrate

his central thesis that

> everyone . . . is doomed or blessed to be a free soul in the free world and solve his own problems as he goes through it. He must have power to think for himself and so he must be cut off from the mass instincts which join ants and bees in communities which have no need to think and no individual freedom.
>
> Each of us is obliged to construct his own idea, his own map of things by which he is going to find his way, so far as he can, through life. He must decide what he wants and how he shall achieve himself.
>
> (FT, ix)

While Cary sees freedom as both a blessing and a curse, a comedy and tragedy, it is the tragic aspect which predominates in his thinking. As all his creative individuals show, their "comedy of freedom" invariably issues in tragedy, death, or imprisonment, thus underlining the initial tragic side of their freedom--the obligation to be responsible for one's self. "All of us," Cary says, "are in a jam, a special and incurable difficulty from which there is no escape" because "we are born to freedom in a world condemned to be free."[7] Our "freedom means work and suffering" (ML, 7) due to the responsibility it imposes on us. Thus we are obliged to construct our own idea of life not only because life has no meaning other than what we give it, but also because of our solitude:

> We are almost entirely cut off from each other in mind, entirely independent in thought, and so we have to learn everything for ourselves. Hume pointed this out in his Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, published in 1748, and no philosopher since has found an adequate answer to him. It is easy to see that if

---

[7] Quoted in Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary: A Preface to his Novels (London: Chatto and Windus), p. 108.

> we were not so cut off from each other, if we were parts of a social commune, like ants or bees, we should not be free agents. Freedom, independence of mind, involves solitude. 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 idea of things.
>
> (AR, 9-10)

It is such individual responsibility which leads Cary to see freedom, with Sartre, as a condemnation. Sartre writes:

> Man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown in this world he is responsible for every thing he does. . . . An existentialist . . . thinks that every man, without any support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man.[8]

In some respects, Cary's assumptions on freedom parallel Sartre's, and he has been called an existentialist.[9] His view of man, for instance, as being "what he has made of himself" (PM, 255) echoes Sartre's "first principle": "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism."[10] But Cary dissociated himself from Sartre's atheistic school of existentialism, preferring, instead, to be identified with Kierkegaard's opposite school. He told his Paris Review interviewers:

> The French seem to take me for an Existentialist in Sartre's sense of the word. But I'm not. I am influenced by the solitude of men's minds, but equally by the unity of their fundamental character

---

[8] Kaufmann, p. 295.
[9] Michael Echeruo, for example, interprets Cary's first trilogy in existentialist terms: "Being and Living: The Existentialist Trilogy" in his book Joyce Cary and the Dimensions of Order (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), pp. 48-91.
[10] Kaufmann, p. 291.

> and feelings, their sympathies which bring them together. . . . I am obliged to believe in God as a person. I don't suppose any church would accept me, but I believe in God and His grace with an absolute confidence. It is by His grace that we know beauty and love, that we have all that makes life worth living in a tough, dangerous, and unjust world. Without that belief I could not make sense of the world and I could not write. Of course, if you say I am an Existentialist in the school of Kierkegaard, that is more reasonable. But Existentialism without a God is nonsense--it atomises a world which is plainly a unity.
>
> (SE, 6-7)

If Cary's unorthodox belief in "God as a person," manifested through love and beauty, could not be, as he supposed, accepted by any church, and is, also, hard to reconcile with his atheistic view of the world as meaningless a priori, it is nevertheless a saving grace which helps to redeem his "tough, dangerous, and unjust world" from existential anguish and despair. While his characters have no hope and consolation of salvation in the Kierkegaardian orthodox Christian sense, they are imbued with his belief that life is, in spite of all its woes, worth living; "there is goodness [love and beauty] in the world, in life; . . . to know it is all the security, and the peace, that life can give. And this is a true faith" (SE, 23-4). This belief, which is best illustrated through Tabitha Bonser in A Fearful Joy (of life) and Gulley Jimson in The Horse's Mouth, is an integral part of their sustaining comic spirit which makes them "tick," or get on in their tragic world.

Their world is "a dangerous one, full of tragedy" because of their creative freedom:

> 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.
>
> (SE, 5)

Cary forgets to mention here two kinds of conflicts which dominate his fiction, and with which we must begin examining his sense of the tragic. These are the conflicts between individuals and between the individual and society. Since every Carian individual is freely striving to create his subjective world, he is bound to collide not only with other individuals, but also with society at large. The conflict between individuals is inevitable because everyone is alienated from the rest by his individuality and world:

> We are alone in our own worlds. We can sympathize with each other, be fond of each other, but we can never completely understand each other. We are not only different in character and mind, we don't know how far the difference goes.
>
> (FT, x)

Thus Cary's free souls often find themselves at cross purposes and in conflict with each other, as shown especially in his trilogies where most of the major relationships are built on misunderstanding and conflict. This situation parallels what Raymond Williams discusses in Modern Tragedy:

> [W]hen . . . isolated persons meet, in what are called relationships, their exchanges are forms of struggle, inevitably.
>
> Tragedy, in this view, is inherent. It is not only that man is frustrated, by society and by others, in his deepest and primary desires. It is

> also that those desires include destruction. . . . The process of living is then a continual adjustment of the powerful energies making for satisfaction. It is possible to give great emphasis to the state of satisfaction, but within the form of this isolate thinking it is inevitable that satisfaction, however intense, is temporary and that it involves the subjugation or defeat of another.[11]

This is largely applicable to Cary's people, except that destruction with them is inadvertent rather than desired or willed; it is an unavoidable result of their creative freedom and conflicts. But, as in Williams' account, their process of living and becoming what they want to be is a continual struggle, marked by temporary triumphs and by defeats. Their quest for self-realization is rather elusive, as they are continually being blocked and frustrated by others and, decisively, by society.

The conflict with society spells the basic tragic dilemma of Carian man who is at once free and not free to create his own world. Cary's treatment of this traditional conflict, in literature as in philosophy, is based on much the same kind of premise as his treatment of individual conflicts. Society, as "the creation of men" (PM, 1), rather than man, is an outer reality which is objective to and in conflict with every man and his subjective world. Society's "laws, dogmas [and] philosophies are not made for individuals. . . . They cater for an average, for an abstract of man" (SE, 163). This situation turns Carian man into a non-conformist, alienating him from society and

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[11] Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 106.

confronting him with a dilemma: "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" (AR, 28). Cary thus conceives every individual as an outsider in his society and at war with it.

This view of the individual's situation in society accounts much for Cary's sympathetic treatment of his fictional misfits. Almost all the creative individuals cited earlier are non-conformists at war with their society. They follow only their own laws, and are invariably delinquent in their behaviour. They are adulterers and adulteresses (Nimmo, Jimson, Sara and Nina), thieves, robbers and cheats (Johnson, Sara, Jimson and Charley) and liars (Nimmo and Johnson). Some of them (Johnson and Jimson) are even murderers, if unintentional ones, as well. But, as we shall see in the succeeding chapters, Cary presents these rogues and misfits in a manner which elicits the reader's sympathy for them in their conflict with society. They all end by being cast out of society, through imprisonment or death, with society playing a direct or indirect role in their deaths. They come close to Frye's scapegoat type of characters who are figures of social exclusion and of pathos:

> The root idea of pathos is the exclusion of an individual on our own level from a social group to which he is trying to belong. Hence the central tradition of sophisticated pathos is the study of the isolated mind, the story of how someone recognizably like ourselves is broken by a conflict between the inner and outer world, between imaginative reality

> and the sort of reality which is established by a social consensus. Such tragedy may be concerned . . . with a mania or obsession. . . . Or it may deal with the conflict of inner and outer life . . . or the impact of inflexible morality on experience.[12]

Frye could have included Cary's characters among his examples, as much of what he says here applies to them. Their tragedy basically deals with the conflict between the inner and outer world, and it thus involves the impact of society's inflexible morality on their personal experience. But their tragedy is also concerned with a mania or obsession.

In general, Cary's people's pursuit of their personal goals becomes an obsession which manifests itself through their impulsive behaviour. As we shall see in the succeeding chapters, they act impulsively and cannot restrain themselves, even when they are quite aware of the consequences of their actions. It is partly as a result of this that society vainly tries to reintegrate them with itself. It has to resort to the tragic solution of casting the misfits out, so as to protect itself. Their obsessive way of life is at once pathetic and comic; pathetic because it "takes the form of an unconditioned will"[13] and issues in tragedy, and comic because of the automatism it involves, which makes Cary's characters good examples of "the mechanical encrusted upon the living."[14] The incongruity

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[12] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 411.
[13] Frye's sense of a pathetic obsession, p. 40.
[14] Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in Robert Corrigan, ed. Comedy: Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), p. 474.

between the automatism with which they seek their goals and the flexibility with which they should do so, as living souls, makes them Bergsonian comic characters.

Cary's characters are comic not only in the theoretical sense of their joy or comedy of creative freedom, but also in the ordinary sense of the word as the ludicrous. Although he conceives their situation, with its irreconcilable conflicts, in dominantly tragic terms as "a jam," he treats them as comically as tragically, so that we laugh at them even as we pity them. Take, for instance, the conflict between Nina and her husband, Nimmo, in Prisoner of Grace, the first novel of the second trilogy. This conflict, like all conflicts in Cary's world, is essentially tragic, and contributes much to the deaths of both characters. But Nina and Nimmo are tragic figures who are quite comic on the surface. Nina does not love her husband. He is an opportunist who is as unscrupulous in his political management of people as he is in his domestic management of her. Yet she goes on excusing his "scandals," including even his indecent sexual advances after their divorce, when he follows her to her new husband's place. "Chester[Nimmo] had nowhere else to go," she defends him, "and no one to look after him" (PG, 400). The contradiction between her dislike for the man and her submission to and defence of him makes Nina a ludicrous woman at the same time as it makes her a pathetic one. In the first instance, she defends him for his political "scandals" because, even though she does not like

him as a man and she knows that he is a political manipulator, she has somehow been converted to his political "ideals" and does not want him to be ruined. Nina is, politically and domestically, Nimmo's "prisoner," and this is why even her ludicrous defence of his sexual delinquencies is pathetic. Having lived with Nimmo for over thirty years and shared his political triumphs, she is no more able to free herself from the perverse old man than Koestler's commissar, Rubashov, in Darkness at Noon, is able to dissociate himself from the Party he has served all his life. Her situation and arguments arouse both laughter and sympathy:

> And I knew then that I should never get rid of Chester, that I dared not do so. And I saw that it was no good pretending that I merely tolerated an old man's whims because he was pitiful--I did not love Chester and I had never loved him, but now, more than ever, at the end of his life, I was in his power. . . . I knew that he held me still with a thousand ties that I should never break--ties from a marriage of nearly thirty years.
>
> (PG, 400)

In a clearer illustration of Cary's mingling of the ludicrous with the pathetic, Nina earlier tries to free herself from Nimmo through suicide. But her pathetic attempt or desire to throw herself down from an upper storey window is comically foiled when he suddenly appears in pyjamas that begin to slip down:

> Then my hatred seemed to grow suddenly so enormous that I could not bear it. And suddenly without any thought of what I was doing (perhaps I did not know what I should do next), I jumped out of bed. And, seeing that the window was a little open, I pulled up the bottom sash and began to get out. Now I

> did know what to do. I could not go back and I was saying, "I'd rather die." . . .
>
> But just then Chester's pyjamas . . . began to slip down and he grabbed at them with such an offended look (as if they had tried to "betray" him) that I had a horrible impulse to laugh.
>
> And all at once the whole affair, and even my horror of the man, seemed quite ridiculous.
>
> (PG, 308-9)

Although Nimmo himself appears to be dominantly comic, he is also a pathetic figure, once we understand his situation, especially after we have read his own story, Except the Lord. He is a deeply religious man who is well-meaning in his actions, both political and domestic. But, like Wilcher in To be a Pilgrim, he cannot live up to his ideals because of his all-too-human weaknesses. Thus, for instance, he does not want Nina to be his "prisoner" and would rather let her go. Yet because divorcing her would ruin his political career, he finds himself manipulating her into staying with him. And when they finally divorce, after his active political career has ended, he wants to leave her alone. But, in his political ruin and social alienation, compounded by ill-health, he cannot help following her to her new husband's place. He needs her support to write his memoirs and clarify himself to the world. Seen from this angle, Nina's argument that Nimmo had nowhere else to go and nobody else to look after him is quite understandable.

Finally, Nina and Nimmo typify Cary's tragicomic method in depicting death. Both are killed by Nina's new husband, Jim Latter, a political conservative, for supporting the General Strike of 1926. Nimmo tries to escape from Latter by

hiding in a washroom, where he dies of a stroke: "It's a small point, but you never read anywhere that Nimmo died in a W.C." (NHM, 222). And Nina is unceremoniously "executed":

> I said we could not wait any more and did she want to pray. She knelt down but said she could not pray, she did not think it would help. But would I forgive her, because she had truly loved me.
>
> I said it was for her to forgive me and I finished the thing in one stroke. She fell at once and not struggle at all.
>
> (NHM, 223)

There is something casual and jocular about all the deaths in Cary's novels.[15] The most tragic moment of his characters has a comic side, just as their most comic moment has a tragic side. His treatment of death illustrates Corrigan's point that all subjects are "neutral"; a writer can make them "tragic, comic, melodramatic, farcical, or what have you."[16] Kierkegaard implies more or less the same point when he says of death: "I know that the poet can interpret death in a diversity of moods, even to the limit of the comical."[17] This is true of Cary's method.

Aldous Huxley has "a literary theory" which is quite applicable to Cary's tragicomic vision:

> I have a literary theory that I must have a two-angled vision of all my characters. You know how closely farce and tragedy are related. That's because the comic and the tragic are the same thing seen from two angles. I try to get a stereoscopic vision, to show my characters from two angles simultaneously.[18]

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[15] Michael Echeruo suggests that Cary's depiction of death may signify his "image of unheroic humanity." Joyce Cary and the Dimensions of Order (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 148.

[16] Corrigan, p. 8.

[17] W.H. Auden, ed., The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard (New York: David McKay, 1952), p.8.

[18] Quoted in George Woodcock, Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A

This is a theory which Luigi Pirandello himself and other modern tragicomedians would readily endorse. By Pirandello's renowned theory of humour, which has been described as "the key to the comedy of our own times,"[19] the comic and the tragic are also the same thing seen from two angles. His central illustration of this is "an old woman whose dyed hair, heavy make-up, and style of dress are inappropriate to a person of her age."[20] Her appearance is contrary to our expectation and our initial reaction is to laugh at her. Yet when we reflect on the reason for her ludicrous appearance and conjecture that she may not derive any delight from making herself up in such a manner, but does so in a desperate attempt to mask her age and retain the love of a husband many years her junior, our laughter turns into pity for her. The comic and the pathetic are, thus, the same thing seen from two angles. In general, our initial response to Cary's characters is also with laughter; they are dominantly comic on the surface, and this is why Cary is seen by some critics as a comic writer. Such characters as Johnson, Charley, Sara, Gulley, Nina, Nimmo, and even Wilcher all give us a comic first impression, with their odd appearances and actions. But when we perceive the jam they are in, they are pathetic figures beneath their comic

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[18](cont'd) Study of Aldous Huxley (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 103.

[19] J.L. Styan, The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 74.

[20] Oscar Budel, Pirandello (New York: Hillary House Publishers Ltd., 1966), p. 60.

surface. We perceive, with sympathy, that Charley's grotesque figure is the cause of his alienation from other children and of his delinquencies and alienation from the adult world; that Johnson's hilarious pretentious behaviour issues from his "civilization" and loss of self-identity, and is leading him to self-destruction; that Gulley clowns so as not to lose his sanity and kill himself; and that Wilcher, at seventy-one, ludicrously chases young girls in recreational parks and indecently exposes himself to them because he is on the verge of insanity. As with Pirandello's woman, their "comedy stands on pathos."[21]

This is because Cary's fiction is largely built on the tragic side of existence, on the tragic consequences of freedom: conflicts, change, insecurity, injustice, and futility. His characters are, thus, doomed to failure in their quest for self-fulfilment. Their triumphs are "forever balanced on the edge of disaster" (SE, 126), and we can, then, understand why Enid Starkie maintains that Cary "understood . . . the pathos and tragedy of failure better than the glory of triumph." Man's freedom to create his own meaning in life is ultimately futile because of the tragic implications of his freedom:

> Life cannot avoid struggle, tension, and tragedy. They are in the nature of things, of a world in everlasting creation and therefore continuous change. To try to make the world safe for anyone . . . is as

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[21] Walter Kerr, Tragedy and Comedy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 33. According to Kerr, "the tragic [is] "the source of comedy" (p. 19). This is the thesis he demonstrates in his book.

> hopeless a project . . . as to command that everyone shall think alike, or stop thinking altogether; that no one shall get old or sick; that storms shall stop blowing and earthquakes cease to crumple.
>
> (SE, 224)

One of the most abiding tragic themes in Cary's fiction is change, the fluidity of the world which man brings about through his incessant creativity. It is the most unifying theme in his fiction. It runs through all his African novels, his Irish novel (Castle Corner), and many of his English novels. Cary conceives change, as he does freedom itself, as both "our opportunity and our tragedy" (FT, xi). It leads to such progress as "the revolution of women" which greatly fascinated him, as it freed them from the Victorian idea of woman. But it also leads to a world of turmoil, instability and tragedy, a world such as he presents in To be a Pilgrim, in which "the good is forever being destroyed with the bad" (TBP, 8). It is this side of change which predominates his thinking.

In Art and Reality and elsewhere, Cary interprets Henry James: one of the "most powerful influences in my life":[22] "For James, the final tragedy of the world was the fragility of all goodness, all beauty, all excellence" (AR, 94). Whatever the validity of this interpretation, one can certainly say, with Larsen, that it applies to Cary's own work.[23] As we see particularly in To be a Pilgrim and in

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[22] Nathan Cohen, "Conversation with Joyce Cary," Tamarack Review. III (Spring, 1957), p. 13. Cary also mentions Conrad and Hardy as his influences.

[23] Golden Larsen, The Dark Descent: Social Change and Moral Responsibility in the Novels of Joyce Cary (New York: Roy Publishers, 1966), p. 124.

Castle Corner, in his world, the good and the beautiful, as symbolized in Tolbrook Manor and Castle Corner, are evanescent because of change. "How can one fail to suffer," he wrote to Starkie, "coming face to face continually with the shipwreck of so many good men, so many beautiful things?"[24] This tragedy of change makes all human achievement precarious, causing unmerited suffering by ruining people. Matt Monday in Herself Surprised, James Gollan in A Fearful Joy, Nimmo in A Prisoner of Grace, Gulley's father in The Horse's Mouth, and Wilcher himself are notable victims of change, which for most of them followed the Great War. As a child, Cary had seen the ruin of Irish land owners, including his uncle Tristram's, following the land act and civil strife of the day, which appear in Castle Corner. This could have helped to shape his later view of change and ruin.

> Even as a small child . . . I knew something of real tragedy: the tragedy of social conflict in which personal quality counts for nothing; where a man is ruined not because he has done any wrong, but because he represents a class or race. . . .
>
> (SE, 19)
>
> [T]hese disasters, as I realize now, played a very important part in making our background of children entirely different from that of our English compeers. The perpetual gambling, the sense of chancy finances, the general indifference to the future . . .--all this was part of an atmosphere not so much of anxiety as crisis, natural to a generation ruined in a land war, the cruellest, most tragic and unjust form of civil strife. For it is precisely the resident landlords, who have been born in the country, who have lived and worked all their lives in it and put all their capital into it, who suffer

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[24] Enid Starkie, "Joyce Cary: "A Personal Portrait." The Virginia Quarterly Review Vol. 37(1961), p. 112.

> most. To us, from the earliest childhood, in England or Ireland, the fundamental injustice and instability of things, the cruelty of blind fate, was as natural as the air we breathed.
>
> (SE, 64)

When Cary wrote this in old age, he had already included in his "personal vision of life" injustice and bad luck among the evils of freedom. For the arbitrary changes of the world which make or break men are due to man's creative freedom. He is, however, not wholly convincing with his association of luck with freedom:

> The world is shot through with luck, because it is shot through with freedom. It is in the field given over to luck, the field of the unconditioned, that the free soul operates.
>
> (AR, 44)

Cary seems to be in a muddle with luck. He maintains that the free soul's field of operation is "unconditioned" and admits, at the same time, that luck--"of birth, of brains, of beauty, of fate" (AR,44)--affects that field. Since the free soul can do nothing about luck, his field of operation is, after all, not so "unconditioned." Cary's dilemma is his desire to explain human tragedy in terms of freedom alone, and to accomodate "bad luck" or blind fate, a tragic factor in the field of determinism, within the framework of freedom. He has to cling to the tenuous connection that luck, like "real freedom," is "self-determined" or "unconditioned," and is for good or ill. However, this connection enables him to accept luck and ill-luck as he accepts the joy and pain of freedom and change.

Cary's handling of the theme of change also involves, as we should expect, conflicts between the old and the new. These conflicts are central to his African fiction and in prominence come next only to those we have already seen in his major fiction. His African world, like his Irish one, is in transition and turmoil. The traditional order symbolized in the Emirs is giving way to the new order of colonialism and "civilization." But since, as Karl Jaspers theorizes on transition and tragedy, "the old is still alive while the new unfolds itself,"[25] there is, in Cary's expression, "a war on"[26] between the traditional and the colonial orders. This war takes various forms. In Aissa Saved, it takes the form of a bloody religious conflict between "pagans" and "Christians," between the traditional natives and "the detribalized natives"--those, like Aissa, the heroine, who have been "converted" to Jesus. In An American Visitor, the war is dramatized through the natives' idea of a nation and the District Officer Bewsher's idea, while in The African Witch it is dramatized through a savage political conflict between the followers of "the educated African," Louis Aladai, who seeks to replace the conservative old Emir, and the traditional Africans who support the Emir. And in the last and best of Cary's African novels, Mister Johnson, the conflict is expressed through the estrangement of "the

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[25] Karl Jaspers, "Characteristics of the Tragic," in Robert Corrigan, ed. Tragedy: Vision and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), p. 47.
[26] Quoted in Charles Hoffman, Joyce Cary: The Comedy of Freedom (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), p. 8.

detribalized native," the hero, from his native community as well as from himself. These conflicts are, as in Cary's major fiction, both tragic and comic. But except in Mister Johnson, which is artistically closer to the later novels, Cary's tragicomic treatment of the conflicts here has a sensational or melodramatic quality, which is marked by such exaggerated violence and horror as Aissa being eaten by "juju" ants, or Bewsher's head being "smashed and mummified" and his bones mixed with a goat's (AW, 259). The tragicomedy in Cary's African novels, while consistent with his stereoscopic vision of life, is coloured by his declared view, in the preface to The African Witch, that the African setting "just because it is dramatic, demands a certain kind of violence and coarseness of detail, almost a fabulous treatment" (AW, 11). It is this "fabulous treatment" which separates it from the tragicomedy in the rest of his novels, even though the situation from which it arises may be fundamentally similar, as with change and its conflicts.

In his major fiction, Cary's treatment of this theme revolves around the conflict between the creative individual or innovator and the conservative, leading to two basic kinds of tragedy:

> We live in the creation and it presents us with two kinds of tragedy: that of the young genius who desires to create his own new world, in politics or in art, and is defeated by the academicism of those whose art and reputations are threatened by his innovation; and that of the conservative whose world is being destroyed.
>
> (AR, 74)

The first kind of tragedy is, in general, much the same as that confronting all Cary's creative individuals who create their own versions of reality and are defeated by their conservative societies. More specifically, however, the tragedy is illustrated through Gulley Jimson and the mechanical innovator, Rankin, in the same story, both of whom are victims of their inventiveness. Nimmo also offers an illustration of the tragedy through his political inventiveness which ultimately brings about his downfall through his conflict with the conservatives, the Latters. This kind of tragedy is anticipated in the African novels through Louis Aladai and his type who seek to renovate their society and are in mortal conflict with the conservatives, and through the young Assistant District Commissioners (Cary's rank during his colonial service), such as Rudbeck, who want change and are in conflict with the colonial establishment, represented by the conservative Blores and Bulteels.

Although Cary's conservative type of character is also a creative individual, at least in theory, he differs from the Gulley Jimson type of character in that his world is static rather than dynamic. He will not renew it, as he should, and accommodate it to change because of his attachment to the familiar:

> 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. What's more . . . we are committed to it. The reason why the young revolutionary becomes the old conservative is not some disease of age, but simply the fact that he has created in imagination that world, a free revolutionary world, which is being torn from him.
>
> (AR, 74)

Rose in The Moonlight, Tom Wilcher himself, and a host of minor characters in various novels illustrate this passion for the old in conflict with change. At its most dramatic, the conflict takes the form of a clash between the old and the new generations. As Cary theorizes, "older people . . . have grown attached to a certain kind of existence because they have made it, and younger people . . . , in their turn, are anxious to make a new existence for themselves. This situation produces a great variety of tension, comic or tragic" (SE, 116).

But as he treats it, the conflict does not, of course, produce a comic or tragic tension; it produces both at once, as exemplified by the conflict between Wilcher and his nephew and niece, Robert and Ann. Fossilized in Victorian England, Wilcher does not want Robert to make any changes to his symbolic ancestral house, Tolbrook, which he shares with the new generation. But the house does not mean to this generation the eighteenth-century beauty, order, and harmony it means to him. It ends up as a farmhouse, and Old Wilcher has to accept Robert's changes after a long futile struggle, which is comic and pathetic at the same time. Rose is in more or less the same jam in The Moonlight. She too is fossilized in Victorian times. She has lived all her life

according to the letter of the Victorian morality of chastity for women, and she expects her sisters' daughters to live as respectably. She dies in disillusionment. We also have a somewhat similar situation in A Fearful Joy, where the heroine, Tabitha Bonser, is "the young revolutionary [who] becomes the old conservative." In youth, Tabitha rebels against the conventional idea of woman and elopes with a rascally man, Bonser. She becomes, however, a conservative woman in middle age and clashes with her licentious granddaughter, Nancy, for leading a life style which Tabitha herself had, ironically, led at around the same age. The incongruity between her actions makes this situation more dominantly comic. Unlike Wilcher and Rose, Tabitha is a progressive conservative, who pragmatically accomodates herself to the new situation. This flexibility saves her from being broken by Nancy's conduct and by change, in general. In fact, her story is not so much that of a conservative as that of a creative individual who is perpetually creating and recreating her world to adjust it to "the continuous revolution of the world"--the principal theme of the story. She is thus a character foil to the Wilcher type of character. The prototype of this type is an "out-moded artist" whom Cary met in Paris and whom he uses now and again in his theoretical writings to illustrate the tragedy of the conservative and, hence, the necessity of recreating, perpetually, one's personal world:

> As for the tragedy of the old, it is even more

> common. I remember myself at sixteen, on a holiday in France, seeing an artist of my acquaintance in a garden. He was a man over sixty, who had at one time been hung, year after year, in the Academy. He painted chiefly girls in gardens. I had gone to the farmhouse where he lived with his ragged family and an exhausted wife and I had found him standing among the hollyhocks beside an easel on which he had placed his latest picture, in a new gilt frame. It had just been returned to him after rejection by the Academy. He had now been rejected four or five times in succession--he could not sell his pictures any more and was in deepest poverty. . . .
>
> The tragedy here is . . . of a man of sixty, not only ruined financially, but whose whole life and skill had lost its meaning.
>
> (AR, 75-6)

This tragedy of the old painter, which is recreated in The Horse's Mouth, through Gulley Jimson's ruined father, who was once a successful painter, encapsulates Cary's recurring views on the vicissitudes of life: the instability of human achievement, the cruelty of blind fate, and the fundamental injustice of the world ("a man is ruined not because he has done anything wrong," but because of the arbitrary changes of the world). The tragedy also serves to show the dilemma of Carian man, as conservative or innovator. Gulley's father, the old painter, is in the same jam as Gulley himself, the modern painter: both are destitute and ruined, ultimately, because of "what they are"; because of their own way of self-realization. This is the inescapable "final tragedy" of Carian man.

Cary's tragic sense of life would have led many other writers to paint an awfully gloomy world picture. But it does not lead him to do so. In spite and because of its tragedies, his world is quite gay, at least on the surface.

It is lit up by his corollary sense of life as joyful and by his sense of humour, his "eye for a ridiculous and humorous situation."[27] With the exception of the Wilcher type of characters, who are too battered by life to delight in it, most of his characters have boundless vitality, resource, and zest for life, which are heightened rather than overwhelmed by their frustrations. Thus, for example, Charley's "misfortune" of having his head ridiculously shaven and being "an outcast" in the children's world, far from breaking him, engenders in him resourceful and vigorous activities of various kinds. Before his final fall, his execution, Johnson falls, in his fortunes as the big man of Fada, only to rise again with greater energy and triumph. So does Sara Monday, in her nest-building career. No sooner has her nest been destroyed than she starts building another one in high spirits. This is also true of Tabitha Bonser whom the vicissitudes of life in her world of continuous creation and change provide a challenge that she meets with admirable strength and resource. Such is her zest for life that even at eighty-four, when she is suffering from a stroke and is all alone, with her husband and her son dead and her granddaughter gone away to Australia, she ardently wants to live. She delights in life, as symbolized in the children--the continuity of life--she meets in Kensington Gardens who make her laugh wildly, causing this fearful joy of life, with which her story appropriately ends:

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[27] Starkie, p. 133.

> Tabitha is seized with laughter. She can't help laughing, an irresistable passion of laughter shakes her whole body, and at once a tearing pain shoots through to her heart. She thinks, "stop--stop--it's killing me--I'm dying," and sinks breathless upon a seat.
>
> She is protesting with all her might against this laughter, this life which has taken hold of her, which is threatening to kill her, but still she is full of laughter. Her very agony is amused at itself. She presses her hand to her heart as if to grasp that frightful pain in her fingers and squeeze it back, crush it out of existence. She is terrified that it will kill her, and never has she wished so ardently to live. Her whole being prays to be reprieved this once--for a month, a week. . . .
>
> Gradually the pain becomes less, the terror falls away before the longing, the prayer. She perceives that she is not going to die that afternoon. And, as cautiously straightening her back, she looks again at the sky, the trees, the noisy quarreling children, at a world remade, she gives a long deep sigh of gratitude, of happiness.
>
> (AFJ, 343)

Through characters such as Tabitha, Cary offers a good illustration of what Charles Glicksberg, in The Tragic Vision in Twentieth-Century Literature, calls "that ecstatic affirmation of life which the tragic vision paradoxically calls forth."[28] Tabitha's zest for life and will to live ironically reach their climax as she faces death. This is also largely true of Wilcher, who faces life as he faces death at the end of his story and life, when he stops complaining about his battered life and accepts it as it is. But Cary's principal illustration of the paradoxical affirmation of life is, as always, Gulley Jimson. Throughout the story, the frustrated artist's misfortunes are the source of inspiration for his determination "to get on," for

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[28] Charles Glicksberg, The Tragic Vision in Twentieth-Century Literature (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), p. 53.

his vitality and gusto, which defy even his death-stroke at the end of the story. He faces his death with a joking mood which characterizes his frustrated life and is remarkably like that with which Cary himself faced his own death. Enid Starkie writes:

> As often happens with those whose view of life is sad, he had a rich fund of comedy and fun, an eye for a ridiculous and humorous situation, and a delightful irony that was the most Irish thing about him. This was sometimes of the "humour noir" variety and, on his death-bed, he joked with the irony of a Scarron.[29]

Dr. Whitty, one of his doctors, was also impressed by his patient's confrontation with death;

> He faced this illness ["amyotrophic lateral sclerosis"], which he knew to be fatal, with considerable stoicism. "Whatever happens, I want to finish this book" [The Captive and the Free, Cary's last novel, posthumously published], he said. He never complained, and did not need consolation and possible glossing over the truth. . . . He just struck me as a very integrated chap who was facing the situation realistically and with great courage. But it is rare to find a person who can behave as he did.[30]

Cary's philosophy of life, according to which apparently tried to live and which informs his characterization of his most likable characters, the Gulley Jimson type, involves, among other things, acceptance and defiance of human tragedy. He accepts it uncomplainingly because it is "the price we pay" for our freedom (SE, 253). Moreover, he argues, "life is given to us. It is a free

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[29] Starkie, p. 133.
[30] Barbara Fisher, ed. Joyce Cary Remembered in Letters and Interviews by his Family and Others (Totowa: Barnes and Noble Books, 1988), p. 250.

gift. We do nothing to merit it" (SE, 251). And so, Plantie completes the argument in The Horse's Mouth, "what right have we to complain that we weren't given it different" (HM, 87). This uncomplaining or stoic attitude to life and its vicissitudes is, like all Cary's major ideas, best represented in The Horse's Mouth, his masterpiece. Gulley and his friend Plantie, in contrast with Wilcher before his epiphany (his acceptance of change and tragedy as part of life) at the end of To be a Pilgrim, try to accept their misfortunes uncomplainingly. Instead of complaining, they make a deliberate attempt to transcend tragedy by trying to make the best of a bad situation. Thus Gulley "resorts," in Glicksberg's expression, "to the weapon of irony to enable him to endure his fate. He can laugh at his own sorry predicament."[31] This defiant attitude defines the heroism of Carian man, and is generally expressed in Cary's major fiction through his refusal to permit his central characters, always excepting Wilcher before his epiphany, to be overwhelmed by their woes. He transmutes their tragedy into comedy by making it a source of inspiration for their "intensity of living." Cary concludes the Irish land war passage, already cited:

> To us . . . the fundamental injustice and instability of things, the cruelty of blind fate, was as natural as the air we breathed, and, as I think, probably as important. . . . We lived more intensely, and set a far higher value on what we had.
>
> (SE, 64)

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[31] Glicksberg, p. 151.

He underscores the point: "[Children have] a wonderful power of enjoying themselves amidst every kind of discouragement. The very insecurity of their lives hardens their nerve" (SE, 22). We can see, then, why Cary characterizes not only children, such as Charley, but also his adult characters with defiant vitality and resilience. As in most modern literature, the tragic is largely the matrix of the comic in Cary's novels. If he is "a joyful trout," it is largely because of his tragic sense of life.

In their defiant vitality and resilience, Cary's people offer a good illustration of "the comic spirit," in Robert Corrigan's sense of the term: "the sense that no matter how many times man is knocked down, he somehow manages to pull himself up and keep on going."[32] They also live up to Susanne Langer's idea of a character of elan vital:

> The indomitable living creature fending for itself, tumbling and stumbling . . . from one situation to another, getting into scrape after scrape and getting out again, with or without a thrashing. He is the personified elan vital; . . . his absurd expectations and disappointments, in fact his whole improvised existence has the rhythm of primitive, savage, if not animalian life, coping with a world that is forever taking uncalculated turns, frustrating but exciting. He is neither a good man nor a bad one, but he is genuinely amoral,--now triumphant, now worsted and rueful, but in his ruefulness and dismay he is funny, because his energy is really unimpaired and each failure prepares the situation for a new fantastic move.[33]

This is surely true of people like Charley, Johnson, Sara, Gulley and Tabitha, although they do not end with triumph,

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[32] Comedy: Meaning and Form, p. 3.
[33] Susanne Langer, "The Comic Rhythm" In Comedy: Meaning and Form, pp. 133-4.

as Langer's elan vital supposedly does. However, her theory of comedy, "The Comic Rhythm," coincides with Cary's practice in many respects. According to Langer, "comedy is an image of human vitality holding its own in the world" full of surprises.[34] It is an expression of "vital continuity," the human drive to "look for as much life as possible," for "intensity of experience" before death.[35] Her idea of "human vitality" presupposes a world, like Cary's, bedeviled with obstacles against which man's "vital continuity" is measured: "The world that presents all obstacles also supplies the zest for life."[36] Man's ability to triumph over the obstacles is his heroism and comic joy. In a sentence which Cary would have loved, Langer says: "The conflict with the world whereby a living being maintains its own organic unity is a delightful encounter; the world is as promising and alluring as it is dangerous and opposed."[37] No other theory of comedy that I know of is so consistent with Cary's practice. What is surprising, though, is that none of his critics has ever mentioned Susanne Langer in relation to his comedy.

Cary, with his eye for the ridiculous, underlines the humorous side of his fiction by creating comic type-characters who do not change from beginning to end, and who are exaggeratedly odd in both appearance and manners. While Wilcher differs from the rest in that he develops at

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[34] Langer, 124.
[35] Langer, 134.
[36] Langer, 139.
[37] Langer, 139.

the end, he is like them in his oddities:

> He was a little man with a bald head and round black spectacles. His nose was very short, just like a baby's, and he had a long blue upper lip, like a priest, which made me say: "You're one of the arguers." He had long thin red lips and the under one stuck out and curled over, which made him look obstinate and sulky. His chin was blue as if it had been shot full of gunpowder and it had a very nice split in the middle. His neck was blue too, and there were scars on the back and I could see, too, that the poor man, like Matt, had suffered terribly from boils. His face was pale yellow all but a little mauve, rhubarb colour, over the bones of the cheek. (HS, 142)

And here is Gulley Jimson:

> Mr. Jimson was a little bald man with a flat nose and a big chin. His head was big and hung over so that his face was hollow in the middle. He was much older than we expected, getting on for forty; very shabby too, and had a front tooth missing. (HS, 41)

His wife, Nina, "was a little thin thing with a long neck and a very big forehead. Her nose and chin were small so that the forehead seemed out of proportion" (HS, 46). Charley's former teacher "was a thin woman in pince-nez, the very type teacher of the comic papers; in a badly-fitting tweed skirt" (CD, 174). Mr. Wandle, in the same story, "is a very tall man with a deep stoop. He has a pale face, a long sharp chin and a very large white hooked nose, of which the tip is depressed almost to his upper lip" (CD, 158). There are many such comic descriptions of characters in all Cary's novels. He was particularly impressed by "Dickens' genius for humorous character" (SE, 179). Dickens' grotesque people, such as Mr. Micawber, are, in Cary's view, "immortal":

> We remember that Trollope despised Dickens for the exaggeration and falsity of his characters, but that Dickens is an immeasurably greater writer than Trollope; and that it is precisely Dickens' exaggerated and false characters who remain in our memory, who, as it is said, are "immortal." We are offered the paradox that "unreal" characters are among the most effective in fiction and have a vitality that keeps them effective for generations. (SE, 172)

It is then not accidental that Cary's own characters are "exaggerated" and grotesque, as the following chapters, beginning with Johnson's, will confirm.

III. "The Poet of Life and Death": Mister Johnson

Mister Johnson is a watershed in Cary's artistic career. It marks the end of his first phase, which is dominated by his melodramatic sociological novels of Africa, and the beginning of his major phase of metaphysical novels of character. The novel, then, can be read in either context. It can be seen as a tragicomic story, like Cary's first novel, Aissa Saved, of "the detribalized native" who is dislocated and estranged from his native society by his superficial mission-school education, and is "lost in the world."[1] It can also be seen as a tragicomic story, like Cary's best novel, The Horse's Mouth, of Carian man as a free creative individual who shapes his own world, and is inevitably destroyed, in the end, through the collision between the subjective and the objective realities. But since Johnson's "civilized" world is naturally built on his education, the two factors of his tragicomedy are, of course, inseparably interconnected, and neither of the interpretations can be, by itself, sustained and convincing. However, the following discussion is focused on the latter interpretation as it does more justice to the story.

Johnson, the young Nigerian hero of the novel, is the first of Cary's major artist figures and outsiders who are characteristically as creative, lively, and resilient as they are amoral, roguish, and bedeviled with trouble. He is

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[1] Joyce Cary quoted in Cornelia Cook, Joyce Cary: Liberal Principles (Totawa: Vision Press, 1981), p. 61. The term "detribalized African" is commonly used in the criticism of the European novel of Africa.

a man of dynamic imagination, and Cary underlines the point through his hero's poetry or songs, and, especially, through his resourceful methods of building "Rudbeck's road"--the dominant symbol of Johnson's creative imagination. Johnson suggests to Rudbeck, the District Officer who is obsessed with building roads without knowing how to fulfill his dream, not only the idea of building a road to the north of Fada, to promote trade in the area, but also the ways of realizing the idea. It is, for instance, his method of mixing labour with pleasure--music and beer--which attracts the reluctant labourers and leads to the completion of the road.

But, true to Cary's double vision of the creative imagination as the source of both good and evil, Johnson is as creative as he is destructive, and his road itself reflects this dichotomy:

> The road itself seems to speak. . . ."I'm smashing up the old Fada--I shall change everything and everybody in it. I am abolishing the old ways, the old ideas, the old law; I am bringing wealth and opportunity for good as well as vice, new powers to men and therefore new conflicts."
>
> (168-9)

Johnson's imagination is similarly "for good as well as vice." He is, by the conventional moral code according to which his society judges and condemns him, a criminal: a thief, a robber and murderer. His life ends in execution after he murders Gollup, a white storekeeper, during a robbery. The murder is, however, quite unpremeditated. He finds himself stabbing Gollup with a knife when the

storekeeper confronts him with a gun and Johnson has to save himself. This mitigates Johnson's crime, from the point of view of the reader. For Cary encourages us to pity the unintentional murderer, who is, for all his inventive mind, quite childish in his naivety and amorality. Robbery is, for Johnson, a kind of game, a means of winning for himself "glory" and admiration by being daring, as well as by entertaining his "friends" with "his" money. But Johnson's judges do not temper justice with mercy. Although "Mr. A.D.O. Rudbeck begs to recommend a reprieve" because of "the prisoner's youth and nervous instability" and because "he did not premeditate the murder" (212), the judges "see no reason to advise the Governor-General that Johnson should be reprieved" (212).

Johnson is, as Jonah Raskin aptly describes him, a "poet of life and death."[2] He seeks "to create happiness" (109) for himself and for others, but creates tragedy as well. This tragic dilemma basically issues from the contradiction between Johnson's delusive idea of himself and reality. His "civilization" and position as a "government clerk" conspire with his naive but inventive mind to distort his image of himself and block his self-knowledge. He sees himself and poses as an important civilized man, "rich and powerful" (11). His ruling passion is to make other natives see him as he sees himself and win their admiration and respect. In pursuit of this obsession, he destroys himself

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[2] Jonah Raskin, The Mythology of Imperialism (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 294.

through the conflict between what he "pretends or tries to be"[3] and what he is:

> The fact is that Johnson is a temporary clerk, still on probation, called up on emergency from a mission school. He has been in Fada six months and is already much in debt. He gives parties almost every night and he seems to think that a man in his important position, a Third-class government clerk, is obliged to entertain on the grandest scale, with drums and smuggled gin.
>
> (16)

Johnson is a self-deceived impostor character-type who, "in his pretentious behaviour. . .[is] quite unaware of his own true nature" [4] or identity. He really believes--and "he believes every word as soon as he invents it" (119)--that he is "a big man" (12). His lack of self-knowledge is comic in Plato's sense: "The person who is ridiculous is he who is farthest from fulfilling the Delphic inscription, 'Know thyself.'"[5] Frye writes to similar effect: "comedy is designed not to condemn evil, but to ridicule a lack of self-knowledge."[6] But, as Sophocles shows with his Oedipus, lack of self-knowledge is, of course, also tragic. It is Johnson's ignorance of himself that makes him a victim of an illusion he tragically strives to realize. His illusion that he is important leads to his debts, troubles with his

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[3] Frye's conception of an impostor or alazon: "someone who pretends or tries to be something more than he is." Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 39.
[4] Marie Swabey, Comic Laughter: A Philosophical Essay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 36.
[5] Quoted in Swabey, p. 36.
[6] Northrop Frye, "The Argument of Comedy" in Laurence Lerner, ed. Shakespeare's Comedies: An Anthology (Penguin, 1967), p.317.

creditors, and thefts, culminating in his fateful robbery.

Yet Johnson's idea of himself also leads to his triumphs. It is both his joy and pain of creative freedom. He derives "enormous happiness" (18) from his ingenious efforts to fulfill his idea of himself. He "gives parties almost every night" (16), marries Bamu, "the most beautiful girl in Fada" (11), and buys her and himself "civilized" clothes. His triumphs are, however, continually undercut by his troubles with his creditors, so that his mood is characterized by frequent transitions from self-congratulatory exhilaration to self-condemnatory despair. When, for example, he has offered to pay "a large sum" (16) to marry Bamu, he jubilantly sings, in self-congratulation:

> "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.
> How doo, lil girl? I see you dar.
>
> (19-20)

But no sooner has he finished singing than he is confronted by one of his many creditors and gripped by a suicidal, if comically exaggerated, despair:

> "You pay me now!" shrieks the woman. "I go to judge now!"
>
> "But--but--but--"
>
> "Robber--liar--I tell judge how you rob me--"
>
> Johnson puts down his head and rushes past her into the clerk's office, where he collapses into a chair. He . . . mutters, "Oh, Gawd! Oh, Jesus! I done finish . . . Mister Johnson done finish. . . ." He hits himself on the forehead with his fist. "Why you so bloody big dam' fool, you Johnson? . . . You catch government job--you catch good pay--you catch dem

> pretty girl . . . now you play de bloody fool--you spoil everyting.
>
> (20)

Similarly, when Rudbeck refuses to give him "a small small advance" (61) to pay his creditors, Johnson descends from "the highest spirits" (60) into the deepest slough of despond:

> Johnson's despair is extreme. He feels it even more acutely than he feels his pleasures, because when he is happy, he simply enjoys, forgetting himself; but when he is unhappy, he hates himself and dwells on his own faults. He murmurs to the air, "Oh, you bloody fool. . . ."
>
> "I'm a fool. I'll take a knife and split myself up--that's all I'm worth. I'm a bad fool--I'll pour kerosene on my English suit and set myself on fire--I'm tired of myself."
>
> (62)

It is because when Johnson is happy, he forgets his troubles in the pleasure of the moment that he is so comically and tragically susceptible to suicidal despair. When his troubles "force themselves upon him" (78), he is suddenly deeply shocked, as he had forgotten them. Yet, for all his self-condemnation, he does not learn from this experience. He is one of Cary's unreflecting heroes and heroines who are too preoccupied with the creative activity of the moment to think. They are "carried unreflecting on the stream of events" (9). As is suggested by the present tense in which his story is narrated, Johnson "lives in the present, from hour to hour" (7), so that he practically has no past experience to teach him. He thus remains, like almost all Cary's people, a static character from the

beginning .he end.[7]

Johnson's oscillation between elation and despair is reiterated on a larger scale through his recurrent triumphs and defeats in his employment. These triumphs and defeats underline the double-edged nature of his creative imagination, and give his story a rise-and-fall pattern that constitutes the form of the novel. Johnson establishes himself in a job, loses it and finds another one only to lose it again. He creates and recreates, as Cary would say, his world three times, and these are the principal parts of his tragicomedy. The opening and longest part is focused on his job as a "government clerk" and on his marriage to the village belle, Bamu. The second part begins shortly after he has been sacked from his government job, when he finds a job as a store clerk for Sergeant Gollup. This part ends in an ominous fight between Johnson and his employer who then dismisses him. The third part is centred on Johnson's work with Rudbeck on completing the road, while the concluding part is centred on his capital crime and punishment.

Molly Mahood is of the opinion that this rise-and-fall pattern is "superficial" to the meaning of the story, and represents a "point of view which is certainly not the

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[7] There is a hint that Johnson has learnt something from his experience when he remarks on the plight of Saleh, a fellow prisoner: "It makes you think that a chap has to look out for himself--yes, you've got to be careful" (202). But since he has been all along regretting his follies only to repeat them, his remark does not mean much. The only one of Cary's characters who develops is Wilcher in To Be a Pilgrim.

author's."[8] She has missed the point. Her claim is refuted by Cary's use of essentially the same pattern in other novels, especially in Herself Surprised and A Fearful Joy. In these novels, as in Mister Johnson, the pattern signifies not only the close alliance between creation and destruction, but also the perpetuity of the processes. Carian man's creativity, it will be recalled from the previous chapter, is as insistent as it is futile, and herein lies the third significance of the pattern: Carian man's vitality and resilience. As we saw, his ability, such as Johnson shows, to "keep on going on," in spite of all setbacks, is the touchstone of Cary's comic spirit. Cary's characters show what Hague considers to be a common attribute of the comic hero: "a self-confidence and geniality that can survive the dissolution of the character's goals and expectations."[9] This is clearly implicit in Johnson's falls and rises, and it is, then, difficult to agree with Mahood that the pattern represents a "superficial view," Ajali's, of the hero. Yet she goes on to talk about Johnson's resilience, which is integral to the meaning of the pattern: his resilience presupposes his frustrations. "Johnson," Mahood correctly states, "is never down for long before being carried to the crest of his own vitality."[10] But the resilience leads Mahood to see the

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[8] Molly M. Mahood, Joyce Cary's Africa (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 172-3.
[9] Angela Hague, Iris Murdoch's Comic Vision (London: Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 23.
[10] Mahood, p. 173.

novel as a story of triumph: "Johnson was able to transform a story of failure, in Cary's mind, into a triumph."[11] To accept this is obviously to see Mister Johnson from only one angle as a comedy, which it is not.

Johnson's life is, for all its comic vitality, profoundly tragic, and offers a good example of "Cary's deep seriousness [as]. . . the well-spring of the comic spirit" of his stories.[12] Johnson is "in a jam." His "civilization" has only succeeded in making him hate his indigenous culture. It has estranged him not only from himself, through his loss of self-identity, but also from other natives--"dese savages," as he calls them. In turn, their "general opinion [of him] is that he is mad" (13). He is a misfit in their society, not to speak of the civilized society to which he aspires to belong. Johnson's situation is compounded by the fact that he is also quite literally "a stranger" in Fada. He comes from another part of Nigeria and is "completely alone" (23) in Fada, where "strangers are still rare . . . and are received with doubt" (11). This dual alienation makes him highly vulnerable, especially so as he is a tragically naive hero. He is as unreflecting as he is unsuspecting, and sees everyone as a friend "who gives him the least excuse to do so" (102). Thus, for example, Ajali who is spitefully envious of Johnson's temporary successes and later dares him to steal from Gollup's store,

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[11] Mahood, p. 173.
[12] V.S. Pritchett, "Introduction" Mister Johnson ed. The Editors of Time (New York: Time Incorporated, 1962), p. xiii.

is a friend because he is "an admirer" of his reckless deeds. His boss Rudbeck is his friend because of the condescending politeness he shows him. Yet Johnson's friend refuses to give him a small advance of pay, and sets in motion the clerk's serious criminal career, which he starts by stealing Rudbeck's confidential files and showing them to the Emir's prime minister, the Waziri, in return for the Waziri's financial "help."

For such self-interested support, Johnson naturally regards the corrupt Waziri as his friend, although he is his mortal enemy, who hates Johnson's road and orders his severe beating when he goes to him for support after he has lost his government job. In fact, most of the natives in the story are Johnson's "enemies":

> Those who, when he was in danger of ruin, merely enjoyed the idea of his folly and certain humiliation, are disgusted by his success. It seems to them unjust that such a fool and rascal should escape punishment. Rudbeck's boy, Jamesu, is so furious that often when he looks at Johnson, he screws up his eyes at him as if they smart at the very sight. The cook, Tom, also glares. . . .
>
> Ajali, too, is disgusted with Johnson. He can no longer occupy himself with the idea of Johnson's folly. . . . He hates the sight or the name of Johnson.
>
> (86-7)

Ajali is Iago's offspring in his malice for Johnson. He is also, as Frye would call him, a "churlish" blocking agent "whose role is that of the refuser of festivity, the killjoy who tries to stop the fun."[13] "Bored to exasperation" (86) with life, Ajali cannot stand seeing Johnson happy. But the

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[13] Anatomy of Criticism, p. 176.

simple-minded clerk is much too obsessed with winning admiration to see his enemies.

Basically because of Johnson's naivety, "civilization," and lack of awareness of himself and others, his story is, from the start, fraught with tragic potential. It is played out against an ever-present danger of his destruction, and there is a strong undercurrent of the tragic beneath even his most comic actions, such as his buffoonery with his "civilized" clothes, as shown, for example, when he goes to visit Bamu's relatives:

> The next morning is Sunday. Johnson puts on his best suit and goes to visit his Bamu. In the cool of the early morning, in his clean white suit he goes at high speed. He carries his shoes in one hand, his white helmet in the other, his new sun umbrella under his arm, and skilfully avoids the least touch of a leaf or creeper on his shining trousers. He is as happy, probably, as even he can be, in the sense of his beautiful suit, his new shoes, his friend Rudbeck's support, and of the approach to Bamu.
>
> When he comes in sight of the ferry village, called Jirige, he puts on his shoes and his white helmet, and advances with the dignified steps of a governor-general in full uniform.
>
> (25)

Johnson's clownish dressing is a tragic symbol of his dislocation and absurd idea of himself. It makes him, then, quite a pathetic figure beneath his buffoonery. Besides, this particular scene underlines the danger he is in as "a stranger" trying to appear rich and important. When Bamu's people discover that he has no money to pay for her bride-price, they literally unmask him of his comic mask of importance by stripping him of his clothes. Johnson goes back home "naked except for a loin cloth" (30), and he has

to start buying another comic mask, on credit.

The comic and the tragic in Mister Johnson are so inextricably mixed that while the story appears to be full of comic scenes, it is hard to find and analyse one without tragic implications. Tragedy lurks behind even Johnson's hilarious parties, full of merriment, which he throws to show his importance only to win enemies. Besides the Ajalis and the Waziris in collaboration with his creditors, Johnson's mania for entertaining wins him the implacable enmity of his conservative first boss, Blore, who "really hates Johnson. The shouts and songs from the clerk's compound, during several nights, have filled him with what he takes for indigestion, but which is chiefly fear. All exuberance alarms him, as if he feels in it . . . some threat to established things" (24). This hatred accounts much for Blore's fateful report against Johnson which largely contributes to the clerk's dismissal from his government job. Johnson, we learn from Tring who dismisses him, "would not have been sacked [for "unorthodox accounting" (115)] if it had not been for his very bad reports" (115). Both Blore and Rudbeck give him bad reports which pave the way to his execution by sending him to work for Gollup, a position which enables him to steal the keys to Gollup's store and to rob from it at will later.

Johnson is, in Aldous Huxley's phrase, "a walking farce and a walking tragedy at the same time"[14] as he innocently

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[14] Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay (London: Granada Publishing, 1977), p. 211.

and ingeniously strives to realize his absurd idea of himself in a dangerous world which understands him no better than he understands it. We pity him even as we laugh at him in his self-destructive clowning. Some critics, though, imply that Johnson is tragic at the end and comic before that. Charles Hoffman, for instance, writes: "He is no longer comic as he prepares to rob Gollup in a last desperate action to save his dream."[15] V.S. Pritchett writes to similar effect: "A novel which is as breathlessly comic and endlessly ingenious as anything Cary ever wrote ends by making us weep."[16] Both critics are right in a sense, but they seem to overlook the fact that Johnson is, from the beginning, both comic and tragic. His death only comes as a full realization of his tragic potential. But, as so often in Cary's world, Johnson's death is no more purely tragic than his life is purely comic. It has an absurdist comic aspect as Johnson is farcically weighed just before his execution:

> "What do you weigh, Johnson?"
> "Weigh, sah, I don' know."
> "And we don't happen to have a weighing machine, do we? Sargy, get that palm rib over there--the big roof stick."
> The sergeant fetches a palm rib from the cluster leaning against the fort wall. . . .
> "Sling it up to the porch by the middle."
> They hang up the rib, tie an office chair to one end on four ropes; and a chop box on the other. Rudbeck throws a few chunks of earth into the chop box to balance the chair. He asks Johnson to sit in

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[15] Charles Hoffman, Joyce Cary": The Comedy of Freedom (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964) p. 40.
[16] Pritchett, p. xi.

> the chair and hold tight.
>
> "Open the cash tank, Sargy.". . .
>
> The sergeant . . . uncovers a slab of galvanized iron level with the earth. He unlocks two padlocks and raises the slab to show a great heap of money bags. . . .
>
> "Put 'em in the box, Sargy."
>
> The sergeant puts bags of silver into the box until the chair rises and the box is on the floor.
>
> Johnson, who has watched this proceeding with interest, asks now, "How much I weigh, sah?"
>
> "How much is that, Sargy?"
>
> "Four bags, two shillings, sah, one bag shilling, one bag sixpence," the sergeant says.
>
> "Five hundred and fifty pounds in silver--at twenty-five pounds a hundred. That's five fives are twenty-five and five twos are a hundred and twenty-five, plus twelve and a half are one hundred and thirty-seven and a half. Say eight. Go and get some jam, Sargy. . . ."
>
> The sergeant returns with one tin of flour, and seven of jam, which Rudbeck hands to Johnson one by one; when he is holding the tin of flour and three tins of jam piled crookedly on his lap, the balance slowly tips and sinks. Rudbeck reckons . . . "That's what did I say minus four of flour and three one-pound jam--seven."
>
> "One hundred and thirty-one, sah," Johnson says. (213-4)

In its mood and action, the scene appears to be anything but a macabre preparation for a hanging. The hapless condemned prisoner is made to give various comic impressions: he seems to be a lucky man going to be given his weight in silver bags, or a child at play with his mates, or, most dominantly, a commodity weighed for its commercial value. Yet beneath the comic mask of the scene is its gruesome reality of the weighing of the prisoner to determine the length of the rope required for his hanging: "so many feet of rope for a seven-stone prisoner; so many for eight-stone, nine-stone. The heavier the prisoner, the less the drop" (212). The savage comedy of the scene

sustains Cary's mingling of the comic with the tragic throughout the novel, and justifies Arnold Kettle's point about "Cary's method":

> I do not see how within its appointed limits Mister Johnson could be better done. Humour and compassion are blended, not in the sentimental fashion of the following of an amusing scene by a pathetic one, but through the conveying at the same time of the pathos and the humour of the same situation, so that one laughs and cries at once.[17]

Johnson's tragicomic life is interwoven with his relationships with three major characters: his wife, Bamu, his employer, Gollup, and, especially, his government boss, the Assistant District Officer Rudbeck. Johnson's relationship with Bamu stands for his ideal to have a "civilized" wife and, as Andrew Wright says, complement his own "civilization."[18] The tragicomic contradiction between Johnson's great expectations of Bamu as his wife and his achievement naturally arises from the conflict, which Cary treats in various ways in all his African novels, between their "incompatible ideals."[19] "There's a war on"[20] between her "primitivity" and his "civilization." Except for its tragic aspect, their conflict parallels Lakunle's with Sidi in Soyinka's comedy, The Lion and the Jewel, and serves a mildly satiric purpose to ridicule Johnson's simple-minded idea of civilization which, like Lakunle's, involves little

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[17] Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel Vol.II (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 179.
[18] Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary: A Preface to his Novels (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 84.
[19] Cary quoted in Hoffman, p. 8.
[20] Ibid.

more than parties, clothes and kisses. At the same time, however, Johnson's idea of civilization serves Cary to show the fertility of his hero's imagination, as exemplified by his fantasies shortly after meeting Bamu:

> [H]is mind is full of marriage and the ferry girl. He imagines her in a blouse and skirt, shoes and silk stockings, with a little felt hat full of feathers, and makes a jump of two yards. All the advertisements of stays, camisoles, nightgowns in the store catalogues pass through his imagination, and he dresses up the brown girl first in one and then in another. Then he sees himself introducing her to his friends: "Missus Johnson--Mister Ajali."
>
> The idea makes him laugh and he gives another spring over a root. How he will be envied for that beautiful girl. But he will not only make her a civilized wife; he will love her. He will teach her how to attend parties with him; and how to receive his guests, how to lie down in one bed with a husband, how to kiss, and how to love. Johnson's idea of a civilized marriage, founded on the store catalogues, their fashion notes, the observation of missionaries at his mission school, and a few novels approved by the S.P.C.K., is a compound of romantic sentiment and embroidered underclothes.
>
> (13)

In her anatomy of the comic novel, Angela Hague makes the point that the comic hero often shows a fantasizing habit of mind which reflects his desire to "create new versions of reality, and is an important feature of his dynamic, inventive personality."[21] This is quite true of Johnson, except that his fantasies have a tragic implication. He mistakes, in Frye's expression, "the dream world which we create out of our own desires"[22] for actuality and fatefully strives to realize his wishfulfilment. Thus, because he wishes Bamu to love him, he

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[21] Hague, p. 39.
[22] "The Argument of Comedy," p. 324.

deceives himself and others that she does. "'Mister Johnson,' he imagines her saying, 'I 'gree for you, I don't like dese savage men--I like civilized man. Mister Johnson . . . You good nice government man, me government lady. I love you with all my heart--we live happy, loving couple all time everyday'" (30-1). Yet Bamu has nothing but disdain for Johnson, and mutely snubs his ridiculous advances when they first meet:

> One day at the ferry over Fada River, a young clerk called Johnson came to take passage. The ferryman's daughter, Bamu, was a local beauty, with a skin as pale and glistening as milk chocolate, high, firm breasts, round, strong arms. She could throw a twenty-foot pole with that perfect grace which was necessary to the act, if the pole was not to throw her. Johnson sat admiring her with a grin of pleasure and called out compliments, "What a pretty girl you are."
>
> Bamu said nothing. She saw that Johnson was a stranger. Strangers are still rare in Fada bush and they are received with doubt. This is not surprising because in Fada history all strangers have brought trouble; war, disease or bad magic. . . . [Johnson] sits with his knees up to his nose, grinning at Bamu over the stretched cotton of his trousers. He smiles with the delighted expression of a child looking at a birthday table and says, "Oh, you are too pretty--a beautiful girl."
>
> Bamu pays no attention. . . .
>
> "What pretty breasts--God bless you with them." . . .
>
> When Johnson lands, he walks backwards up the bank, laughing at her. But she does not even look at him. The next day he comes again. Bamu is not working at the ferry. But he lies in wait for her in the yam fields and follows her as she carries home her load from the field store, admiring her and saying, "You are the most beautiful girl in Fada."
>
> 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. . . .

> Two days later he finds her again in the ferry. . . .
>
> The dugout touches the bank, and Bamu strikes the pole into the mud to hold firm. Johnson gets up and balances himself awkwardly. . . . 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!"
>
> (11-12)

The passage is a self-contained tragicomedy of Johnson's unrequited but insistent love for Bamu, and reveals much about his situation and character at the outset of the story. As "a stranger" to Bamu, in his tribe as in his strange "civilized" ways of wooing her, Johnson's efforts to be accepted by her are doomed from the start. But he is quite unaware of his situation. He is as self-deceived as he is persistent in pursuing his obsessive goals. Thus he is, like so many of Cary's people, destined to collide with the outer reality. The contradiction between Bamu's disdain for the stranger and his persistent pursuit of her resolves itself through his near destruction, by drowning, and foreshadows his later hazards with her and her relatives. It is Bamu, for instance, who betrays him and causes his arrest after his ultimate crime. Significantly, the scene where they meet shortly before his arrest is almost a recreation of the drowning scene. After he murders Gollup, Johnson goes in hiding at the river in "her father's old dugout" (196),

apparently the same one which terrified him at the beginning. Bamu finds him and takes him, at his own request, to her house where he is trapped, beaten and arrested when she discloses his presence to her brother; she herself does not know what to do about her former husband.

Although Johnson manages, through his offer of a big bride-price for her, to marry Bamu, his ideal of marriage is unrealized. He remains a stranger to her from the beginning to the end, when she leaves him. She is as unyielding in her refusal to be "civilized" as he is in his efforts to "civilize" her, an irreconcilable conflict of incompatible ideals which leads to such tragi-farcical scenes as the following:

> "Your dress, Bamu. How you shall be a government lady at once. Here, this is the first thing to put on."
>
> He holds up a pair of old-fashioned drawers, mission style.
>
> "But that's for white men."
>
> "No, no, it is lady's dress--for white ladies. Now you are a government lady, you must wear this too." . . .
>
> "But what is the good of such things--I have my own cloth, quite new."
>
> "But Bamu, you silly girl, don't you understand--this is a great honour. Come, I'll show you. You will feel quite different when you have put it on." Johnson pushes Bamu down upon the chair, catches her left leg and tries to put it into the leg of the drawers. Bamu suddenly gives a scream and at once two brothers, an uncle and her mother come rushing in, laughing. They are astonished at the scene and stand gazing.
>
> "What is it, Bamu?"
>
> "I don't know. I can't make him understand anything."
>
> Johnson turns on them and screams furiously, "But she must--she must dress properly--she's not a bush girl now--tell her not to be silly. I want to give her great happiness."

> Bamu suddenly springs away from the drawers, takes up her cloth and rolls herself into it. She says, "No, I won't be married to him."
>
> (41-2)

In his unyielding pursuit of an elusive ideal, Johnson offers an illustration of Cyrus Hoy's view of tragicomedy:

> In serious drama, comic or tragic, we are confronted with what is at bottom a single truth about the human condition. Man is possessed of an ideal . . . but circumstances together with his own inherent failings conspire to make the belief that the ideal can be realized a finally illusory one. But man persists, in despite of all the odds, and in his persistence he may appear as nobly enduring, stubbornly unyielding, foolishly blind, or a combination of all three. The more forcibly and apparently these diverse qualitites are linked in combination, the more surely sounds the note of tragicomedy.[23]

Although it is hard to claim that Johnson is "nobly enduring" in pursuing his ideal, we can certainly say that he is "stubbornly unyielding" and "foolishly blind."

If Johnson's relationship with Bamu stands for his ideal to have a "civilized" wife, his relationship with Sergeant Gollup stands for his romantic ideal to be heroic in his deeds. Gollup is a violently drunken man who beats his servants without provocation. But while other servants meekly accept his harassment, Johnson, his new store clerk, challenges it successfully. The clerk's ensuing fearlessness and his craving to be admired for reckless actions contribute much to his bold robberies from Gollup's store. His relationship with Gollup is destructive and ends in death for both characters. But Cary, of course, treats it as

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[23] Cyrus Hoy, "Comedy, Tragedy, and Tragicomedy," The Virginia Quarterly Review xxxvi(1960), p. 110.

comically as tragically. Much of the mixture arises from his characterization of Gollup himself. He is a Conradian white man without restraint who has "gone native." Like Kurtz, he is a successful trader who is isolated from other whites and lives "like a little king" with natives (122). He is, thus, unrestrained in his conduct. He dresses odd[illegible] drinks heavily, and treats his servants, especial[illegible]s mistress, Matumbi, savagely. He is, in addition to being a Conradian white savage, one of Cary's Dickensian eccentrics, odd in appearance and manners:

> Sergeant Gollup is a little man with a pale, lumpy face, a black moustache waxed at the points and round blue eyes. He is an old soldier. He parts his black hair down the middle, shaves carefully, and wears everyday clean clothes, but not always in orthodox form. For instance, he will inspect his store and compounds in cotton drawers, a spotless singlet, a white linen coat, pale blue socks with green suspenders and white canvas shoes. He will go to bed in drawers and take an afternoon stroll in purple and green pyjamas, or he appears on the wharf in nothing but a pair of beautiful white trousers, carefully creased.
>
> (122)

As Larsen remarks, "the comic inconsistencies of his grooming and attire . . . prove to be the key to an understanding of his inner conflicts and thus the tragic possibilities of his character."[24] Gollup's emotional instability is underlined through other contradictions. He can be friendly and fraternize with his servants, "but for all his good nature, ferocious and ready at any moment for

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[24] Golden Larsen, The Dark Descent: Social Change and Moral Responsibility in the Novels of Joyce Cary (New York: Roy Publishers, 1966), p. 59.

any kind of violence" (128). He is as full of Kiplingsque pride in Empire-building as he is full of self-pity for doing so and being in "hexile":

> [I]t'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."
>
> Ten minutes later, he is astonished at his own sufferings. "You don't know wot it is to leave your children--talk of hagony--"
>
> (130)

Gollup is, finally, a rich man who hates the rich; and a racist who has a black mistress. He is a comic-pathetic character in his confusion. This confusion makes his relationship with Johnson dangerous, as when he violently stops the clerk's party:

> Johnson, bewildered and half-stunned, gathers himself up again, slowly rises to his feet, and instantly receives another punch in the nose. . . . This angers him very much . . . and [he] cries, "I no 'fraid for you, Sargy Gollup. . . ."
>
> Johnson suddenly springs up and leaps at Gollup. . . . Gollup, amazed, gives a furious punch in the air which misses by several inches. Johnson's knee strikes him in the stomach . . . and he falls down as flat as a sack. . . .
>
> Then screams and yells of terror break out. . . .
>
> "Clerk Johnson has killed the merchant Gollup."
>
> (139-40)

This killing, which results in Johnson's dismissal, is unreal, but it prefigures the actual killing, which Cary treats as casually, if not as farcically:

> [Gollup] hears the click of a small lock and the chink of money. He springs across to the door, points the gun at the drawer and shouts, "I've got you! Hands up!"
>
> At once something long and dark, with a bright flash before it, seems to uncoil from the floor,

> straight at his breast. He fires and feels a thump on his bare chest. Then his legs give way and he says in a surprised voice, "'Ere, 'ere. Wot you playing at?" He is dead.
>
> (197)

Johnson's relationship with the District Officer who has to execute him for this same murder is the most dominant in the story, and is, from the start, largely built on mutual miscomprehension. For all the parallels between Johnson's and Rudbeck's character, which Cary's critics often draw,[25] there is, in Kipling's phrase, a "gulf of miscomprehension"[26] between them, caused not only by their cultural differences, but also by their personal idiosyncracies and deficiencies. Much of the humour and the pathos of the relationship initially arise from this situation. Rudbeck does not understand "the African delinquent" (142) any more than Johnson understands "white manners" (88). Both characters are, consequently, quite easily deceived and misled by each other's actions. In his ignorance and fancifulness, Johnson mistakes Rudbeck's patronizing attitude for friendship and feels big and falsely secure: "It seems to him now that he has not a single care in the world. Mr. Rudbeck is his friend" (53).

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[25] Larsen, for example, writes: "Both are young and unformed; both are newly married, Johnson to a pagan who remains within her tight container of primitive culture and Rudbeck to a genteel English Lady whose equally tight container of cliches and conventional convictions explodes [in Africa]; both lose themselves in the excitement of creation; and both reflect their fluid and unstable personalities in alternating moods of elation and despair." Larsen, p. 67.

[26] Rudyard Kipling, In Black and White (New York: Scribner's Press, 1913), p. vi.

This inflating wishful thinking originates from Rudbeck's condescending politeness to him:

> Rudbeck, new to the service, has treated Johnson, his first clerk, with the ordinary politeness which would be given to a butler or footman at home. He has wished him, "Good morning," hoped that he enjoyed his holiday, sent him a bottle of gin for the new year and complimented him once or twice on a neat piece of work. Johnson therefore worships Rudbeck. (23)

For his part, Rudbeck is not only deceived by Johnson's subtle actions, such as his calculated "special interest in roads," designed to please his master (59); he is also deceived by Johnson's plain lies, such as his denial of borrowing money from the local treasury, his sham illness and other excuses for coming late to work. In fact, Rudbeck is so comically gullible that Johnson is quite aware that he can fool him and get away with it. This unfortunately makes the clerk all the more self-destructively daring in his delinquent deeds. Thus, for instance, he steals the confidential files, knowing that he will easily deny it:

> I say . . . I never go from my bed. I swear I never go. I swear by Gawd. Johnson sees himself assuring Rudbeck that he is not a thief. (76)

Besides being new to the African service, Rudbeck is lacking in imagination and too preoccupied with his hobby-horsical road projects to understand Johnson. Cary comically exaggerates Rudbeck's lack of imagination through the administrator's dependency on other people's ideas, as shown especially in relation to his "passion for roads": "From Sturdee he has caught the belief that to build a road,

any road anywhere, is the noblest work a man can do" (46). And from Johnson, he catches the idea of the Fada road: "Rudbeck himself has jump though only for the one game; the one idea that has been given him, the Fada north road" (83). Rudbeck's administrative practices are just as mechanically adopted. He "simply follow[s] Blore's advice" and refuses to give Johnson an advance of pay (61); and since "Blore caught [Johnson] at all sorts of dirty work" and gave him a bad report (62), Rudbeck also gives him a bad one. "Rudbeck has always despised office work, because someone, probably his father, when he was young, has said something contemptuous about it" (84); and also because he is "not a great reader and takes no pleasure in his own thoughts, which revolve in a good deal of confusion. He would rather . . . build a bush house, a bridge or a market than write a report" (58).

In spite or because of the fact that Cary himself was a colonial administrator, in a position smilar to Rudbeck's, he is quite critical of the colonial administrators in his African novels. Bradgate, in Aissa Saved, is characterized by his remoteness from the people he governs. His role in the bitter conflicts between "Pagans" and "Christians" is negligible. Most of the administrators in The African Witch seem to be more interested in playing polo, and in attending their exclusively white club, than in administration. Bewsher, in An American Visitor, is a blind administrator who believes, for instance, that because he has "broken the old narrow tribalism of the Birri" (AMV, 164), they cannot

harm him. And Blore, in Mister Johnson, is fossilized in the past; he will not even replace his useless old mosquito net. In depicting his colonial administrators, Cary combines his dissatisfaction with their practices with his delight in drawing caricatures to create dominantly comic men.

Rudbeck is a robot and a Bergsonian comic figure in acting only according to other people's ideas, and, indeed, in doing obsessively one activity as if he were a machine designed only to make roads. "We laugh," says Bergson, "every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing."[27] Rudbeck also creates in the story another Bergsonian comic feature: through his dependence on Johnson, his inferior, for ideas for "Rudbeck's road," he produces a comic inverted situation, or "topsyturvydom," in which the inferior is, ironically, the superior and vice-versa.[28]

But as comic as Rudbeck's weaknesses are, they carry a tragic implication for his relationship with Johnson. The District Officer inadvertently serves as Johnson's tragic agent. Through his obsession with building roads, and his dependence on Johnson's ideas, Rudbeck inflates the clerk only to deflate him. This tragicomic irony issues first from Rudbeck's foolish adoption of Johnson's fraudulent idea to obtain money for the road from other votes:

> Rudbeck is gloomy. He has come nearly to the end of his road money. . . .

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[27] Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in Robert Corrigan, ed. Comedy: Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), p. 476.
[28] Bergson, 475.

> "[S]ah, I tink you take 'em from one of de other votes."
>
> "Take 'em? Take what?"
>
> "De money, sah. You look, sah." Johnson turns the pages [of the Treasury vote book]. "Uniforms, sah--plenty money in uniforms. Extra services, sah--four pound five shilling. I tink you take 'em."
>
> Rudbeck is amused. It is common enough practice to spend one vote on another purpose.
>
> (78-9)

Rudbeck rewards Johnson for his idea by placing him in charge of the construction of Zungos or road inns. But he also causes the clerk's dismissal when his successor, Tring, discovers the fraud and reports it to the Resident, Bulteel. While Rudbeck himself is only reprimanded, Johnson has to be sacked because, as we saw, he has had bad reports as well.

But when Rudbeck resumes his job, he resumes also his function as the chief external agent of Johnson's rise and fall. He endorses, again, Johnson's unorthodox but effective methods of building the road by promoting him to be headman of nearly all the road gangs, a position which greatly enhances the clerk's false sense of security, his self-importance and attendant buffoonery:

> Johnson at once engages twenty more drummers, not apparently to improve the rate of work, but simply to please himself. . . .
>
> He also buys himself a new canopy chair, a white helmet and a pair of patent leather shoes. He wears the shoes on Sunday; on other days he goes barefoot, followed by a small boy, carrying the hat and the chair. He is never seen to sit in the chair. Whenever he visits a gang, it is set up and the hat laid on the canopy, like a royal crown above the chair of state. Johnson himself, having thus displayed the marks of his rank, goes among the gang.
>
> (148-9)

Johnson's "glory" is, however, quite short-lived. For no sooner is "the Fada road finished, the great idea . . . realized" (165) than he is dismissed by Rudbeck: not because there is no more work for him, but because of quite a trivial and unfair charge of "embezzlement," involving the money Johnson collects from Zungos to entertain the road workers--the very idea that leads to the realization of Rudbeck's dream. Johnson's dismissal is soon followed by his frequent robberies from Gollup's store. Deprived of other means of winning "glory," he devotes himself to robbery, with such terrible consequences that Rudbeck himself comes to regret his own actions when he is faced with executing Johnson: "he remains gloomy and depressed. 'That report of mine--I don't know if I was quite fair to you.'. . . 'And when I sacked you from the road--'" (223). Rudbeck's contribution to Johnson's tragedy is, however, redeemed by its inadvertence as well as by his efforts to save Johnson from execution. He wins our sympathy in his identification with Johnson's situation, and consequent efforts to get a reprieve for him. In the futility of his efforts, all he can do is to grant Johnson's request, at some risk to his own career, to shoot rather than hang him.

Although Cary presents his hero as the author of his own tragedy, he also shows him, as he does many of his characters, to be a considerable victim of injustice. Most people in the story, both natives and whites, treat Johnson unjustly. Bamu's people, for instance, "fleece" him not so

much because of what he has done as because he is a stranger: "After all, what else could anyone do with a stranger, except fleece him?" (25). Blore "dislikes all negro clerks and especially Johnson," who is an exuberant negro "clerk in trousers" (22). Rudbeck himself does not share Blore's racial hatred, but, as we have seen, he also treats Johnson unfairly. And, finally, we are led to suspect that Johnson's judges see no reason why he should be reprieved because "the murdered man is white" (197).

All this serves to heighten our pity for the hero, and shows Cary's sympathetic treatment of his rogues, which Pritchett, in his introduction to the story, associates with the writer's Irish background:

> One of the great contributions of the Irish to our enlightenment is their tenderness for rogues. It enlivens all the Irish novels from Lever to Beckett. It runs through all the novels of Anglo-Irish Joyce Cary. And, in . . . Mister Johnson, it attains those heights at which the rogue turns into the poet and takes on a sort of sublimity.[29]

Cary's "tenderness for rogues," whether we see it in terms of his Irish background or in terms of his metaphysics, makes Johnson and his type more or less victims of "social revenge": society treats them in a way which, according to Frye, tends to make an individual, "however great a rascal he may be, . . . look less involved in guilt and the society more so."[30] This is as true of Johnson as it is of his counterparts, including young Charley, the subject of the

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[29] Pritchett, p. xi.
[30] Anatomy of Criticism, p.45.

next chapter.

IV. "A Play with Danger": Charley is my Darling

In Charley is my Darling, as in Mister Johnson, Cary dramatizes the tragicomic life of a young artist-figure who is caught between the world of his naive creation and the real world, in which he is a misfit. Charley Brown, the central figure of the novel, is a juvenile delinquent in conflict with the adult world, which has inadvertently induced his maladjustment. Though anxious to rehabilitate him, the adult world, as chiefly represented by his guardian, Miss Lina Allchin, does not understand Charley any more than he understands it. Consequently, it fails to normalize him and sends him to a remand prison. Its response to him generally shows what Frye would call "a comic tendency to integrate the hero with his society and a tragic tendency to isolate him."[1]

Charley has been evacuated with other children from suburban London to the West Country because of the Second World War. The effect, on all the children, of the evacuation is to encourage their incipient delinquency. They lack proper parental guidance, the only "antidote," according to Cary, "to those instincts in the child which can make him a criminal" (SE, 27). Besides, the evacuees are not well-occupied and are bored in their sedate new environment. Their boredom is, by Cary's assumption, conducive to delinquency: "Half juvenile delinquency, that is, most of crime, starts in boredom. Boys and girls of

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[1] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 54.

twelve to eighteen have terrific energy and too little to do with it" (SE, 147).[2]

But for Charley Brown, the evacuation carries a personal implication which compounds his situation. He has "a dirty head," full of lice, and must be shaved and his clothes burnt on arriving at his new home, Burlswood (14). His baldly shaven head and the ill-fitting clothes he is given to replace his burnt suit make him look "quite laughable," and give him "a bad start" (19) by isolating him from the other children, who "unite to jeer" at his grotesque figure:

> [T]he bald skull, the green jersey which is too tight, and a pair of wide, cut-down trousers completely alter his proportions. His head seems absurdly small, the ears project like a dog's, his cheek-bones appear much higher, and his cheeks thinner, his body is shrunk by half. 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.
>
> (15)

For the children, of course, Charley is only a butt of laughter; for, as Auden says in his "Notes on the Comic," "children see only the situation and are unaware of the suffering" in it, as when they laugh at a hunchback.[3] But for the adult who can imagine what it means to a child to be

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[2] Kierkegaard concurs in Either/Or: "In the case of children, the ruinous character of boredom is universally acknowledged. . . . [I]f they become unruly . . . it is because they are already beginning to be bored." A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p.22.

[3] W.H. Auden, "Notes on the Comic," in Robert Corrigan, ed., Comedy: Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1963), p. 61.

rejected and isolated by his peers, Charley is more dominantly pathetic than comic in his grotesque appearance. While he is "quite laughable," one's awareness of his desperation for being "an outcast" (42) makes one's laughter mirthless. Charley's isolation places him in a situation which Frye considers to be "the root idea of pathos,"[4] that is, "the exclusion of an individual from a group."[5] Such exclusion, Frye elaborates, "attacks the deepest fear in ourselves that we possess,"[6] implying, of course, that we can readily empathize with the victim, unless, it may be qualified, he deserves it.

Charley is all the more pathetic because his exclusion functions as the prime-mover of his progressively delinquent behaviour which, while rehabilitating him in the children's world, estranges him from the adult world and culminates in his exclusion from it, through his imprisonment. Like Johnson, Charley wants "to have friends, to give friendship. He wants to be liked and admired."[7] And so "to find himself excluded from all friendship" (191) forces him to resort to mischievous actions in a desperate struggle to impress the children and compensate for his degrading appearance. He conforms to the behaviour of the group-dependent child that Frankenstein discusses in his Varieties of Juvenile Delinquency: "It is precisely through committing offences

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[4] Frye, p. 39.
[5] Frye, p. 39.
[6] Frye, p. 217.
[7] Cary, quoted in Charles Hoffman, Joyce Cary: The Comedy of Freedom (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), p. 87.

that the wayward child may bolster his ego-feeling and his sense of achievement. This . . . is his variety of compensation: it enables him to enjoy group approval on which he depends."[8]

While Charley's delinquency carries a social-critical implication, as will emerge, it primarily serves Cary as an expression of the tragicomic dilemma of the child, with his "powerful imaginations and weak control" (8), as a creative individual. As "a child with imagination" (5), Charley soon manages to overcome his isolation, and even "assumes leadership" of the children (25), thus creating for himself, as he seeks, "a society . . . in which he shall have his place."[9] Yet because he is as creative as he is lacking moral sense and guidance, Charley inevitably shapes his society against the "moral structure" (9) of the adult society, turning his triumph into frustration. His creative activity or quest for approval is "a play with danger" (92) not only because it results in "crime" and punishment, but also because it is fraught with danger of self-destruction; he frequently narrowly escapes serious injury or even death, as when, for instance, he tries to impress his peers by climbing into a house and stealing bottles of beer:

> Charley . . . has stuck under the coping. He cannot bring himself to let go of the spout and reach up across the bare wall to the top. Neither can he go down, and every moment he grows weaker. His arms are trembling, his fingers are losing their power to

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[8] Carl Frankenstein, Varieties of Juvenile Delinquency (London: Gordon, 1970), p. 57.
[9] Cary, quoted in Hoffman, p. 87.

> grip. He begins to pray: "Oh, God, oh, Jesus, save me, don't let me fall--don't let me be killed--I don't want to be killed. Oh, Jesus, you save me, I never do anything bad again--I never climb no more spouts."
>
> (230)

Such fusion of the pathetic and the humorous typifies Charley's quest for approval and story. With his clown-like appearance (his hat-covered "baldy" head, his small body and over-sized clothes), and with his desperate actions, Charley assumes the role of a clown with a broken heart as he strives to "command [the children's] respect" (30), incongruously playing at being an adult and gangster, a bull fighter, a thief, a burglar, a lover and rebel. Since he "pretends or tries to be something more than he is,"[10] Charley is, like Johnson, an impostor, a character-type, that may be comic or tragic, according to Frye. By Cary's method, of course, both qualities merge in the contradiction between what Charley is, "a frightened, breathless small boy" (38), and what he "pretends or tries to be," a gangster.

Thus although "he has never before stolen anything except lumps of sugar or spoonfuls of jam," he pretends to be "an old hand, a real thief" (30), and, to his distress, readily offers to break into houses and steal, invariably bottles of beer. When, for instance, he offers to steal from Wicken's house, "Charley is visibly in distress. . . . The three boys [Bill, Ginger, and Harry, who are most hostile to him] look at him with the most concentrated attention,

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[10] Frye, p. 217.

studying his distress. . . . They know that Charley is trying to impress them and dominate them by his reckless deeds" (28). Likewise, Charley is scared of heights, but he has to assign himself every task involving climbing. And he is afraid of bulls, but he must be seen as a bullfighter, as when he offers to fight Wicken's bull, in his first attempt to overcome his isolation:

> "Ullo," says the stranger [Charley].
> Nobody answers this. The stranger turns pink. He swaggers up to the stall and peers in.
> "Wot you got ere?"
> No one answers. The stranger turns to them.
> "Bulls ain't nothing to be afraid of."
> No one answers this, but Bill leers at Ginger over the stranger's hat and jerks his shoulders as if hustling somebody. . . .
> "Cows is different," the stranger says. "Cows go for you with their eyes open. But bulls go at you blind. Bulls is easy. You just wait till their orns is grazing your leg and then you dodge em."
> "You ain't afraid of bulls," Bill says, reeling towards the stranger as if to fall upon him and crush him.
> "Nah, course not."
> "Let im out then. Go on, let im out."
> "Course I would if I ad the key."
> This offer interests the whole party. Ginger, Harry and even Bill look at the stranger with speculative curiosity. Bill says: "Wots yer name, Sinbad?"
> "Charley Brown."
> "All right, Sinbad Charley, don't brown me off."
> "You really going to let out the bull?" Harry says.
> "Yers, if I ad the key."
> "There isn't a key," Ginger says gravely. "Only bolts. There you are, top and bottom."
> Charley is taken aback. He had thought he was safe in asking for a key. He turns round very slowly and looks at the bolts.
> "Go on," Bill says. "Bulls is easy, aint they?"
> Charley is now looking at the bull, which gives a snort. He turns round, rather pale. . . .
> They gaze at Charley in the middle of them with his back to the stall. They understand perfectly his situation; that he, an insignificant foreigner, has

> been trying to impress them, and that he is now in a pitiful and difficult position.
>
> (23-4)

The passage sums up Charley's plight as a stranger comically and pathetically struggling to belong, through desperate actions. He is estranged from all the children by his clownish appearance, and from the "natives" of Burlswood, especially the three boys whose hostility is chiefly responsible for his compensatory behaviour, by his being an evacuee as well. The incongruity between Charley as he is and as he wants to be seen, while giving his actions a comic patina, is a pathetic expression of his desperation. Yet the fact that, in spite of all his disadvantages, he manages to transform this uncongenial world into a world of his own design, reversing his position from "an outcast" to a gang leader, is a comic expression of his typically Carian resilience and resourcefulness. He offers an illustration of Langer's idea of a comic hero:

> The comic hero plays against obstacles presented either by nature . . . or by society. . . . His fight is with obstacles and enemies, which his strength, wisdom, virtue or other assets let him overcome. It is a fight with the uncongenial world, which he shapes to his own fortunes.[11]

But unlike Langer's purely comic hero, Charley is doomed to frustration. His resourcefulness is, as always in Cary's world, his strength and weakness, his "salvation" and "undoing" (SE, 126). His enterprising quest for approval becomes an obsession, comic and pathetic, which persists

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[11] Susanne Langer, "The Comic Rhythm," in Corrigan, p. 127.

even after he has overcome his isolation; he has to hold the children's respect. In this obsession and in his naivety, Charley acts as impulsively as recklessly, running headlong into his first confrontation with the adult world, when he is put on probation for his mischievous actions. But such is his obsession that the probation has no deterrent effect. He continues to behave recklessly, breaking into house after house and stealing, even as he comes to recognize, under fear of punishment,

> that he was not behaving sensibly, that he was taking absurd risks for very little return. He knew that . . . he was bound to end in the hands of the police, probably very soon. But he paid no attention to criticism or common sense. . . . It was as though a wall of glass stood between him and everything rational. He could look at reason, appreciate it, but he was obstinately prevented from making any use of it.
>
> (255)

In his automatism, Charley offers, with Johnson and Sara, a pathetic picture of the Bergsonian comic figure as a robot. "He has no time for reflection" (48) before acting, and "he cannot help himself" (236) as he finds himself involuntarily behaving senselessly. After some painful experiences with his robberies, for instance, he is "full of a sour wonder at his own folly," and "resolve[s] never to go robbing again" (240), but, of course, he does it again. As with Sara and Johnson, Charley's preoccupation with the activity of the moment denies him the benefits of past experience. He is so absorbed in the present that he forgets the past and keeps repeating even his painful actions. As

Santayana says, "those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it."[12]

Charley's actions are motivated not only by his initial need of "overcoming feelings of inferiority through compensatory behaviour," and, later, by his need to hold the children's respect, but also by his "desire to live 'like an adult.'"[13] The expressions are borrowed from Frankenstein's Varieties of Juvenile Delinquency, which helps much to explain Charley's absurd delinquent behaviour. A juvenile delinquent, according to Frankenstein, will strive to avoid "adult controls" by "imitating adult behaviour."[14] This "provides the youngster with an illusion of 'having adulthood,"[15] which gives him a rewarding feeling that he is "capable of being like them [adults]"[16] His "symbols of adult status" include smoking, going to the cinema, "driving a 'borrowed' car," and engaging in "sexual activities."[17]

Charley and his gang could have served as case histories for Frankenstein's study (published after Cary's novel) of the juvenile delinquent, and it is not for nothing that Cary says in his prefatory essay to the novel that he "was once asked by an official of the Board which looks after young offenders how [he] had come to know so much about them" (5). Charley's imitation of adult behaviour,

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[12] Quoted in William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. vi.
[13] Frankenstein, p. 80.
[14] Frankenstein, p. 85.
[15] Frankenstein, p. 85.
[16] Frankenstein, p. 82.
[17] Frankenstein, pp. 68-72.

like all his delinquent actions, originates from his desire to impress the children. By acting like an adult and offering, for example, to take the children to the cinema at Twyport, in a "borrowed," or pinched car, he seeks to bolster his ego and overcome, as he does, his feelings of inferiority. But later, after he has won admirers, including a girl-friend, Lizzie, his and all the children's imitation of adult behaviour is largely motivated by a desire "to escape from the grown up world" (146) and live independently like adults. The cave which "becomes the daily rendezvous of the gang" (143) symbolizes the children's striving for adult status:

> What this [cave] means is--the darkness has shut out all Burlswood from us . . . and not only Burlswood, but our whole lives in the outside world. . . . Here we are alone in the world and it's a world full of affection and beauty. See this beautiful lamp, this carpet, this convenient fireplace, this sofa where two can sit side by side; these things are ours. (44)

The children steal "these things" and bring them into their own world, where they can behave like adults. "Have a fag, chaps," Charley hands round a pinched silver cigarette-case, "they're cork tips" (143). But, of course, they "play with danger" at being adults. Their cave soon collapses with rain, nearly killing them:

> A gust of wind swings the roof and suddenly the walls of mud and stone fall inwards with the roof on top of them. Gallons of water which have filled the ditch and undermined the walls pour into the cavity. Harry gives a scream of terror. "I'm drowned."
>
> All the children are struggling desperately in a pond of soft mud. Charley, finding his way out by some instinct, is the first to crawl from beneath the

> fallen roof. . . . Ginger, smooth as an otter with wet mud, creeps out. He and Charley together rescue Liz and last of all, Harry, who is almost suffocated. (154)

Charley and his associates incongruously play at being adults in reaction to what they interpret as the repressiveness of the grown-up world. Their common wish is expressed by Lizzie, whose parents foolishly do not want to spare the rod and spoil her: "I wish we weren't children. . . . That's the trouble. You don't get a chance till you're grown-up" (153). The children resent adult restrictiveness, with its attendant corporal punishment. On the face of it, however, they do not seem to mind their thrashings as they treat them in a Gulley-like "facetious spirit" (198), dramatising and joking about them, so as to distil humour from "their sufferings":

> "Wots the las 'ime you was wopped, Arry?"
> "I dunno. 'E used to wop me almost every day for something."
> "Got any marks?"
> "Daresay I ave."
> "You got any marks, Charley?"
> "You bet--permanent ones."
> "You got any marks, Liz?"
> "I dunno--but it feels like I have."
> "On your bare bottom did e do it?"
> "Yess, on my skin."
> "Show us, Liz."
> "Bant nothing to see. Only bruizes."
> "If I show you mine, you oughter show me yours, thass only fair."
> "Come on, Liz--we'll see who's worst." (102)

But while the children outwardly "make jokes about [their] thrashings" (256), they are inwardly, of course, not amused by their treatment. They come to relate it to the

current treatment of Jews in Germany. Liz remarks:

> "I do wish people weren't so cruel, too.". . .
> "Why are they so cruel?. . . It aint no fun hurting people."
> "They wip Jews to death in Germany," Charley says. "Jus go on beating till they pass out."
> "It's so wicked--aren't they afeared to do such turble things."
>
> (100)

This sense of adult cruelty, compounded by the children's boredom, naturally leads to their desire to live in their own world and avoid adult controls. Their pathetic desire for independence also manifests itself through Charley's comic flights into a world of fantasy. He is full of humorous dreams of being his own master in the Pacific Islands smoking long cigars, and, especially, of "going to Ammurca" with Lizzie:

> "But how we get to Ammurca?"
> "Thass easy--stowaway. You don't pay nothing, see--you just go on a ship and ask for a friend. Say you got a nuncle in the crew, then ya just get in a W.C. and idle till the ship starts off."
>
> (202)

In the end, Charley tries to realize his dream of independence through his futile attempt to elope with Lizzie.

Charley's relationship with Lizzie is particularly revealing of the children's defiant delinquency in the novel. Although her parents, the Galors, are determined "to keep Lizzie, at all costs, from contact with the London boys, and to reform her by strictness" (212), she adopts an I-don't-care attitude ("I don't care, they can kill me" [78]) and defies their beatings and joins Charley at will.

For his part, he breaks all the rules of his probation and goes to see her, even if it means climbing into her father's house. "He feels that with Liz he has become a mature being, that he has lived like a grown-up" (316).

Their relationship is comic not only in their incongruous imitation of adult behaviour as they engage in sexual activity and plan to marry, but also in Frye's sense: "A young man wants a young woman, [but] his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal" which he overcomes and manages "to have his will."[18] But in their case, of course, the relationship does not end in triumph, with the lovers married and living happily ever after. Their triumph is only temporary as they end with punishment for their adult behaviour and are permanently separated. "This is goodbye," a police official shatters their marriage illusion after foiling their attempt to elope, "youngster, you won't be seeing each other again" (342).

As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, Charley's and his associates' delinquency implies a criticism of adult understanding and management of children. Quite unlike the adults in A House of Children, Cary's second and autobiographical novel of children, whose understanding and care save the incipiently delinquent young Cary (Evelyn Corner) and his playmates from "childish wickedness" (8), the adults in Charley is My Darling only help to encourage the malady. Through their lack of understanding of children

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[18] Frye, p. 163.

compounded by their irresponsibility or their inefficiency, all the adult characters responsible for Charley, his stepmother, his absentee father, his teachers, and, especially, his official custodian, Miss Lina Allchin, inadvertently spoil him and his associates. Comic in themselves, these characters are his unconscious tragic agents, and this makes their actions, as usual, a fusion of the comic and the pathetic; comic because the actions are quite contrary to our expectation, and pathetic because of the destructive implications they carry for Charley.

Charley's stepmother, Mrs. Brown, with whom he lives before being put on probation, is a foolish young woman, with a perverse sense of responsibility toward him:

> Her relations with Charley, perfectly reasonable to her and to him, were an extreme annoyance to Mrs. Parr [their landlady]. She would say: "If that was my booy I'd learn him to take his hat off in the house."
>
> "Charlie never as took is at off for anybody," Mrs. Brown would answer, as if discussing the interesting habits of some wild animal.
>
> Mrs. Brown was much amused by Mrs. Parr's dislike of Charley's manners. She would warn him: "Look out for her, Charley--she says you slop in your boots again.". . .
>
> Mrs. Brown considered it part of her duty to Charley to warn him against all persons who wished in any way to control him and interfere with his freedom of action.
>
> (45)

This ludicrous attitude obviously only encourages Charley to behave as he likes. He plays truant and devotes most of his school time to impressing the children, knowing very well that his mother does not care what he does, and supports him. Although Mrs. Parr is concerned about his behaviour,

s' too makes her own contribution to his degeneracy by deliberately and irresponsibly refusing to intervene, with her silly excuse: "He's not my booy" (46). The discrepancy between her concern and her indifference makes her attitude just as ludicrous as Mrs. Brown's.

For his part, Mr. Brown, Charley's father, contributes to his son's delinquency through his method of "parental correction" (176), which is no less destructive than his wife's lack of a sense of responsibility. Mr. Brown, a comic looking "short, square-shouldered man . . . with a hooked nose and a face like weather-worn teak" (176) appears only once at Burlswood, and in the story, to testify against his son, at his first trial, as "a young devil who had to be kept in order" by the rod (175). He is, as he admits, "not sure" (176) of the efficacy of his method of parental correction, and yet he does not hesitate to beat Charley "thoroughly" after the trial, arguing quite simple-mindedly: "I know it won't do Charley no arm because e's a good tempered kid" (176). He obviously does not know his son. For, as we saw, Charley and his associates react to such corporal parental correction with defiant delinquency, although they appear to take it well. Cary ridicules not only Mr. Brown but also the magistrates who are naively impressed by his destructive methods: "When he promised to beat the boy well, he made them feel that he was a serious and responsible citizen who had some conception of the grave dangers of juvenile crime" (175).

While the magistrates are responsible but ignorant, the teachers are simply irresponsible. Their destructive role is represented through the art teacher, Mr. Lommax, a Dickensian figure, who is as odd in appearance as he is in his treatment of his pupils:

> He is a middle-aged man with a strangely yellow face, wrinkled like a windfall, a broad, heavy-ended pale nose, and large torpedo moustache, tobacco coloured in the middle and dirty grey at the points. His expression is extremely serious.
>
> (33)

Just as his comic figure carries a serious expression, so does his comic conduct carry serious implications for the children. Mr. Lommax is so obsessed with his own work that he has no time for children. Unlike his counterpart Pinto, in A House of Children, who helps the children with their drawing, Lommax ludicrously argues, in self-excuse, that "no one can teach art--or anything else" (154), and he does not teach and help to occupy and "keep the children out of mischief" (155). The following scene typifies his destructive comic self-absorption and dereliction of duty:

> Lina goes through the list [of pupils] one by one until she reaches Henry Bean, who also agrees to come to the class. Then she turns to Lommax and says: "Now, Mr. Lommax, for your class tomorrow morning--"
>
> Lommax makes no answer. He has taken out a letter, and, using the notebook as a desk, is drawing on it.
>
> "You could take the names now, couldn't you?"
>
> Lommax says nothing, but continues to draw, glancing now and then into the bull-pen with that professional important air which belongs to all men when they are doing their work.
>
> Lina frowns. No doubt she would like to say: "Mr. Lommax, you seem to forget that you are on duty, war duty," but instead she says politely: "How many can you take in a class, Mr. Lommax?"

> Lommax draws another line and looks at the effect. . . .
> The boys are all trying to peep at the envelope, Charley from one side, Harry and Ginger from another; Bill from behind. . . .
> "They want to see, Mr. Lommax," Lina says. . . .
> "It's not fit to see." Mr. Lommax puts the envelope in his pocket . . . and walks off.
>
> (33-4)

The pathos of Lommax's relationship with the children is that while they are interested in him and his subject, "he is not interested in children, but only in his painting" (161). Thus he only serves to frustrate them in their enthusiasm for art, diverting their creative energy to destructive activities. As well, he helps to undermine the children's confidence in adults, a situation which only aggravates their delinquency. When, for instance, Lommax ignores and frustrates the children, as above, at Wandle's art gallery in Burls House, Charley

> 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?
>
> (162)

His frustration is later expressed through the destruction of Burls House and its collection of modern art. After drinking stolen beer, the children start smashing things in the house, in a "new game" called "smash picture, thousands o pounds" (283).

"Boredom and confusion," Cary emphasizes in his prefatory essay to the novel, "are surely the two prime sources of childish wickedness. I mean real wickedness which goes beyond mischief, the . . . malicious damage" (8). The

children's destruction of Burls House offers a tragic example of their boredom and wickedness, which the adults, such as Mr. Lommax, inadvertently bring about through their irresponsibility. But many of the adults contribute to the children's delinquency not so much because they are irresponsible as because they simply do not know how to manage children. The most outstanding example of this is the billeting officer, Miss Lina Allchin.

Of all the adult characters responsible for Charley, none is more spoiling of him and, at the same time, more concerned about his well-being than Miss Lina Allchin. Charley's most caring adult is, quite ironically, also his chief tragic agent. As the billeting officer responsible for all the evacuees, Miss Allchin takes a particular interest in Charley, and is eager to help him. He is, as the title of the story underlines, her "darling" ("Charley is a dear, I really mean it" [171]) from the start when he actively assists in the evacuation process. Yet because Lina is naive and does not understand Charley and children, in general, she only spoils him in helping him. It is with tragicomic irony that she declares "I'm not going to spoil young Charley" (121) and does the opposite. She is a destructive, well-meaning innocent who pathetically confesses:

> I don't feel I know anything about children--I'm really the last person for a job like this. And you can do such frightful harm by not knowing. (171)

Lina evokes a different reader response from that of other adult characters. We have some sympathy for her, even as we laugh at her, as she naively and destructively struggles to help Charley and other children. The discrepancy between her good intention and her bad achievement is both comic and pathetic. Her order to her childish assistant, Phyllis Hawes, to shave Charley's head, illustrates at the outset of the story her self-defeating concern for the boy's well-being, and sets the tone of her destructive relationship with him. Quite laudably, Lina aims to give Charley a good start at Burlswood by having his lousy head cleaned. Yet because of the silly way in which Phyllis does the job, Lina ironically accomplishes what she is most anxious to avoid: "We don't want to give him a bad start" (19). Her first and cardinal error of judgement is to entrust Charley's cleaning to her foolish assistant, who is even less capable than Lina herself of telling the effect of her actions on Charley:

> "You were very quick, Phyllis, you're sure you made a thorough job of it."
> "Oh yes, Miss Allchin," Phyllis sings, "I took off every hair. The poor liddle chap looked quite laughable."
> "And you're sure he didn't mind too much."
> "He diddn care a bit, he's too sensible."
> "I hope so. It's so easy to make a mistake with children, and we don't want to give him a bad start." (19)

But it is not until much later when Charley is already spoilt by being made to look "quite laughable" that Lina sees Phyllis' folly and her own mistake:

> She had asked herself a hundred times of Charley in the last few days: "Was I right to let Phyllis shave his head like that--oughtn't I to have sent him away to the hospital at Longwater? Obviously something has gone wrong."
>
> (50)

Lina's approach to Charley's behavioural problem is just as destructively flawed as her approach to his physical problem. Thus although she is anxious to prevent the boy from being "sent to an institution for young offenders" (171), she only helps to send him there. From the start, she naively seeks to win his co-operation and check his delinquency by avoiding reprimanding him and hurting his feelings: "I don't like to impose myself on Charley" (171). Accordingly, Lina not only tries to ignore Charley's delinquencies, she also tries to defend him whenever he is accused of behaving mischievously. When, for instance, he lets out Wicken's bull, "Lina assured the old man that Charley Brown was far too sensible to let out bulls or steal" (39). Similarly, when Lina's mother supports those who suspect Charley to have stolen a car at Twyport, Lina retorts: "Nonsense, mother, no one knows who took the car. It probably wasn't a boy at all" (118-9). Lina's absurd attempt to defend Charley reaches its climax at his first trial when she tries to defend him while the boy himself boastfully confesses his delinquencies to the policeman:

> Charley looks at the policeman and says nothing. He raises his eyebrows slightly as if enquiring: "What is he after?"
>
> "One of you took it [the lady's bag], didn't he?"

"Why, there was five of us," Charley cries.
"Five. I see--what are the names?". . .
"Was it Henry Bean?"
"No."
"Was it Edward Smith?"
"No, it was me."
"Ah, now we're getting on. You took the lady's bag?"
"Yers sir, and the car and the other car and everything."
"Charley," Lina exclaims, "are you thinking what you're saying?"
"Excuse me, miss, I think it's better left to me."
"Yes, but the boy doesn't realize what he's saying."
"I think he's telling the truth, aren't you, sonny?"
"Yers, of course--I wouldn't say it if I adn't done it, would I?"
"You took the cars and the bag?" The detective is pleased with himself.
"Yers, and I let out the bull, too."
"A bull, what bull?"
"Mister Wicken's bull--I let it out, see." Charley is also pleased with himself.
"Charley!" Lina exclaims.
"Yes, miss?"
"Excuse me, miss, I think you'd better leave this to me."
"Yes, but the boy doesn't realize his position--he's not thinking at all. Charley, you don't mean that you <u>planned</u> all this?"
(169-70)

Because of their miscomprehension of each other, Lina and Charley are at cross-purposes throughout the story, and this is largely the source of the humour and the pathos of their relationship. He cannot understand her actions any more than she can understand his, and they are perplexed and confused by each other. In his naivety and craving for admiration, Charley obviously sees his delinquent actions as a source of pride. He is thus as perplexed by Lina's reaction to his boastful confession of his "crimes" as he is by the result of the confession: punishment instead of

praise. Lina herself, unaware of the boy's motive, is understandably shocked by his confession. It ridicules her attempt to save him from punishment, and herself from blame: "She feels that somehow she is responsible at least for Charley's crimes; and that a more efficient person . . . would have prevented them and saved the boy from a criminal career" (167).

But for all her recognition of her inefficiency, and for all her growing concern for Charley, Lina does not change her method of trying to save him. When he is put on probation under her care, she seeks professional advice only to justify her own method of avoiding "to impose" herself on him. She literally takes the advice "you must show confidence in him" to "win his confidence" which superficially coincides with her own method, and reduces it to absurdity by blindly trusting him and "refus[ing] to see his delinquencies" (237):

> "I don't want you to feel that I'm watching you, Charley. That would be stupid . . . because you're quite clever enough to deceive me. . . ."
> "And we must trust each other, mustn't we?" Lina made another plunge. "I'll trust you to keep the rules and you can trust me--" She hesitates, wondering in what Charley can trust her, and says at last--"Not to spy on you and to bother you as little as I can. To trust you, in fact. For I know you are trustworthy."
> (178)

By this fatuous "kind of confidence trick" (237), Lina, in her naivety and inefficiency, ludicrously seeks to encourage Charley to behave sensibly "even when nobody can see what he is doing" (237). Instead, she encourages him to behave

recklessly: "Charley knew, of course, that Lina gave him extraordinary licence, that she avoided intrusion and swallowed any excuse he liked to make" (237).

Because of her ludicrous methods and because Charley misunderstands her intentions, Lina's efforts to win his confidence and check his delinquency are doomed from the start. In fact, far from winning his confidence, she loses it. She fails, like Mr. Lommax, to encourage him in his drawing, probably the most effective antidote to the children's boredom and mischief-making in the novel. When, for example, Lina "blushes" in disapproval of his drawing of the bull, "Charley also turns red. He loses all confidence in his drawing" (52) and turns to mischief. Like every adult in the story, Lina is ignorant of the causes of Charley's delinquency, and, therefore, of the ways of combating it. Yet she comically implies she knows: "Charley would be perfectly easy to manage if we went the right way about it" (132).

Lina's mismanagement of Charley and his consequent loss of confidence in her comes to a climax at his second trial, when she takes sides against him and bitterly condemns him for making his girl-friend pregnant:

> "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 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. . . . He feels

> resentment against Lina but says nothing. He does not know how to defend himself.
>
> "I can't understand it," Lina says, but obviously in this situation, at least, she can't be wrong." I didn't think you were like that.". . .
>
> "It's so cruel and mean--and you don't seem to care a bit."
>
> "But I didn't--I didn't--it aint like that--" he wants to explain that neither he nor Lizzie are guilty of anything. . . ."
>
> "Think what you have done to her--she will be sent away from home--her own mother and father are ashamed of her--and you can only think of excusing yourself."
>
> (323-4)

The reader here responds to Lina with as much detachment as he responds to Charley with engagement. She loses any sympathy we have had for her and she is purely comic where Charley is purely pathetic. In earlier scenes, as we saw, she arouses some sympathy in her miscomprehension of Charley as she is just as confused and perplexed by his actions as he is by hers. But here she is so sure of her stand, so certain that "she can't be wrong" in condemning Charley, and yet so mistaken that we can only laugh at her. Her gross mistake is to assume that Charley understands that what he has done is wrong, and is only "excusing" himself. This is obviously why she will not even listen to him. Yet he does not understand "wot was wrong with it"--"his love making" (325)--and is as shocked by her reaction as she is annoyed by his action. But while his miscomprehension is understandable, hers could only be ascribed to her child-like naivety. With some imagination, Lina ought to have understood that he was not aware of the consequences of his actions. But she displays her naivety further by

completely misinterpreting his tearful response to her callous upbraiding of him as remorse, creating this absurdist scene, the climax of the tragicomedy of miscomprehension in the novel:

> Charley is overwhelmed. He bursts into tears. Lina Allchin says in a voice, full of relief and happiness: "Thank God, Charley. You have got some decent feelings after all--I wasn't mistaken in you."
>
> "Yes, miss, I'm sorry--I been bad--to everybody." . . .
>
> Lina, too, is tearful. She congratulates the boy on his repentance: "Now I do hope for your future, Charley; and you know I will always be your friend."
>
> She goes away happy and leaves him remorseful, still more confused than before. He complains to himself: "But she wouldn't listen--it wasn't like that."
>
> His violent emotion, which was remorse, now becomes anger. "Wy did she go at me? She didn't even listen. It wasn't like that."
>
> (324-5)

Charley is all the more confused and frustrated by Lina and the magistrates because they send him to the remand prison for, of all his crimes, "his love-making with Lizzie, which an hour before had the beauty of its happiness" (325), without clarifying to him the nature of his guilt. All they do is condemn him, and "he feels he is not really guilty at all" (328). As a result of his bitterness, he later plans with another inmate to burn down the prison, a scheme which is only prevented by the more exciting one of escaping and going to see Lizzie.

In his preface to the novel, Cary says:

> 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 . . . give a clear picture [of "what is right and wrong"] without

uncertainties.

(9)

As his trouble over Lizzie illustrates, Charley is obviously without such a picture. The adults responsible for him, Cary suggests, fail in their duty to him and are responsible for his maladjustment. Yet, on the other hand, Charley's delinquency is quite consistent with the general portrait of Carian man. Charley shows much in common with Cary's mature heroes and heroines. He anticipates, for instance, Gulley Jimson, Cary's model artist-figure, in his amorality, licentious sexuality, self-assertiveness, anarchism, and, indeed, in his recurrent conflicts with the established society.

The resemblance suggests that, while Charley's delinquency is induced and aggravated by the adults, it is rooted, like Jimson's, in his "creative imagination." Even with "a clear picture without uncertainties" of "what is right and wrong," which Cary over-stresses in his preface (and there seems to be nobody in his world who possesses such a picture),[19] Charley could still have been delinquent.

Because of its child hero, Charley is my Darling has a built-in weakness in relation to Cary's central theme of creation. Cary cannot present young Charley, as he does the

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[19] Cary contradicts himself when he says, through Wilcher, in To be a Pilgrim:

> [N]o power can protect a child from his own ignorance. No kindest nurse, no far-sighted anxious mother, assuring it every day of love and sympathy, can give its weak half-formed brain the power to judge of truth and falsehood, of the real nature of things.
>
> (TBP, 334)

mature heroes, as responsible for his actions, and so his thematic emphasis tends to shift to social criticism. Douglas Stewart has commented on the novel: "Charley is my Darling should be prescribed reading for probation officers."[20] This praise is reflective of the prominence given to social criticism in the story, a prominence which Cary himself underlines through his preface. Still Charley is essentially like his counterparts, "a prisoner . . . an enemy of society" (314) because he creates his own society.

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[20] Douglas Stewart, The Ark of God (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, Ltd., 1961), p. 142.

V. Introduction: "Get on or Get Out": The First Trilogy

Herself Surprised, To be a Pilgrim, and The Horse's Mouth comprise the first and better known of Cary's two trilogies of novels. This trilogy is his most ambitious attempt at a fictional realization of his "ruling idea" that "each of us is obliged to construct his own idea, his own map of things by which he is going to find his way, so far as he can, through life" (FT, ix). Accordingly, Cary designed the trilogy to show, as he explains, "three people living each in his own world by his own ideas, and relating his life and struggles, his triumphs and miseries in that world" (FT, ix). The three people, Sara Monday, Tom Wilcher, and Gulley Jimson, the principal characters of the trilogy, are fictitious authors relating their subjective worlds in the first person.

Since each of the characters is preoccupied with his or her own life, Cary's trilogy is, unlike most others, not a continuous story; each part is self contained. But the whole is not lacking in unity. For the characters are involved, in varying degree, in each other's lives because of Sara Monday's relationship with both Wilcher and Jimson. She serves both, in succession, as a mistress and cook, thus interlocking her story with theirs and connecting, if tenuously, their stories.

The characters are, like all Cary's people, basically in a tragic situation and "are fighting for their lives" (FT, xii); in Gulley's phrase, they are fighting "to get on"

(HM, 11). Sara Monday, an unscrupulously sensual woman, is perpetually striving to build herself a nest. She is in trouble not only with her men, but also with society. Her story is written in prison. Tom Wilcher is a pious and worldly old man, on the verge of insanity and death. His life, which he relates under medical confinement at home, is trapped between the past and the present, as well as between the spiritual and the worldly. He is writing and fighting to reconcile the opposites and, thus, give his life a new meaning before his death. Gulley Jimson is a bohemian artist in irreconcilable conflict with society. He is impoverished and broken in health, but laughs at his situation, "as an alternative to cutting his throat" (FT, xiii). His story is written in hospital, where he dictates it to his secretary. Thus the whole trilogy is, as Cary himself indicates, tragically conceived:

> The tragedy of old Wilcher . . . is that of the conservative who loves his old house, his old fields, and the old ways. For he has created from them a world of associations in which alone he can achieve his desire, his need for affection. He loves things as well as people, and cannot bear to lose them. But even his trees must go to make way for the tractor.
>
> Gulley, on the other hand, is the original genius, the innovator, who can only achieve himself in exploring new forms of expression. His tragedy is that the conservatives fight him and destroy him. For they know how dangerous any new idea, any new art, is for their own achieved worlds, in and by which they live.
>
> Sara's tragedy is the woman's everlasting tragedy: she creates a home, and by its very success it breaks up.
>
> (FT, xi-xii)

Christopher Fry has said: "I know that when I set about

writing a comedy the idea presents itself to me first of all as tragedy." [1] This parallels Cary's method. While he conceives his trilogy as tragic, he finds "the comic in the tragic"[2] and presents it as tragicomic.

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[1] Christopher Fry, "Comedy," in Robert Corrigan, ed. Comedy: Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing company, 1965), p. 16.
[2] Walter Kerr, Tragedy and Comedy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 31).

A. "The Inveterate Nest Builder": Herself Surprised

Herself Surprised, the opening part of the trilogy, is Sara Monday's world. She presents it in the form of a confession and justification of her licentious life as wife, cook and mistress, as she records it in prison where she has been sent for petty theft. Sara is, typical of Cary's free people, a non-conforming roguish woman who does what she likes. "Her morals," Cary says, "[are] the elementary morals of a primitive woman, of nature herself, which do not change" (SE, 126). She is a voluptuous "woman of the world" (71) obsessed with enjoyment of sensual pleasures, her idea of life, which she pursues as freely as automatically. Her life is governed by this pursuit, and is virtually a study in obsession. She is, more dramatically than anyone else in Cary's hobby-horsical world, a captive of her own way of life, of her "flesh," as she calls it, which situation surprises even herself: "I can't help myself" (10). Sara is quite a comic character in her impulsive pursuit of her ends, and with her self-indulgence and gaiety, she appears to be a purely comic figure. But while she is dominantly comic on the surface, there is, of course, an underlying tragic side to her life, a side which increasingly becomes more prominent in the succeeding parts of the trilogy.

Sara is as much a prisoner of her way of realizing herself as she is of society. As a woman who stands outside convention, she is condemned by society as "a woman without any moral sense" (9), and is symbolically cast out of it

through the imprisonment with which her story tragically ends. Society's treatment of Sara arouses much sympathy for her in the reader. She is, among other reasons, a woman whom we find more amusing than punishable in her roguishness, and Cary, with his characteristic "tenderness for rogues,"[3] has endowed her with a kindly disposition that mitigates her delinquent behaviour and endears her to many of her readers. She even writes her book primarily for charity reasons: to sell it to the Newspapers and pay the school bills of Gulley's son, Tommy (220).

But Sara is also quite a cunning and self-assertive woman. She is thus in conflict with almost all her men whom she tries to manage according to her own hedonistic idea of life. She collaborates with external forces to undo, at least in her own part of the trilogy, every nest or home she builds, with the pathetic result that she becomes, in Cary's phrase, an "inveterate nest builder,"[4] restlessly striving to make a home. "Her success, like all success," according to Cary, "is forever balanced on the edge of disaster" (SE, 126). By the time she dies at the hands of "the only man she loved" (SE, 126), Gulley Jimson, in the last part of the trilogy, Sara is, like Gulley himself, quite a pathetic old tramp. Her self-indulgence and gaiety have turned with age, which Cary has designed as part of "Sara's tragedy" (FT, xii), into melancholy: "'I feel so old,' she laments before

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[3] V.S. Prichett, "Introduction" to Mister Johnson, ed. "The editors of Time" (New York: Time Inc., 1962), p.xi.
[4] Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary: A Preface to his Novels (London:Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 112.

Gulley, 'I could cry. And I feel it all the time. Everything seems to say to me: You're an old woman, Sara Monday. No more fun for you in this life. You'd better go and bury yourself.' And there were tears in her eyes'" (HM, 76). According to Cary, "the greater a grown man's power of enjoyment . . ., the deeper and more continuous his feeling of the waste of life, of happiness, of youth" in old age (AHC, 67). So with Sara and her double-edged "intense enjoyment of life."[5]

The youthful Sara sees "life [as] a gift" (24), and lives by the carpe diem principle, which serves to intensify her feeling of the waste of life in the end, that she must seize the moment and enjoy it while she can: "I'm only young once" (14). She is thus so given "up to the sweet world" of pleasure (34) that she is, as the title of her story underlines, "herself surprised" at her own conduct. Her story is marked by these naive surprises, which are both a humorous and pathetic expression of her impulsive hedonism. Thus, for example, she does not like to marry Matt Monday, who nevertheless becomes her first husband, because he is old, shy, and--typical of her men--comic in appearance, "with his long neck and long nose, his bulgy eyes and his bald head" (15). Yet because he is a well-to-do gentleman with "a good place," and because her nature could not resist a man, any man, she automatically says yes to his marriage proposal: "though I meant to say no, yet the words came out

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[5] Cary, "Preliminary Notes on The Horse's Mouth" quoted in Wright, p. 157.

of my mouth that I would try. . . . All that evening I was surprised at myself" (16). When they are married, she considers herself fortunate to have built herself a nest in such a good place, with a well-provided kitchen. But because she "could not refuse any pleasure" (219), she undermines her nest by committing adultery with her husband's business acquaintance, Mr. Hickson, and "wonder[s] at [her] lightness and folly" (34). She is similarly surprised when she complicates the situation by falling for Hickson's protege, the artist Gulley Jimson, modelling for him: "I could not believe it was myself, sitting there, half naked. . . . I wondered at myself. . . . I was in wonder and dismay all the evening. I thought: 'What will I do next--there seems to be nothing I wouldn't do'" (59). And indeed, there seems to be nothing Sara would not do in pursuit of pleasure.

In her automatic quest for sensual delights, Sara is virtually a will-less woman, who is "not like a woman, but a truck which goes where it is pushed" (107)--a graphic illustration of a person acting mechanically and giving us "the impression of being a thing."[6] Although Sara's impulsiveness is consistent with Carian man's behaviour in pursuing his obsessive goals, it is a little overdone, and, as Dennis Hall remarks, Cary makes it difficult for a reader who is not familiar with his assumptions to see such an impulsive character, as intended, as a free soul beyond her licentiousness.[7] Virtually everything she does appears to be

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[6] Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in Corrigan, p. 476.
[7] Dennis Hall, Joyce Cary: A Reappraisal (London: The

mechanical. She finds herself, for instance, stealing, even after she is reprimanded for writing bad checks:

> But as for my robberies . . . I still wonder at myself. For at this very time, when I was helping Mr. W. to economize, and cutting down even his own dinner, I was still cheating him. How I came into this double way of life, I cannot tell, except that I got used to my pickings.
>
> (183)

Similarly, she cannot help imitating Rozzie's "reckless" style of dress and "torturing" her gentle husband:

> I went shopping with Rozzie and bought the same kind of clothes. Then not to waste them I had to wear them and we gave Bradnall a fine spectacle. This in my first weeks [of marriage] when I was on my trial, and I thought myself dutiful. . . .
>
> I tortured [Matt] so and suffered for him, but so it was. It seemed I was two women; and one of them a loving wife and the other mad and wicked. I did not know how to manage myself, any more than a filly foal running about the field with her tail in the air. . . . And as I say, I was frightened too, for I thought: "this luck can't last. Think of all the girls prettier than me, and ladies, too, that never get husbands at all."
>
> So I was reckless, too, and it's a true word that the reckless are meat for any devil.
>
> (20-1)

In so far as she has "no time to think" (34) before acting, Sara is, as she excuses herself, a "helpless woman" (64) who cannot help behaving recklessly. We could not, however, accept that she means to "reform" (39). She presents herself as a woman from a religious home, who has been "well brought up" (9) on Scripture and Yonge's didactic novels, and who wants to be "a sobersides" (14), but is caught between her "religious duty" (34) and her pleasure principle. Foster supports her: "Sara is torn by the

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[7](cont'd) Macmillan Press, 1983), p.6.

conflict between her education, upbringing, and religion and her flesh. The old saying, 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak' certainly applies to Sara."[8] Not so certainly. The conflict between her spirit and flesh is more apparent than real; it only appears to be there because of the self-excusing manner in which she presents herself. Sara means to realize herself not through "religious duty" but through enjoyment of life. This is her way of life, and she would not change it: "That's the way I'm made" (14). "There was a bad spirit in me ready for mischief and for any temptation, and I would not fight it" (18). Besides, Sara could not really be at war with herself; unlike Wilcher, for example, she is much too amoral and simple-minded to see her reckless behaviour as reprehensible. She does not take her "wickedness" seriously, and this is why she is amused by the stories brought up against her at her trial. It is also why she cannot tell whether modelling for Gulley, while she is still Matt's wife, is good or bad: "I could not tell whether I had done a religious thing or a bad one" (59). While, as Adams remarks, Sara calls herself a "criminal," she does so without conviction.[9] Such a person could hardly be expected to mean, as she claims, to repent, thus being split between her spiritual and fleshly imperatives.

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[8] Malcolm Foster, Joyce Cary: A Biography (Boston: Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 382.
[9] Hazard Adams, Joyce Cary's Trilogies (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983), p. 79: "Sara calls herself a 'criminal,' but she does not feel the moral force of this word."

All this implies that the pious aspect of Sara's story is quite hollow, and has no significance beyond serving as a purely comic effect: through the sharp incongruity between her preoccupation with fleshly matters and her pious protestations, such as her flippant resolve to reform at the end of the story: "God helping me, I shall . . . keep a more watchful eye next time, on my flesh, now I know it better" (220). We could not take this resolve any more seriously than she herself takes it, especially as we know that her "elementary morals . . . do not change." Sara's spurious piety also makes the didactic intent of her story quite baseless; it seems to be a parody of the didactic writers she has read: "So perhaps some who read this book may take warning and ask themselves before it is too late what they really are and why they behave as they do" (9).

As part of her comic way of excusing herself, Sara depicts herself as a woman who behaves as she does because she does not know herself (9). Yet, as we know from such confessions as "that's the way I'm made," her weakness is not lack of self-knowledge, but lack of self-control: "I did not know how to manage myself" (20); "I gave myself no time to think" (34); "I did not remember my weakness and study my faults" (36); "I forgave myself too easily for those evil deeds which always took me by surprise" (36). Such confessing serves Sara as her main way of excusing her life before the reader. As she discloses her strategem later, "I had found out even as a child that a quick confession could

save me a slapping and a bad conscience too" (194). She, apparently, hopes that the reader will understand, if not forgive, "those evil deeds which always took [her] by surprise." Sara's repetitive surprises, then, also come to function, at least in part, as a way of excusing her recklessness. In this sense, they are, as Gulley Jimson implies, comically spurious: Sara "falls every night to rise in the morning. And wonder at herself. Knowing everything and still surprised" (HM, 32). But since her surprises can also be interpreted as a genuine expression of her impulsive behaviour, we can only agree with Bloom that they are dubious; they are sometimes genuine, and sometimes they only serve "to excuse some rather questionable behaviour."[10] He adds: "The comedy of the book resides largely in this second possibility." Bloom is right, though we can expand on his area of where the comedy resides. Most of what is purely comic in Sara's story resides in the way she excuses her conduct: through not only her surprises, but also her confessions, and, most amusingly, her simple-minded arguments.

Sara's arguments are, for the most part, designed to excuse her own nature by excusing that of her men. She accepts them because she pities them for their nature which is, like hers, uncontrollable, and for various other reasons. Thus, for example, she could not blame Matt for his

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[10] Robert Bloom, The Indeterminate World: A Study of Joyce Cary (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), p. 86.

advances, "for I saw it was nature working in him" (15). Similarly, she pities and accepts Hickson:

> I liked Mr. Hickson at first sight for his sad eyes; and perhaps for knowing he was a sad man. Although he was not yet at the middle thirties and married for the last four years, his wife was a gadabout. . . . She was only a shame to him. I was told that at all their houses, in London and the west and at Bradnall, where she was never seen, she had her own rooms and her own bed and never came to his and gave him no comfort even in duty. It seemed very wrong that so rich a man, who had worked hard for his riches, should get so little for it, not even so much as any ploughman with a simple woman to his bed and his table.
>
> (24)

Sara falls for Hickson because he is a "millionaire," but she cannot, of course, tell us the real reason. Yet when the "millionaire" goes "too far" she pretends not to "like it" (28), only to unmask herself with yet another frivolous argument:

> But since Mr. Hickson had flirted so with me once, touching me, he had to do it again. And this is the great difficulty for a woman. How to put an uppish kind of man into his place, without hurting him more than he deserves. For after all, it was not great crime in Mr. Hickson, to be a man and like me as a woman. Or if it was so, then providence must answer for our shapes.
>
> (28)

This is also why she yields to Wilcher:

> For I thought: if I turn him out [of her room], he'll be bound to be hurt. Whatever he says, he's a man and though I've no doubt he is not so delicate as my poor Matt, he has a great sense of what is proper, and is easily hurt by anything unexpected.
>
> (173)

Sara's frivolous arguments for succumbing to her men should leave no doubt that she does not mean to be anything other

than what she is: an unscrupulously sensual woman simple-mindedly and humorously justifying her conduct.

In her sensuality, as in many other features of her characterization, and in the narrative style of her story, Sara is often compared to Defoe's Moll Flanders, and, in some respects, to Chaucer's Wife of Bath. But according to Cary's biographer, Malcolm Foster, he "objected violently" to the comparison with Moll Flanders:

> Defoe has had no influence upon me whatsoever. The thing was invented by one of those stiff-minded persons who must find a pigeon-hole for a book before he can understand it.[11]

Cary goes on, according to Andrew Wright:

> 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.[12]

The latter argument is not quite convincing, for Defoe's "old bawd" is, in effect, also an inveterate nest builder by virtue of the many homes she finds herself making. In fact, Cary's whole objection has not convinced his critics, who continue to identify Herself Surprised with Moll Flanders.

Yet Cary is right, in quite a significant sense. For all their striking character resemblance, Moll and Sara are "designed" to different ends, and this is, I hope, not an "intentional fallacy." Defoe's design for Moll is, going by his preface to the novel as by critical opinion, didactic, while Cary's design for Sara is, as he implies in his preface to the trilogy and elsewhere, existential. Sara is

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[11] Foster, p.3811.
[12] Wright, p.112.

"a female artist" (SE, 126) of life who shapes her own world and gives it meaning, with triumph and defeat. Her story, for all its pious embellishments, surprises and evasions, conforms to the familiar Carian tragicomic pattern. Sara lives by her own light and is inevitably in conflict with the objective reality. Her story begins as it ends with her conflict with society:

> The judge, when he sent me to prison, said that I had behaved like a woman without any moral sense. "I noticed," he said, and the paper printed it all, "that several times during the gravest revelations of her own frauds and ingratitude, Mrs. Monday smiled. She may be ill-educated, as the defence has urged, but she is certainly intelligent. I am forced to conclude that she 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."
>
> (9)

The judge's view of Sara is understandable, but mistaken. She smiles not out of contempt for society's values, as he thinks, but because she is, as said earlier, too child-like in her amorality and too risible to take the accusations against her seriously. She is naively amused by the damaging "stories" disclosed about her. There is a kind of innocence about her which makes some of her actions akin to Charley's in their childish humor and pathos, though we cannot, of course, respond to her with as much sympathy. The sympathy she arouses at her trial is largely due to the fact that she is a victim of a malicious, though not false, accusation, and those who sue her, Mr. and Mrs. Loftus, Wilcher's relatives, are themselves far more reprehensible

in their conduct. In their covetousness, the Loftuses contrive to get Sara imprisoned for stealing petty things from Wilcher's place, so as to prevent her from marrying Old Wilcher, as he proposes, and inheriting his property, which they themselves must possess at any cost. Wilcher himself is opposed to the trial, as he sees Sara as his "saviour" rather than as a thief (IBP,9). But he cannot save her from his covetous relatives who unjustly see her as a scheming woman bent on his possessions:

> 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.
>
> (176)

In the end, one prefers Sara's straight "primitive" morals to the hypocritical morals of the Loftuses of this world, self-righteously and despicably posing as the luminaries of "social obligation," and making the Saras scapegoats for their avarice.

Sara's crime is, for the reader, also mitigated by her generosity, which partly accounts for it. She steals, in part, to help her man, Gulley Jimson, who is an impoverished modern painter, as no one would buy his eccentric pictures (40). "I was bound," she says, "to send something to Gulley" (183). While helping him through stealing is obviously a foolish thing for her to do, it is nonetheless indicative of her kindly disposition, which serves to show that she is, in a sense, justified in seeing herself as a victim of her good

nature. Cary describes the different points of view of Sara in the trilogy:

> Sara regards herself as a tenderhearted creature whose troubles are due to her good nature. This estimate is true. Wilcher sees in her an easygoing mistress who will cherish him in decrepitude. He is quite right. Gulley calls her a man grabber, and he is also right.
>
> (FT, xiii-xiv)

But it is only in the sense that Sara victimizes herself through stealing for Gulley, as well as through trying to help him become a financially successful artist, that we can justify her view of herself. Otherwise, there is not much causal connection between her kindness and her troubles with men, whom she admittedly pities as generously as suggestively.

Sara's troubles or conflicts with men, which dominate her story, largely issue from the discrepancy between her way of life and her men's, with the exception of Wilcher. In cunningly trying to bridge this gap, she finds herself undermining her nests. Yet, as Cary says, her cunning is at once her weakness and strength: "Sara was infinitely cunning in the management of her men. . . . [T]he everlasting enterprise which was her undoing was also her salvation. She was still making a world for herself, a home, . . . when she was cut off" (SE, 126). Sara cunningly succeeds in building herself a nest, helps to undo it, and resiliently transcends her frustration with further enterprise. Her ability to go on building nests, in spite of frustration, is a salvation, a comic triumph over frustration, and bespeaks an

indomitable spirit which one comes to associate with Carian man. When, for example, she loses her nest with Wilcher and is imprisoned, she defiantly looks forward to building herself another nest: "A good cook will always find work, even without character" (20). Earlier, when Gulley Jimson beats and deserts her for her management of him, she responds with the same comic spirit:

> I was knocked so low I couldn't go any lower and there was nothing to do but to get up. So I got up . . . and I had my hair curled over the cut and I went to a little public in Queensport where I was known and put down my name at a registry office for a cook's place.
>
> (HS, 135)

It is with such defiant courage that Sara manages to keep on going on, moving from place to place, building and losing her nests. By this movement, she gives her story in structure as well as in comic spirit (in "the sense that no matter how many times man is knocked down, he somehow manages to pull himself up and keep on going"[13]) a picaresque quality, which is underscored by her roguish character and some other features she shares with the archetypal picaro: her story too is, as is usually the case in picaresque fiction, in the first person and realistic; she is "drawn from a low social level and is of 'loose' character, according to conventional standards"; her occupation, as cook, "is menial by nature"' and she obviously shows "no development of character."[14] The main

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[13] Robert Corrigan, p. 3.
[14] All this information is from Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature 3rd edn. (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1977),

difference is, of course, that Sara is, unlike the archetypal picaroon, not a purely comic character. Where, for example, Moll Flanders' picaresque progress is towards fortune or salvation, Sara's is towards death--if we see her movement, as we are supposed to, in the context of the whole trilogy. In any case, Sara's picaresque movement is built on what Cary conceives and partly presents as a tragic dissolution of all her nests ("Sara's tragedy"), and is in itself tragicomic. She is at once a comic picaroon and a tragic tramp.

Her movement is, in her own part of the trilogy, naturally organized around three tragicomic relationships with the men she lives with and "manages," thus building herself a nest, as Cary likes to say. These men, Matt Monday, a well-to-do businessman, Gulley Jimson, a poor artist, and Tom Wilcher, a rich but miserly retired lawyer, come to represent the principal episodes of her story. Sara's relationship with Matt Monday, the only man who marries her, is characterized by incongruities, which make it comic while balancing it "on the edge of disaster." She is a working-class young woman, not yet twenty, while he is a middle-class gentleman in his forties. She loves pleasure and wants him to entertain and socialize, "as a gentleman should" (33); he loves respectability and wants her to be "ladylike" (20) in dress and manners. She is gregarious and out-going; he is shy and withdrawn or "unsociable." And she

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[14](cont'd) p. 392. Cary admired the picaresque novel for its "revelation of character" and for its realism (SE, 182).

is lusty, while he is inept: "In his first months . . . he could do nothing at all with me, poor darling, unless he had been asleep first, and took his nature by surprise" (98).

Sara's cunning way of trying to reconcile these differences and shaping, if not perverting, Matt's repressed life according to her own hedonistic idea of a gentleman heightens the humour and the pathos of the marriage. He is as docile and self-effacing as she is cunning and self-assertive, and so she is able to manage him quite easily. She contrives to socialize him by manipulating him into a fateful friendship with her lecherous "millionaire," Hickson, after Matt introduces him to her--t s (Matt's) regret later, but to his and her delight now

> I was glad to see how, shy as [Matt] was, he came out when Mr. Hickson used his fascinations upon him, and talked and laughed. . . .
>
> He asked Matt to luncheon, on some business which he said he had for him; but I believe he invented it. And after he had gone, Matt was in such a state of wonderment and joy, and pride in himself, and pride in me, that he seemed quite comical. . . .
>
> Mr. Hickson . . . was so sweet to Matt that he was touched to the soul; and said afterwards 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.
>
> (25-6)

Matt is, in his docility, quite unsuspecting and easily deceived. This is, apparently, why he seems "quite comical" to his adulterous wife. But to the reader, he is also just as pathetic. He is defencelessly caught between an unscrupulous wife and a calculating self-interested friend, ironically seeing the lecherous rival as a man who sets the

things of the spirit above the body, and completely misplacing his trust in him and her. He thus facilitates, as ludicrously as self-destructively, their self-indulgence by leaving them to go out without him, as when they go for a "water party":

> I always loved to be rowed on water, for the feel of that wonder. . . .
> Even the knock of the oars I liked, because, on the water, all sounds are like music. . . .
> So when we came to the little little temple and found there all kinds of lemonade and wines and sandwiches and sweet cakes laid out upon a clean cloth; and garden chairs with silk cushions, I was very ready to drink some sweet wine, and eat and compliment Mr. Hickson on his water party. "You spoil me," I said, but he answered No, he could never do enough for me in return for what I had done for him. . . . And at the same time, I admit, he would take and press my hands and even kiss them. . . .
> Why had I not stopped him? I can't tell except that he was my friend and Matt's. . . .
> So now in the temple, what with the water and the stillness of everything, even the aspen leaves seemed to be asleep, I did not notice Mr. Hickson or what he was doing, but only felt the joy of the evening.
>
> (30-1)

The scene is as revealing of Sara's obsessive self-indulgence as it is of her husband's misplaced confidence and pride in her and in Hickson. But Hickson himself is soon frustrated when he introduces his protege, Gulley Jimson, to the Mondays and Sara falls for him as readily as she had fallen for Hickson. This is why the lecherous "millionaire" discloses, in revenge, to Matt not only Sara's infatuation with Gulley, but also her adulterous relationship with himself, thus precipitating the crisis of her marriage:

> [Matt] said that this was the end and now he would summons me into court and expose me; and Hickson and Jimson. He would divorce me and keep the children.
>
> I wondered if he could do that. But I know that the evidence would be black against me and that if I was appointed to have a fall it was no more than I deserved. . . .
>
> "And what are you going to do next?"
>
> I said that I supposed I would go to Rozzie. She would always give me a home.
>
> "And you will leave me alone and the children without another thought?"
>
> I said that, of course, I would never leave him alone until I was turned out.
>
> Then he stared at me and said: "If I let you stay, it will be the same thing over again. I can't trust you an inch--your whole life is a lie."
>
> "I can't trust myself," I said. "I never meant to deceive you."
>
> "And you expect me to belive that," he said, "that you're a weak, helpless woman [?]. . . "
>
> "I don't know what I am," I said.
>
> (63-4)

Since Sara's recklessness is impulsive, we may believe that she can't trust herself. But that she never meant to deceive her husband is a lie, since she obviously "deceives Matt" in manipulating him into a friendship with her rich admirer. Through her deceitful management of Matt, Sara creates for him and herself a misfortune, not of divorce, as he impotently threatens, but of a financial destruction which he does not survive for long. He stops working, his health breaks down, and he dies later. Thus in trying to create happiness, Sara inadvertently helps to bring her husband down and to dissolve her first nest.

Sara's "management" of her second man, Gulley Jimson, is similarly cunning and, though for quite different reasons, self-defeating. Gulley is, as mentioned earlier, "the only man she loved," for they have much in common. He

is, like herself, a non-conformist; he is "not one to care what the world thinks, and so I warmed to him at first" (41). He too is an enjoyer of the moment: "If I ever loved Gulley, it was for his never grousing and never spoiling a joy in hand with yesterday's grief or tomorrow's fear" (139). And there is a sensual side to him which harmonizes their relationship; he has "a taste for good food" and "it had been a pleasure to cook for [him]" (113). More important, he is quite unlike her inept Matt: "Little as he was, and thin, Gulley never seemed to flag; you would have taken him for a young boy in his first hot youth" (98).

But in Cary's world, as we shall recall from the introduction, "to love anyone is the greatest joy in life, and also the greatest danger." So with Sara. The only man who gives her "much happiness" (126) is also the only man who beats her and later kills her. Their tragicomic conflict largely issues from the fact that he has everything she loves, but success and money. Yet by her petty materialistic values, a man must have success and money: "a successful man is a comfort in the home" (39). To this end, she tries to "manage" or "push" Gulley, under the fateful illusion that "he had no push and a man who takes up art needs push before all things, or money, or he will be trampled on" (41). But, quite unlike her docile Matt, Gulley is an independent "man of set ways" (112), and will brook no "interference" with his life and work. As Nina, his wife, warns her, "interference drives him mad" (54).

The comic and the tragic qualities of her relationship with Gulley are fused in the contradiction between his insistent refusal to be pushed and her equally insistent efforts to push him. She becomes so obsessed with making him successful that she acts, as usual, automatically, justifying his mechanical simile: "You're like a train--nothing will turn you when you get started. It's a good thing you're not my wife or I should have murdered you long ago" (54). He murders her in the end, though for a different reason: she refuses to surrender to him a portrait he had painted of her in the nude, around this period of their relationship when she models for him. When a buyer, Sir Beeder, in The Horse's Mouth, asks Gulley for a picture of the Sara style, in which he no longer paints, the impoverished artist demands from Sara what he calls "my picture or your portrait" (192). For sentimental reasons, she values the portrait so much that she cannot part with it, and in the ensuing struggle, she screams "Police":

> I got a big fright. I didn't want the police. It might have meant five years. And five years would have finished me. I ran after Sara and grabbed her by the back of her skirt. But she still kept screaming "Police." So I gave her a little tap on the bonnet with the iron Duke, to restore her to her senses; and a little push away from the window. Whereupon she fell down the cellar stairs into some dark hole. I said, for I was a a bit surprised, "What did you do that for?"
>
> (HM, 263)

Though foreshadowed, Gulley's crime is accidental and, like Johnson before him, he is not seen by Cary's critics as a murderer. Still, that he should be the cause of the death of

a woman who loves and does so much for him, for a picture which is no longer his, makes his action quite deplorable and her fate all the more tragic: "'Oh dear, oh dear,'" said Sara, 'I never thought you would murder me'" (HM, 263). But in her undying love for him, she forgives him by giving the police, just before her death, a false description of her murderer, thus saving him from being arrested--the culminating expression of her good nature.

Part of Sara's tragedy with Gulley is that while she cares for him, he does not care for her. Although, as we see in The Horse's Mouth, he calls her his "spiritual fodder" (HM, 52), he sees her, at the same time, as fatal to his art. He recalls his relationship with her during the period of Herself Surprised:

> And when I was mad to paint, she was for putting me to bed and getting in after me. Stirring all that fire only to cook her own pot. Growing wings on my fancy only to stuff a feather bed.
>
> (HM,51-2)

He sees Sara in terms of Blake's "The Mental Traveller" which "shows us a male figure born into domination by a female crone, mother nature":[15]

> She binds iron thorns around his head
> She pierces both his hands and feet
> She cuts his heart out at his side
> To make it feel both cold and heat
> Her fingers number every nerve
> Just as a miser counts his gold
> She lives upon his shrieks and cries
> And she grows young as he grows old.[16]

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[15] Adams, p. 136.
[16] William Blake, "The Mental Traveller" in W.H. Stevenson ed. Blake: The Complete Poems (London: Longmans, 1971), pp. 578-581. Gulley Jimson does not follow the order of the

(HM,52)

But Gulley will not be dominated: "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" (HM,52).

This conflict between Sara's "materiality" and Gulley's art or "prophetic spirit" is, however, shown in Herself Surprised only in terms of her attempt to manage or "dominate" him by her materialistic idea of success, as when she pushes him to finish a picture for an art competition only to kill his inspiration in the project:

> "But there is only a fortnight before the sending-in day," I said.
> "I know," Nina said, "and so does he. But it's no good trying to make him paint if he has lost his inspiration."
> "Inspiration is nonsense," I said. "He told me so himself. He only wants to be put at it."
> But she looked grave and said that Jimson often talked like that but it wasn't true. How could he paint without inspiration?
> "This competition is the biggest chance of his life," I told her. "If he wins it, it will give him a real start". . .
> "I know," she said, "and he was painting so well even on Monday--but he has not touched a brush since." She said it in such a way that I knew what she meant and I said: "What, it's not me who's upset him."
> "He was very upset," she said, "you know he looked upon you in a special way as his friend."
> So I was astonished to think that I could have upset anyone so much. . . . But I was put about too. For, I thought, if he loses this competition, it will be my fault.
> He must finish it, I said. He simply must send his picture in. He mustn't miss this chance if he dies for it [Cary's emphasis].
>
> (52)

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[16](cont'd) original poem.

Sara's obstinate insistence on pushing Gulley into success is considerably redeemed by her genuine concern for his well-being. But it is, as comically as tragically, simple-minded and single-minded. In her self-assertiveness, she will listen to neither Nina nor Gulley himself and understand that he is self-motivated, and is not, like herself, materialistic. He does not paint for money, in the first instance; he paints to express himself, which is why he resents her efforts to make him "a money maker":

> "My dear Sall, you've never had any other idea but to turn me into a money-maker with a balance at the bank and two motor cars. Well, I give you warning--stop it and stop it now. That's all I ask. Not to be nagged."
>
> So then I lost my temper and said: "That's one thing I would never do. I'd scorn to nag--and I scorn a nagger."
>
> "On the contrary, you've never stopped nagging at me--why, you nag me even when you're asleep. Your face says: 'Go on and make me money and be somebody in the world.' That's the word, isn't it? That's the way you think. Well, stop thinking. I won't be thought at."
>
> "And I won't be talked to like that. I'll not stand it." I tried to walk out, but he got across the door. We looked at each other and I could see that he was blue and green with rage and shaking all over.
>
> I tried to push past him and at once he hit me on the nose with his fist. I was so astonished and so furious that I could not say a word. I caught him by the wrists and pulled him from the door. I wanted to shake him and box his ears. But suddenly he jerked away from me and walked out of the room.
>
> (111-2)

Gulley is, in his frustrations, a violent man, but Sara does not seem to take him seriously. As is suggested by her reiterated joke of wanting to box him, and by her obstinate efforts to push him into success, she takes his words and beatings as lightly as she takes most situations. In some

contexts, this is her comic strength, her defence against feeling demoralized. But in the context of her relationship with Gulley, as in the context of her trial when she aggravates her situation by smiling, her comic strength is her tragic flaw. She plays with danger in not taking Gulley seriously, as when, in their final conflict, she gives him an infuriating parcel in which "there was nothing inside but four rolls of toilet paper," instead of the picture he has asked for: "I remembered that Sara had gone into the bedroom to look for string to tie up my parcel. . . . And I laughed. It was that or wanting to cut the old woman's throat" (HM, 193).

It is partly because Sara does not take Gulley's violent nature seriously until it is too late, but largely because she is a captive of her love for him that she decides to have "no more of Mr. Gulley" after the beating (112) without really meaning it. She goes away only to wire their landlady, Miss Slaughter, to send her bags: the pretext for calling her to take her back to Gulley, without losing face. As she unmasks herself, "I . . . knew perfectly well that I had sent for my trunks only to get her to bring me home" (115). Sara is such a comic-pathetic captive of Gulley that, for all her castigation of herself as "a beaten woman that goes back to be beaten again" (118), she would go back to him, even after he deserts her and she has built another nest, with Mr. Wilcher:

> I knew I would go back if he asked me, and be beaten

> and lose all my comforts. I dreaded it and yet I knew he had only to say the word. For cruel as he was, he had yet a hold on me. I don't know how it is but when you've lived with a man . . . he gets into your blood, whoever he is, and you can't get him out. Besides, there was no doubt Gulley was the most of a man I ever knew.
>
> (166-7)

Since no other man she lives with has a hold on her, the generalization she makes ("whoever he is") only serves to justify her fateful obsessive love for Gulley. Her nest with him is finally dissolved when she tries to force him to make the vicar pay for damaging the parish mural Gulley paints for their landlady:

> "Painting is my job, not fighting, and if I start fighting, I won't be able to paint. That would be one up for the church wardens, wouldn't it, to smash the picture and stop me painting too--and worry myself to death on top of all."
>
> So I said if he would not fight, I would.
>
> "That's the same thing," he said. "If you get into fighting and bitterness, then so do I. The only thing for us, Sall, is to keep serene. . . ."
>
> I said I was not going to let us be ruined and wasted, all for want of a little spirit.
>
> So then he turned savage and told me that if I said another word, he would hit me. And I daresay I said the word, for he gave me the worst beating of all. . . . And when I came round he was gone, and I didn't see him again for years.
>
> (132-3)

As we see in <u>The Horse's Mouth</u>, Gulley tries to accept the world's injustice, such as the wanton destruction of his pictures here and in his story, with philosophical calm, so as to keep his sanity. To attempt to fight against injustice is to knock his head against the wall; it is self-destructive, and this is why he advises Sara "to keep serene." But since she will not listen to him, he explodes,

as is his wont. The central tragic irony of the passage is that Gulley tries to keep his serenity only to lose it; he avoids fighting the vicar only to fight his mistress. While this frees him from her "domination," it also makes him all the more destitute--a situation she mitigates with Wilcher's money.

Sara's relationship with Wilcher only comes next to that with Gulley in the gravity of its tragic outcome--the imprisonment. But before the end, it is dominantly comic, not only in the sense that it arouses laughter in the reader, but also in that it is happy for the heroine herself. As she presents him, Wilcher is a comic (or laughable) "regular old bachelor" and gentleman (159). He is particularly marked by a sharp contradiction between his preoccupation with "the lusts of the flesh" (143) and, at the same time, with the lusts of the spirit. Thus on the one hand, he is a lecherous man in some trouble with the law for indecent self-exposure to girls in recreational parks (187); and when Sara joins him, he has a bad reputation with his country house, Tolbrook:

> When I asked the registry woman what was wrong with Tolbrook, she told me as if it pleased her. A big country house, with only two maids indoors. . . . And it had a bad name, too, that is to say, Mr. Wilcher, the owner, had a bad name, deserved or not. He had difficulty with keeping servants, specially female servants, and once or twice he had nearly been had up with his goings on.
>
> (137)

Yet on the other hand, Wilcher is a pious man, "strict about church-going" (142) and "family prayers" (143). He has,

however, more reputation for his lecherous side, which, in public opinion, makes the pious one hypocritical, as we learn from Sara's defence of him:

> As for those who said Mr. W. was a hypocrite to make so much of church and then run after young girls, I thought of his boils and his hot blood, and I thought, too, of my past deeds. And it seemed to me that I might have been a hypocrite, when I was going to church.
>
> (143)

Sara is here trying to identify herself with Wilcher and defend both of them. But her case is different. Her piety is, as we have seen, hollow, and does not, in any case, preoccupy her at any time. Wilcher's piety, on the other hand, is, as we see in his own part of the trilogy, quite genuine. He is a devout Christian, but his worldliness tends to overwhelm his spirituality, and this serves to harmonize his relationship with Sara.

Her nest with him is, unlike her previous ones, free from conflict. It is also the most revealing of the culinary aspect of her obsession with sensual pleasures. She loves the kitchen and cooking no less than men, and at Tolbrook she appears to have found her ideal kitchen:

> It seemed to me that it was providence Himself that had taken me by the hand and led me back to the kitchen. For where could a woman find a better life, I mean in a good house with a good draught in the chimney, and double sinks and really hot water, as I always had at Tolbrook. Then it came back to me about what poor Jimson had said about my true home being in a kitchen . . . and I felt the true joy of my life. . . . "So here I am," I thought, "mistress of my own world in my own kitchen," and I looked at the shining steel of the range and the china on the dresser glittering like jewels, and the dish covers, hanging in their row from the big venison one on the left to

> the little chop one on the right, as beautiful as a row of calendar moons. . . .
>
> "How many women," I thought, "can sit before a fire like this one among such a noble property of bowls and pots and cups and plates and knives and forks and whisks and pestles and colanders, bottles and kegs and jars."
>
> (149-50)

This comic extravagant passion for Wilcher's "noble property" makes Sara all the more willing to yield to his perverted demands, so as to protect her nest:

> I knew I would give way. For I liked my happiness . . . 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.
>
> (174)

But, ironically, Sara tries to protect her nest only to help dissolve it. For it is her close co-operation with Mr. W., in more than one way, which enables her to steal even money from him, and which leads to his marriage proposal and to her imprisonment.

Sara is, as I hope I have shown, a tragicomic figure. But she is invariably seen by most of Cary's critics as a comic one:[17] she shows many stock comic features, such as her roguishness and vitality, and her carnality and concomitant battles with men, which give her a close resemblance to such conventional comic heroines as she is often compared with, especially as she also lives to tell

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[17] See, for example, Michael Rosenthal, "Cary's Comic Sense," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 3(Fall 1971), p.342. And James Hall, The Tragic Comedians: Seven British Novelists (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 85. But Golden Larsen perceives, as I do, "the deeply tragic undertone" of Sara's story. The Dark Descent: Social Change and Moral Responsibility in the Novels of Joyce Cary (New York: Roy Publishers, 1966), p. 124.

her story. As "a woman of the world" battling with men, Sara could have been seen by Meredith and Langer as a typical comic heroine: "The heroines of comedy are like women of the world. . . . Comedy is an exhibition of their battle with men, and that of men with them."[18] Langer concurs: "The contest of men and women--the most universal contest, humanized, in fact civilized, yet still the primitive joyful challenge, the self-preservation and self-assertion whose progress is the comic rhythm."[19]

But with Cary's treatment of Sara's contests with men, "the comic rhythm" is also, in Langer's corollary phrase, "the tragic rhythm." He illustrates further Corrigan's thesis that a subject, even "the 'battle of the sexes',"[20] is comic, tragic, or mixed only according as the artist handles it.

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[18] Quoted in S. Langer, "The Comic Rhythm" in Corrigan, p. 136.
[19] S. Langer, p. 137.
[20] Corrigan, p. 8.

VI. "The Divided Self": To Be A Pilgrim

> "Pity and laughter, sympathy and derision--all can be expressed at once."[1]

If we have a dominantly comic first impression of Tom Wilcher, the narrator-protagonist of To be a Pilgrim, in Sara's story, and "it is difficult to find anything in him to sympathize with,"[2] it is largely because Sara herself has, in Wayne Booth's phrase, "inadequate access to necessary information" about him.[3] Her picture of him is, therefore, too superficial to win him much sympathy. It is focused on his perverted actions in the present and immediate past, as she sees him outwardly and hears about him from gossip. She does not--and we do not--know his background, and the underlying causes of his reckless behavior. Although we suspect, with her, that Wilcher is half-demented, his Volpone-like cunning undermines our suspicion and sympathy. Consequently, we largely respond to him with detachment, in spite of Sara's pity for him, which, in its characteristic automatism, does not move us.

It is not until we meet Wilcher again, in To be a Pilgrim, that we understand all about him, from the inside, and modulate our initial comic response to him with pity.[4]

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[1] Andrew Wright, "Irony in Fiction" in S.K. Kumar ed. Critical Approaches to Fiction (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. 387.
[2] Hazard Adams, Joyce Cary's Trilogies (Tallahasee: University Presses of Florida, 1983), p. 125.
[3] Wayne Booth, "Distance and Point-of-View: An Essay in Classification" in Kumar, p. 319.
[4] Adams remarks, with Wayne Booth's support, that "the strength and the weakness of such a form of personal narration are that we almost inevitably sympathize [with the

The Wilcher we see here is a profoundly pathetic, if still ludicrous, old man of seventy-one, "battered by life" (7). He is suffering from loss of all his close relatives, and of things which he treasures; from loneliness, nostalgia, and frustration. Not surprisingly, he is suffering from recurring heart attacks as well, and even his mental stability is, as we learn, highly questionable; his niece, Ann, a doctor in charge of him, thinks he is losing his mind, and some of his aberrations here, as in Sara's story, lead to no other conclusion. He is, however, never certified. For, as Laing says in The Divided Self, "it is . . . not always possible to make sharp distinctions between sanity and insanity."[5]

If, as Cary remarks, "all [his] characters are in a jam,"[6] Wilcher is certainly in the most agonizing jam, not only because of the magnitude of his suffering, but also because he is, quite unlike his counterparts, a passive sufferer, lacking even the usual Carian psychological defence mechanism--laughter--to mitigate his tragic consciousness and save him from spiritual disintegration. Where the Jimsons respond to their tragic situation with laughter, he responds with self-pity, even as he knows that "self-pity is self-torture" (119). This malady is marked by such comic-pathetic ejaculations as: "I . . . Tom Wilcher,

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[4](cont'd) narrator-protagonist] even though we might not approve [of his actions]." Adams, p. 124.

[5] R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 137.

[6] Joyce Cary, quoted in Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary: A Preface to his Novels (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p. 108.

that life-battered gnome" (237); "I, the very last individual being of the old creation" (278); "I am an old fossil" (341); "I am an old man, and I have not much longer [to live]" (114). In this, as in so much else, Wilcher is quite the opposite of the typical Carian man, and his story departs from the familiar tragicomic pattern. For the first time in the novels discussed in this thesis, we have a conservative protagonist at war with change and, indeed, with himself, rather than a non-conformist at war with the established society.

Tom Wilcher, "a sentimental old Victorian" (101), is Cary's principal illustration of "the tragedy of the conservative whose world is being destroyed" (AR, 74) by change--"the inevitable and continuous revolution which goes on all the time everywhere" (SE, 120). Although reason tells him that the world is in flux, that "history is always a turmoil of change" (7), Wilcher is so deeply attached to the Victorian world into which he was born that he is broken by its passing away and its replacement by what he resentfully sees as "the corruption of the times" of the post-Victorian world (271). With the death of everyone he loved, and with the falling apart of the things he valued, as symbolized in his disintegrating ancestral country-house, Tolbrook, Wilcher's life is devoid of meaning, and confused. For, as Cary theorizes on such a situation in Art and Reality,

> everyone . . . creates his own idea of things. . . . He makes a world that is his work of art. He is not only expressed in it, he is committed to it, and its

> destruction is for him an irreparable loss, for with it he loses all the meaning, all the emotional satisfaction of his life, its whole realization. (AR, 72)

Cary, as we saw in the first chapter, sees change at once as "our tragedy" and "our opportunity," as ruin and progress (FT, xi). Accordingly, he is both sympathetic with and critical of the man such as Wilcher, who hates change as he contemplates its destructiveness. On the one hand, therefore, he identifies himself with Wilcher's situation:

> The tragedy of such a man is that he sees the good forever being destroyed with the bad; especially that irreplaceable good, those graces and virtues that depend on tradition, on example, on that real education which lives only from mind to mind, and cannot be even described in text book. (8)

His tragedy is universal:

> Can anyone fail to suffer in the face of continued ruin of good men, good things, of all that is fine, true, delicate. . .? Can everyone console himself with the enjoyment of all that is fine, true, delicate, in the new arts, new aspirations which arise every day? It may not be possible to do so. We may be too old, too tired. We may be too lonely. Change may break our hearts.[7]

But for all his sympathy, Cary is, on the other hand, opposed to Wilcher's conservatism, and treats him, as he does all his conservative characters, with hardly any admiration, at least before his epiphany. Wilcher, Cary would explain,

> has never realized that freedom itself, the free creative mind in action, means an everlasting revolution, everlasting change. [He] belongs, that is, to the kind of person who cannot accommodate

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[7] Joyce Cary, quoted in Wright, p. 37.

> [himself] to change, who begins to say in middle age that the world is going to the devil. We all know the academician who says that art is finished because people don't like his pictures any more, or the critic who says the novel is finished because he doesn't like any novels written later than those he read about forty years ago.
>
> (SE, 112)

This is Wilcher's main tragic flaw. He cannot accommodate himself to change. Yet because "nothing ever stays fixed" (SE, 253), and change, good or bad, is inevitable, one can only make common cause with it, "move on" with it, as does Tabitha, Wilcher's foil, in A Fearful Joy. To try, as Wilcher does, to resist it is futile. As he himself recognizes, with authorial approval, "we have to move with the times. Or the time will move us" (105). "We must make new worlds about us for the old does not last" (37).

But, ironically, Wilcher continues to resist change, through his "passion for the old" (AR, 74) and opposition to the new, even as he realizes that it is imperative to move with it, and wants to do so. His story revolves round this tragicomic dilemma. Before he finally comes to terms with his "enemy," change, at the end of the story, Wilcher is pathetically and comically divided between his attachment to the past and his desire to be progressive: "to be a pilgrim," an adventurer or "wanderer" in spirit, space, and time. So, as the story tortuously progresses towards his reconciliation or resignation to change, Wilcher loses part of his conservative identity, and is more characterized by his divided allegiance than by his conservatism.[8]

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[8] That Wilcher is a divided character is mentioned by most

Although this central split dominates his old age, Wilcher has always been a divided and self-contradicting man, bedeviled with "a conflict of desires" and consequent confusion (77). In youth, he wanted to live at home and take care of family possessions at the same time as he wanted to go to India and be a missionary. Since then, he has been a worshipper of God and Mammon; a conformist to tradition and non-conformist; a gentleman and rogue; and so on. While these contradictions are comic, they are built on pathos, as they are symptomatic of Wilcher's mental and emotional instability which has alienated him from himself, and paralysed his will to regulate his life. Hence he has always been a confused kind of man, lacking faith in himself, and easily swayed by others.

In old age, as he faces death, Wilcher's confusion is aggravated not merely by senility, but largely by a maddening consciousness of his "failure in life" (16) as he revaluates himself in relation to what he simplistically sees as the successful lives of his dead relatives. As a result of his self-revaluation, his story oscillates between the present and the past, through flashbacks. But for reasons that go beyond his revaluative demands, as we shall

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[8](cont'd) of Cary's critics. But few examine the implications of Wilcher's duality. Robert Bloom, one of the few, equates the duality with Cary's own duality, his refusal to be specific in moral terms. The Indeterminate World: A Study of the Novels of Joyce Cary. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 1962), p. 86. Another critic, Stephen Shapiro, reads the duality in terms of a far-fetched sexual theory. "Joyce Cary's To be a Pilgrim: Mr. Facing-both-ways," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, VIII (Spring 1966), pp. 81-91.

see, Wilcher devotes more space and time to the past.

Unlike his adventurous elder brothers, Edward and William, and sister, Lucy, Wilcher discovers, he has been strongly attached to family possessions and failed "to be a pilgrim": "Possessions have been my curse. I ought to have been a wanderer, too, a free soul" (16). His consciousness of failure is all the more acute because the possessions have all but disappeared; he feels as if he had built his house on sand as he sees "the very frame of things in which [he] had lived so securely . . . falling apart, like broken glass" (160). The effect of this frustration is partly to alienate Wilcher from his conservative and materialistic self, from his "love of an orderly and settled life, [his] too great reverence for tradition, etc., and the family possessions that represent tradition in material form" (91). He now associates this way of life with failure, and wants to adopt the pilgrim spirit right away: "I must move on" (16). Yet because Wilcher remains a conservative at heart, his pilgrim and conservative spirits are inevitably at loggerheads, so that he keeps vacillating between loving and hating his past, on the one hand, and between admiring and fearing the pilgrim spirit, on the other. Thus he loves and hates Tolbrook, the symbol of his past: "the old house, so hated and so loved," is his "curse" and pride (12). In hatred, he sees it as his "prison" and "coffin," and wants to abandon it: "The secret of happiness, of life, is to forget the past, to look forward, to move on. The sooner I

can leave Tolbrook, the better" (34-5).

But, with characteristic self-contradiction, what he tries to forget, instead, is the present. For in his "love of Tolbrook and the old grace of life" (134), Wilcher lives in the past; literally in the ancient house, and figuratively in memories evoked by the house of his dead relatives. His mother's former bedroom, for instance, brings her back to life:

> Here in my mother's bedroom long dismantled, I seem to float in another world, far detached from the turmoil of history; and full of another brightness, another tension, than the fire and conflict of human life. I could believe that my mother's spirit has returned to this place.
>
> (292)

Wilcher is oddly obsessed with remembrance of things past, and seems to derive a sweet melancholy from it: "I have no happiness now, except in memory" (26). The pathos of his obsession, though, is that his communion with the living dead perpetuates his agonizing consciousness of loss, at the same time as it heightens his feeling of loneliness by alienating him from the living. Furthermore, by living the present in the past, he evades facing the inescapable reality of the present, and prolongs his agony in coming to terms with it.

But in his escapism, suggested as much by his long-standing habit of taking "refuge in the idea of [his] happy childhood" (34) as by his craving for Sara to "save" him from his agony, Wilcher sees his memories as a good escape from the present he hates. Tolbrook is a sanctuary

which, for all his dubious repudiation of it, he must preserve. This is the pivot of "the generation conflict" between him and his nephew Robert and niece Ann, "the new generation" sharing Tolbrook with him. The old house, "so doused in memory" (135) for old Wilcher has no more significance for Robert than Ranevsky's cherished cherry orchard has for Lopakhin, in Chekov's play of that title. So Robert, a farmer, strives to create his own meaning of Tolbrook by transforming it into a "farm house," much to Wilcher's dismay. Lopakhin-like, Robert mindlessly fells Wilcher's beloved trees in the yard, before desecrating the house itself:

> I stepped into the room and looked about me. Rakes and hoes were leaning against the classic panelling, garden seats were planted before the inner doors, and a work-bench stood under the great central chandelier of the three, under which, as my grandmother has recorded, Jane Austen once flirted with her Irishman. Upon the one chair remaining in a corner, a yard cat was suckling two kittens. It needed nothing more to say that barbarians had taken possession. . . .
>
> [The room] has been our pride for a century. Even my father would boast of the architects, who came from all over the world, to photograph its decorative plaster, and to measure its panels. Some have called it too delicate in its simplicity. But what beauty in its grace, its dignity. . . .
>
> I heard Robert's voice at my elbow. "Hullo, uncle, I thought as we weren't using this old barn, it might do for some of our stuff. It will save a new machinery shed at least."
>
> "An old barn," I said, for I thought that the boy was needlessly provocative. "It is a masterpiece."
>
> "Yay," Robert said, "I always liked this room best of any I know. It's grand. Good for dukes. Sixteen foot high, I measured it to see if it would take a thresher. I didn't tell you I was after a second-hand thresher--we'll have to put it somewhere out of the rain. But I won't do the building any harm, uncle. It's only temporary. And if we had to

> make a door for the straw we could take down a panel next the fireplace and knock out a few bricks."
>
> "Thresh in here--you'll shake the whole house to pieces. No," I said, "not while I live. . . ." I lost my temper with the boy and told him to take his damned machinery into the yard.
>
> (128-9)

Wilcher's tragedy, as we saw at the beginning, is that his world is being destroyed. This process is what Cary dramatizes here in the passage. Wilcher is helplessly confronted with change, personified in "the new generation" which, by Cary's assumption, is always as "anxious to make a new existence" for itself as the old generation is "attached to [its own] kind of existence" (SE, 117). Wilcher's protests notwithstanding, he can only suffer as he sees the best part of Tolbrook being destroyed by "barbarians" who cannnot appreciate its beauty, grace and dignity. We sympathize with him in his emotional agony, and, at the same time laugh at him for expecting Tolbrook to last forever, even without maintenance! Like Ranevsky and her cherry orchard, Wilcher, in his miserliness, no longer maintains the cherished house.

In a sense, then, and as Wilcher himself recognizes later, it is proper that Robert takes charge of Tolbrook. He will preserve it by renovating it. Yet his scorn for Wilcher's sanctuary, and the glee with which he transforms it, imply a lack of consideration for the old man's feelings that borders on what Wilcher calls "the injustice of one generation to another" (41). This makes Wilcher all the more pathetic. But since the basic problem between the two is, as

so often in Cary's world, that of mutual miscomprehension, we ultimately sympathize with both of them.

Their conflict offers a clear illustration of Wilcher's tragicomic dilemma--to be or not to be a pilgrim. He wants "to forget the past" and be progressive, yet he fights to preserve it and remain conservative. His disenchantment with and reverence for his past are only matched by his admiration for and fear of the pilgrim spirit. Thus while he is opposed to Robert for his enterprise, shown as much by his transformation of Tolbrook as by his sojourn in Canada, Wilcher is also impressed by his nephew for that very reason: "There's a lot of Wilcher in Robert. He is a real Protestant inside. He'd really like to make a whole new god for himself" (164).

Wilcher identifies the pilgrim spirit with English Protestantism and non-conformity, as epitomized for him by John Bunyan, from whom he borrows the title of his story. This "Protestant tradition" implies to him, as to Cary himself, one's "power" or freedom to chart out one's own course of life instead of conforming to a particular pattern. Hence the pilgrim is, for Wilcher, a revolutionary or non-conformist, as exemplified by his clan: "the Wilchers are as deep English as Bunyan himself. A Protestant people, with the revolution in their bones"(21). But his chief exemplar of these qualities is his sister, Lucy, Robert's mother, who, in youth, rebels against her father after a beating, and joins Brown and his Benjamite sect. Wilcher is

full of admiration for Lucy in her "power" to break away from home and "cut out" her own destiny (48). At the same time, however, he sees her power as devilish: "I never hated anyone as I could hate Lucy. . . . What I loathed in her was the devil" (20).

"People of power," such as Lucy and her husband Brown, have always impressed and scared Wilcher. They strike a responsive note in the Protestant part of him which binds him to all the Wilchers and repels the conservative part of him which associates them with "the tragedy of revolution" (210). Thus, as a young man at Oxford, he is reluctantly enthused by Brown and his Benjamites as they sing Bunyan's hymn:

> 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 was afraid of Brown; I thought he could convert me. . . . 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 favorite 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 own 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.
>
> (20-1)

But such is Wilcher's tragicomic confusion, even as "a clever young man," that as much as he fears 'the tragedy of revolution" and tries to suppress his Protestant self, he nonetheless finds himself impulsively participating in

revolutionary political activity. He avoids following Brown and his inconsequential Benjamites only to follow, with enthusiasm, his brother Edward's radical wing of the Liberal Party, committed to social change--the very antithesis of what he stands for as a conservative. This incongruity between his radicalism and conservatism surprises even himself:

> For, to tell the truth, I was in terror of this revolution [expected "between 1909 and 1910"] which I expected every day. Why then, you say, did I sign petitions, write ferocious letters to the Press, which, even if they were not printed, expressed the most republican principles; and why did I help Edward in his own more violent campaigns? I answer that I don't know. I am amazed at my own actions; and I think I was often surprised even then.
>
> (202)

Wilcher should not be surprised at his actions, however. For, as he aptly calls himself, after one of Bunyan's characters in The Pilgrim's Progress, he is "Mr. Facing-both-ways"(71). In virtually every issue, he has a foot in both camps, and if he consistently illustrates anything, it is certainly his inconsistency. This makes him appear to be what he is not, hypocritical at times, as particularly exemplified by the discrepancy between his "too great reverence for tradition" on the one hand, and his disregard for it on the other. By his "strict" upbringing, as by his conservative temperament, Wilcher is a conformist who strongly supports convention, especially in regard to marriage, the family and sex, and he is perturbed by the current "moral revolution" (191) or "the corruption of the

times."

But because of his psychic dichotomy and consequent character weakness, which is only complicated by his old-age crisis, Wilcher is also an eccentric with long-standing admiration for "those who stand outside convention" (145). Thus while he extols, for instance, marriage and the home as "the most stable and valuable parts of social order" (181), he is, incongruously, the only one in his father's family who has never married. We do not know, of course, whether this is by choice or by force of circumstances. It seems, however, that until his old age when he desperately and vainly wants to marry his housekeeper and mistress, Sara, Wilcher has been more interested in keeping a mistress than in marrying. When, for instance, his mistress, Julie, proposes marriage, he unscrupulously disappears from her "for more than a year":

> My conduct may seem absurd and even pusillanimous. I can't explain even now why I felt so convinced that it was impossible to marry my mistress. But I have this excuse, that by this time, Tolbrook had come almost entirely into my possession. It was saved. And I felt perhaps that to bring a Julie to Tolbrook would be an impiety to my father's house, now in my care.
>
> (209)

Wilcher's "excuse" is as derisively self-centred as his "conduct" itself. When it suits him, as with Sara, he has no scruples about marrying his mistress and living with her in Tolbrook. When it does not, he cares about the "impiety" involved. However, his "excuse" is also indicative of his pathetic split, and cannot be wholly dismissed as nonsense.

As a gentleman who reveres tradition, Wilcher cannot bring Julie, who stands outside convention, to Tolbrook without violating his propriety. But as an impulsive rogue, he cannot help taking her away from Edward and keeping her for himself, much to his surprise: "I never said to myself, 'I shall have that woman'" (153).

It is this licentious side of Wilcher which makes him appear hypocritical in his reverence for tradition, if one does not charitably take into account the compulsiveness of his licentiousness. He is, as a result of being divided, susceptible to being will-lessly pushed in this and that direction by external forces. Since evil is said to be more fascinating than virtue, it is perhaps not surprising that Wilcher finds himself more easily pushed towards mischief. At Oxford, for instance, he greatly admires "those men of the world, like Edward, who had taken a decision" to have a mistress, and automatically follows them (71). We may accept his pathetic portrait of himself as "a boy who at twenty-one was utterly unsure of himself. So . . . 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" (77).

In old age, Wilcher is even less responsible for his own vices. His senility, loneliness, frustration and incipient insanity all collaborate with his susceptibility to mischief to make such conduct as he shows before the girl in the park grotesque but understandable and pitiable:

> I was not only astonished at my conduct with the young girl in the park; I was horrified at myself. For I had used some phrases to her which were calculated to shock her modesty, and which, it seemed to me, I had chosen for the purpose. To wake her up. To excite her. To make something happen, for myself as for her. I could not believe how such words had passed my lips. But two nights later I was talking in the same manner to a woman who might have been one of my own servants. . . .
>
> How I began this conversation I do not know. I found myself, as before, beside the young woman and in full speech, before I knew what I was doing. (306-7)

Wilcher's surprises are not, like Sara's, dubious. His reckless behaviour is quite involuntary, and he is truly estranged from and surprised at himself. He is, thus, a much more pathetic figure in his recklessness than Sara. Yet, at the same time, he is also much more ludicrous. This is not merely because of the nature and degree of his delinquency. It is largely because, in his exaltation of Victorian morality and its "conventions about chastity" (38), Wilcher forgets himself and adopts a holier-than-thou attitude towards the new generation, deriding it for its moral laxity. The incongruity between his own laxity and his impatience with the young people's "moral revolution" makes him quite a ludicrous advocate of Victorian morality. He is, in Bretall's expression, " a comic figure--like all persons who unwittingly contradict themselves, i.e. who automatically refute what they <u>say</u> by what they <u>do</u> and <u>are</u>" (Bretall's emphasis).[9]

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[9] Robert Bretall, ed. <u>A Kierkegaard Anthology</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 191.

Wilcher's moral conflict with the young generation is focused on Ann's and Robert's premarital sex. Outraged, Wilcher, true to his meddlesomeness, cannot leave the lovers alone:

> I distinctly heard Ann's voice say something about the time. "Perhaps, "I thought, "she is talking to herself; and in any case, I'm not going to expose myself to ridicule by any further interference with these children. They have their own ideas about things."
>
> But a moment later, to my own surprise, I found myself in the passage, at the door of the nurse's room. I opened it quietly and turned on the light. There were two heads on the pillows of the narrow bed, and before I had time to turn off the light and withdraw, I saw Ann start up.
>
> I felt a great relief. "That settles it," I thought, as I went back to bed. "Now I need not bother my head about the girl. I shall get some peace at last."
>
> But when Ann, at eight, came in to take my pulse, etc., I could not even look at her. . . .
>
> "I'm afraid you are rather shocked at me," Ann said then in a tone like a little girl who has been stealing the jam. But she was laughing at me.
>
> But I was determined not to be angry with her. I said, "I suppose it is a modern custom. Do you go to bed with any man who offers?"
>
> "No, uncle, truly, it is the first time."
>
> "The first--don't you think it's a pity--and that perhaps some of these old conventions about chastity and so on were designed for the happiness and protection of women". . . .
>
> . . .[S]he hints, "And you told me yourself that Sara Jimson was as good as a wife to you. Of course, I'm not blaming you, uncle--quite the other way."
>
> "Then you ought to--I did wrong--a terrible sin. It is fearful to think of my responsibility."
>
> "But, uncle, you shouldn't let that get on your mind. You were so stricty brought up. And that always produces a reaction."
>
> (38-40)

Wilcher is typically shown here "in two minds at once and that means," he heard a psychologist explain, "he [has] no will" (77). Hence this comic-pathetic spectacle of his characteristic inconsistency. He decides against

interference only to interfere; he does not want to bother any more about the girl, and yet he will not leave her alone; and he is determined not to be angry with her, even as he is already so! Similarly, Wilcher boasts elsewhere of being "one of the strongest supporters of the emancipation of women" (26), yet his castigation of Ann as a "disreputable niece" (40) rather than Robert or both of them shows him as, in Hardy's expression, "the slave to custom and conventionality."[10] He is prudishly concerned about chastity only for women, an anomaly which provoked Cardinal Newman's complaint about his fellow Victorians: "Was it 'just in a man to expect in a wife an antenuptial chastity, if he does not come chaste to her?' "[11]

Such inconsistency is undoubtedly what Ann aims to expose in reminding Wilcher of his own disreputable relationship with Sara. This naturally deflates him. He can no more explain the inconsistency than he can explain why

> on the day when I went to make love to my brother's mistress, I had in my pocket a letter to a missionary friend, promising to join him in his work. (147)

But the sympathetic reader knows, of course, that Wilcher behaves as he does not because of his strict upbringing, as Ann thinks, nor because his "whole life was illusion and hypocrisy," as he sees himself through the spectacles of the

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[10] Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles: An Authoritative Text, ed. Scott Elledge (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979), p. 221.

[11] Quoted in Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 367.

"youngsters" (147), but because of his split personality, which makes To Be a Pilgrim virtually a study in self-contradiction.

The passage just quoted brings into focus yet another major aspect of his duality: his preoccupation with both worldly and spiritual things, as stressed through his love of money and property on the one hand, and his love of God on the other. But since I dealt with this contradiction in the preceding chapter, I will confine this discussion to only the tragicomic implications of his mammonism. "Money," Wilcher admonishes Ann and Robert, "is important--extremely important. I've had to do with money all my life" (182). He cannot conceive of life without money: "What is a man without cash. His self-respect, his faith oozes out at the bottom of his empty pockets" (17).

In his life-long obsession with money, culminating in his legal specialization as a "money-manager" (182), Wilcher displays several stock comic qualities: he is "a skinflint" (316) or miser, an egotist, and an acquisitive man. His miserliness and egotism are revealed not only through his habit of underpaying his house servants, but also through his obsession with changing his will whenever a beneficiary offends him. In so doing, Wilcher selfishly aims to gain the service of all his hopeful relatives at no cost. He has so far altered the will thirty-two times, and, his disclaimer notwithstanding, he is plainly a comic "old miser who can only think and talk about money and shake his will every

time that he's crossed" (182). This vice makes him a nasty old man, ever suspicious that his relatives, particularly Ann and Robert, are plotting to get him out of the way so that they can take over his property.

The vice also points to Wilcher's unscrupulousness in seeking his ends, a weakness he underscores especially by capitalizing on Edward's financial problems to disinherit him of Tolbrook, and also to take from him his mistress, Julie:

> And Edward's position, at a critical moment in his fortunes, enabled me, or rather the firm, to impose terms. The first clause in our agreement, a clause not put into writing, was that he should leave Julie and marry Mrs. Tirrit [a widow].
>
> We insisted on this. For only Mrs. Tirrit could satisfy the creditors, who were prepared to accept, on her verbal assurances alone, a delay of proceedings.
>
> (184)

Wilcher argues, in self-defense, that if he had not separated Edward and Julie, she would have ruined his political career, and that if he had not dispossessed him of Tolbrook, the house would have been lost to the family. Admittedly, both reasons are plausible. Yet his actions are in such conformity with his egotism and acquisitiveness that the argument appears to be little more than a clever justification of his conduct.

In any case, Wilcher pays for his acquisitiveness in the end. For, as we saw, he comes to regard the coveted house as a "burden" and a cause of his failure "to be a pilgrim." This is the pathetic side of his materialism. He shows more self-condemnation than self-acceptance in his

preoccupation with money and property. Hence his belated desire "to renounce the shows of the world" (151). As he censors himself with biblical quotations, "'he who loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver. This day is vanity, if I have made gold my hope'" (151). Wilcher, Cary underlines in his prefatory essay, "knows, with his sound education and evangelical protestant training, that he must not set his heart on worldly things" (7). He suffers, therefore, for devoting his life to money and property. He feels that he has betrayed himself and, indeed, his father, whose last words he painfully recalls: "'God's work--quite right, go into church. Set heart on God's things. Other things go from you'"(158).

But the reader knows that because of Wilcher's conflicting goals, he hardly could have had any more self-realization from being more devoted to "God's things" than he has had from being more devoted to worldly things. Ultimately, then, it is his divided allegiance which denies him self-realization, and spells what he pathetically sees as his futile existence, before his reconciliation of opposites within him at the end.

Partly as a result of his oppressive sense of futility, and partly because of his self-condemnation as its cause, Wilcher paints a largely clownish and pathetic picture of himself as an ineffectual man, "unsure of himself" (77) and "absurd" in appearance (139). Of the various illustrations one could cite, the picture he draws of himself in politics

is most representative:

> It was true, of course, that, at critical moments, I was apt to do foolish things, or the wrong thing, or nothing at all. I was, too, a bad speaker; and my voice, in moments of excitement, rose to a squeak. For this reason and because of my general appearance, I adopted a slow and rather pompous form of address. . . .
>
> [On one occasion] I mistook the time and place of a meeting, and began to speak to the wrong audience in the wrong place, at the wrong time.
>
> (156-7)

Wilcher's "general appearance" comes to function as a metaphor of his ineffectuality, by association. Several times, he draws our attention to it, as above, in the context of his inadequacy, especially in his recollection of himself as a youth. His dog-like dependency on Lucy, for instance, is tied to his recollection of himself as

> a small ugly child with a round red face, a snub nose, black hair growing out of his round head in tufts, like that of an old-fashioned clown.
>
> (25)

Similarly, he recalls himself, in the third person, as cast by Nature "for the droll and not the poet":

> He was grave and a little pompous; but the gravity was partly due to the knowledge that he was very plain, with an absurd ugliness. His red face, his snub nose, his stiff black hair, his round spectacles and peering startled eyes, were comic in themselves. And when he forgot them and began to chatter, to wave his hands, he became at once grotesque. Yet he often did forget them, for he was greatly liable to enthusiasms.
>
> (138)

Wilcher's portrayal of himself would be purely comic if it were not so painfully interwoven with his frustration with himself, as cause or effect. The kind of laughter his

portrait arouses is what Beckett would call "the mirthless laugh . . . the dianoetic laugh . . . the laugh laughing at . . . that which is unhappy."[12] This gives Wilcher a tragi-clownish character, which relates him particularly to Charley, Johnson and Jimson.

To some extent, Wilcher's frustration with himself also makes him a rather limited interpreter of his overall situation and that of other characters. One feels, for instance, that he exaggerates his "failure in life" (16). He sees his life as futile, but, as we interpret it, with Edward, he has at least satisfied his "passionate love of home" (78). Edward reminds him: "You've got what you wanted. You always meant to live at home" (175). While it is also true that he meant to be a missionary, his love of home was preponderant. To project himself, therefore, as wholly unfulfilled is a comic over-dramatization of his failure in life.

Wilcher's observation of himself is further limited by his dual nature. As is suggested by his moral conflict with the young generation, among other illustrations, one side of Wilcher at times blinds him to his other side, and he will innocently either deny his confessed weaknesses or castigate others for their similar weaknesses. In his piety, for instance, he overlooks his materialism, and vehemently denies manipulating his relatives to his covetous ends. In

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[12] Quoted in Ruby Cohn, "A Comic Complex and a Complex Comic" in Robert Corrigan, ed. Comedy: Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1965), p. 430.

his piety, again, he self-righteously condemns his estate manager, Jaffery, for seeing, like Wilcher himself, "everyone who does not love money and property above everything in the world [as] cracked" (33-4). Likewise, in his dubious progressiveness, Wilcher cannot tolerate Blanche's conservatism:

> For Blanche always upset me. So sure of herself. And besides, a reactionary of the worst kind. She belonged to the feudal age. I didn't object to a reasoned conservatism. . . . But I had no patience with the blind worshipper of exploded systems. (133)

If Wilcher himself is not a blind worshipper of exploded systems, he is a worshipper still; a worshipper of an exploded Victorian system, who ought to be the last person to be impatient with anyone fossilized in the past. Here, as in the preceding illustrations, the discrepancy between Wilcher's view of himself and what he is implies a deficient self-awareness, which has a comic patina beneath which lies the pathos of his self-estrangement.

Wilcher's observation of other characters shows much the same discrepancy between what they are, from the reader's point of view, and what he sees them as. Just as he exaggerates his failure, so does he exaggerate other people's success in life. Apart from the new generation--Ann, Robert, Gladys and John, whom he mostly criticizes and pities at the same time, all other major characters appear to the frustrated Wilcher to have succeeded where he failed. So he admires and inflates them,

unconsciously giving a comic falsity to his pathetic observation of them. This is especially so with his observation of his relatives after their deaths, which is often quite incongruous with his more objective contemporaneous observation of them. Of Lucy, for instance, he writes after her death:

> The very idea of Lucy goes to my head. "There aren't such people nowadays," I think. "And what if she had a devil. She did God's work. Out of devilry. She made something good and noble of her life. As I might have done if I had not been turned into a family drudge." (48)

Yet Lucy's life, as we learn from Wilcher himself, is far from godly. The Benjamite sect she naively joins is little more than a congregation of devil worshippers, idolizing their leader, Brown, a self-serving "savage" who uses his sect as a source of women. Lucy's life with him as follower and as one of his wives is quite despicable, and she dies a battered woman.

Similarly, Wilcher elevates Edward, after his death, as an extraordinary politician. But the Edward we see in life is an irresponsible politician, bedeviled "with debts or women" (205), and unable to exploit fully his considerable political talent. Wilcher's other relatives, Bill and his wife Amy, are shown in life as laughing-stocks to the other Wilchers, because of their unsettled existence and poverty. But in death, they become, for Wilcher, models of domestic felicity and quiet dignity. In his agony, Wilcher myopically sees all the lives of his dead relatives as much more

comfortable than his own, thus arousing in the reader laughter as well as pity.

The only living person he admires and inflates is Sara Monday, his former housekeeper and mistress, whom he forlornly still hopes to marry after her imprisonment. Wilcher's pathetic longing for Sara, his only hope of escaping his emotional turmoil, finds expression in his comic exaggeration of her qualities. He sees, for instance, "her view of life" as the quintessence of the wandering spirit he ought to have adopted:

> "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."
>
> And is not that the clue to my own failure in life. Possessions have been my curse. I ought to have been a wanderer, too, a free soul.
>
> (16)

Wilcher is obviously mistaken in seeing Sara's wandering as arising from "her view of life." As we saw, her wandering is simply dictated by circumstances--the dissolution of every nest she builds. She too, as she remarks, "misliked changes" (HS, 85), and would have preferred to put down roots, for instance, at Tolbrook. She loves the place no less than Wilcher himself. But, of course, unlike him, she readily accommodates herself to change, and this is the only clue to what he simplistically sees as her success.

Although Wilcher goes on lavishing praise on Sara, speaking of her only in superlative terms, in the end he contradicts himself, as usual, and sees her as a rogue rather than a lady. This is after she finally shatters his marriage dream because of her new nest with Fred:

> "I thought you so good and religious, and wise, but you are nothing but a cunning greedy creature, a regular peasant. I suppose you have caught this boy Fred just now, as you caught me, and catch everyone--yes that's what you do. You pretend to be so religious and modest and respectable, and all the time you're leading a man on, and heading him off." (322)

The incongruity between Wilcher's two views of Sara comically bespeaks his inability to judge her objectively. He is influenced either by desire or anger, and thus moves from one extreme view to another. However, his latter view, which is, incidentally, identical with Gulley Jimson's view of Sara, is not as incongruous with the reader's view of her.

Wilcher's disillusionment with Sara fortunately marks the end of his long night's journey into day. Henceforth, he squarely faces reality and finally accepts change, thus giving a comic or happy resolution to his central conflict with Robert over Tolbrook:

> [T]he very ruin of this beautiful room is become a part of my happiness. I say no longer "Change must come, and this change, so bitter to me, is a necessary ransom for what I keep." I have surrendered because I cannot fight and now it seems to me that not change but life has lifted me and carried me forward on the stream. It is but a new life which flows through the old house; and like all life, part of that sustaining power which is the oldest thing in the world. . . .

> Robert . . . 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 . . . into a country house.
>
> (328)

Wilcher has all along been, as Adams remarks, "a pilgrim without realizing it."[13] His pilgrimage is his tortuous progress towards "his final acceptance of the inevitability of change,"[14] and, indeed, towards his self-acceptance. For having accepted that change is life, he shows no more conflict within him, and is all of a sudden no longer a divided self. Instead, he shows a belated love of life, as stressed through the conclusion of the novel. Wilcher, who has himself "taken life too seriously," agonizing over loss of "things as well as people" and over other frustrations, big or small, now advises Ann, whose life is beginning to show a similar trend, not to fall into the same trap:

> "You look as if you'd swallowed a safety pin," I said, making her her look at me with Edward's eyes, which should be gay. "You take life too seriously."
> "Don't you think it is rather serious?"
> "My dear child, you're not thirty yet. You have forty, forty-five years in front of you."
> "Yes."
>
> (342)

Literally read, the Ulysses-like everlasting yea which closes Wilcher's story, of course, simply means Ann's agreement to his estimate of the time ahead of her. But over and above the literal meaning is her (and his) recognition

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[13] Adams, p. 116.
[14] Judith Brawer, "The Triumph of Defeat: A Study of Joyce Cary's First Trilogy," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 10 (Winter 1969), p. 633.

that life is "much too serious to be taken seriously" (204). and affirmation to take it easily, to adopt, with Gulley Jimson, a comic response to a tragic existence. "A landscape," says Cary, "does not need to be smooth meadows for men to live with it" (SE, 16[illegible]ife does not have to be smooth to be worth living. This is Wilcher's (and Ann's) ultimate lesson in To be a Pilgrim. His acquired comic spirit, in responding to a tragic world, harmonizes his story with Sara's and Gulley Jimson's.

VII. "A Janus bifrons": The Horse's Mouth

"I am a Janus bifrons; I laugh with one face, I weep with the other."[1]

Kierkegaard

Gulley Jimson's story, The Horse's Mouth, is an epitome of Cary's tragicomic vision of existence. The story is the novelist's culminating illustration of the metaphysical tragicomedy of what his hero calls "the fall into freedom"; everyone's responsibility to make his own sense of life (174). For "the world," according to Gulley's existentialism, "does not mean anything to anybody except what the thrush said . . . GET ON OR GET OUT" (208); put your own meaning in the world and be, or succumb to the meaninglessness. Thus, for Gulley, "every man [is] his own candle. He sees by his own flame" (119). He is solely responsible for realizing himself, and this is the point of Gulley's favorite quotation from Blake: "Go love without the help of anything on earth" (129).[2] Gulley's art, "the creative activity that . . . stands for liberty,"[3] functions, on one level, as a symbolic expression of this individual responsibility or freedom, which as we saw, Cary sees at once as a blessing and a curse.

Accordingly, Gulley's art is his laughter and tears, his life and death. "I like painting," he aptly

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[1] Soren Kierkegaard, "The Journals," in Robert Bretall, ed., A Kierkegaard Anthology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 8.
[2] See note 20.
[3] Joyce Cary, "What Does Art Create?" in Literature and Life, vol.II, Addresses to the English Association, ed. Margaret Willy et.al (London: Harrap, 1951), p. 44.

remarks."That's been my trouble all my life" (16). The "stroke" of the brush which gives him a thrill of joy (170) is, symbolically, "THE STROKE . . . the finisher, the cut-off" (50) which kills him when he falls down while painting his last mural, suggestively entitled "The Creation." His fall into creative freedom is his fall to death. Gulley typifies the metaphysical tragic dilemma of Cary's people: to realize himself, he is "obliged" (FT, ix) to paint, as he does, from "the horse's mouth," to live by his inner light, and create a personal world, but in so doing, he is, in Frye's expression, "broken by a conflict between the inner and outer world, between imaginative reality and the sort of reality which is established by a social consensus."[4]

On the symbolic level of the story, then, neither society nor Gulley himself is really to blame for his tragedy, and his condemnation of society for it is misplaced. Gulley's tragedy is not so much the result of what he or anyone else has done as "the end of what he is"[5]--a free soul condemned to be responsible for himself. This metaphysical character of the tragedy and the comedy of the story must be the basis for Cary's claim: "The Horse's Mouth is a very heavy piece of metaphysical writing" (SE, 13).

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[4] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 39.
[5] Frye, p. 42.

But on the non-symbolic or surface level of the story, society appears to be the principal cause of Gulley's "tragedy of the artist unappreciated in the philistine world."[6] His tragedy is presented in terms of a conflict between him and society because of his genius, and he falls into Frye's category of artists as tragic figures, "whose genius makes them Ishmaels of a bourgeois society."[7] As an original artist, Gulley is ahead of and outside his society, with its philistine artistic values. He believes, with Blake, his mentor, that he "must create a system or be enslaved by another man's,"[8] and he does not conform to conventional forms of artistic expression, appreciated and promoted by society's patrons of art. Hence his tragicomic conflict with society. We sympathize with him not only because he impresses us as "having something more valuable than his society has,"[9] but also because "what happens to him [destitution and ultimately death] is far greater than anything he has done provokes."[10] Yet we also laugh at

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[6] Charles Hoffman, "The Genesis and Development of Joyce Cary's First Trilogy," PMLA 78 (September, 1963), p. 434.
[7] Frye, p. 41.
[8] William Blake, Jerusalem (1.20) in W.H. Stevenson, ed., Blake: The Complete Poems (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 644.
[9] Frye, p. 48. Frye here cites The Horse's Mouth, among other novels with such a tragic hero.
[10] Frye, p.41. Cary remarks on the subject in Power in Men:

> It is, of course, true that states, churches, and academies have always feared and hated genius. Whether they are controlled by ambitious egotists who seek only power and security for themselves or by honest men sincerely believing that there is only one faith, one scientific creed, one good art in the world, they detest the innovator. Men at the head of institutions are necessarily of mature age, with settled convictions and ideas. Such men, even if they should be geniuses, do not welcome new facts and arts

Gulley for, among other reasons, defying society and, as implied by his complaints, expecting to earn a living as an artist.

Society, as represented by his former patron, Hickson, will only recognize and pay for Gulley's art if he paints as it likes, as he used to before his artistic maturity and emancipation from the yoke of convention. But since dismissing this early and popular phase of his artistic career as derivative rather than imaginative, Gulley will only paint as he likes. He is an avant-gardist "who can only achieve himself in exploring new forms of expression" (FT, xi), and he will not sacrifice his artistic freedom to social recognition and money. This is his pride and misfortune of genius. For no one, except his young disciple, Nosy, appreciates his paintings, which are seen by his critics as immoral. "Look at the awful disgusting pictures Jimson paints," he mimics the critics. "Look at that Adam and Eve--worse than Epstein or Spencer. Absolutely repulsive and revolting, as Dickens said about Millais" (26).

Gulley, then, has not sold a picture since he broke away from conventional forms fifteen years ago. He is thus so impoverished that he has nowhere to live, and is a tramp; he cannot afford to buy a proper meal or proper clothes; and, most frustrating to him, he cannot afford to purchase

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[10](cont'd) which tend to supersede their own. They are unfitted to understand them. They honestly regard them as ridiculous or false or dangerous to society. But for every great poet, artist, or scientist murdered by authority millions have died of neglect (p. 89).

badly needed painting materials. Hence "his desperation [and] his rage against the world" (FT, xiii). It deeply grieves him to be destitute and unable to work while the Hicksons, the art dealers, have "made thousands out of [him]" (118) by selling his earlier pictures, "which were practically stolen from [him]":

> [T]he situation had its comic side. Here am I, I said, Gulley Jimson, whose pictures have been bought by the nation, or sold at Christie's by millionaires for hundreds of pounds, pictures which were practically stolen from me, and I haven't a brush or a tube of colour. Not to speak of a meal or a pair of good boots. I am simply forbidden to work. It's enough to make an undertaker smile.
>
> But then, I said again, as I walked up and down Ellam street, to keep warm, I mustn't get up a grievance. Plays the deuce. I must keep calm. For the fact is, IT'S WISE TO BE WISE. . . . I mustn't exaggerate. The nation has only got one of my pictures which was left it by will and which quite likely it didn't want; and only one millionaire has ever bought my stuff. Also he took a big risk of losing his money. Also he is probably far from being a millionaire. So I have no reason to feel aggrieved. (16)

This monologue encapsulates Gulley's plight and his comic reaction to it. He sees his destitution as too undeserved to be taken seriously without losing his mind. Herein resides the dark "comic side" of his story. With "his smile of keeping up" his spirits (HS, 207), the undertaker's smile, Gulley tries to make light of his plight, turning his grievance into a joke by virtually denying it and contradicting himself. As he keeps on advising himself and others, " a man is wise to give way to gaiety even at the expense of a grievance" ('69). Gulley finds it prudent to laugh in the face of what he calls "the damned unfairness of

things" (92) and "get on with the job" (11) of living and painting, instead of getting "in a state" (20) over it and losing his sanity. When, for example, Mrs. Coker evicts him from his boathouse studio, he calms himself:

> It made me laugh. . . . I saw I was going to be angry. No, old man. I said . . . an old chap has got to hold on to wisdom. Yes.
> IT'S WISE TO BE WISE.
> It pays all the time. Don't let 'em rattle you or you might as well take a dive into your coffin. (122-3)

According to Cary, "the personal tragedies of ruined men, superseded business, frustrated artists, can be mitigated by various devices."[11] Laughter is Gulley's mitigating device. It is his "brand of anaesthetic, or opiate, which [makes] bearable for [him] the painful operation of living."[12] Ionesco says, and Cary would have agreed, "the comic alone is able to give us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence."[13] He elaborates: "To become fully conscious of the atrocious and to laugh at it is to master the atrocious."[14] Kallen concurs, and further explains: "Although there is no escape from the plight, laughter is a release. . . . In laughing, the Self achieves a true psychic distance; it 'alienates' the condition from itself and transcends it."[15] And, most recently, in an

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[11] Joyce Cary, "Artist of Affirmation" Saturday Review, May 28, 1955, p. 12.
[12] Enid Starkie, "Joyce Cary: A Personal Portrait," The Virgina Quarterly Review 37 (Winter, 1961), p. 113.
[13] Eugene Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, Trans., Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964). p. 144.
[14] Ionesco, p. 144.
[15] Horace Kallen, Liberty, Laughter and Tears: Reflections on the Relations of Comedy and Tragedy to Human Freedom

article in The Times (London) entitled "Serious Swedes Learn to Laugh their Pains Away," Dr. Lars Ljungdahl prescribes laughter as a pain-reliever: "When one laughs the muscles relax and stress is diminished."[16] Such, then, is the kind of psychological wisdom behind Gulley's comic response to his destitution. As Cary says, "he makes a joke of life because he dare not take it seriously. He is afraid that if he does not laugh he will lose either his nerves or his temper" and destroy himself (7).

Thus, in spite and because of his frustrations, Gulley shows, at sixty-seven, remarkable vitality; he appears to be full of life. When we first meet him (in this story), for instance, he has just been released from prison, for "uttering menaces" (66) against Hickson at one of those moments when his grievance overwhelms his wisdom. But, apparently, the imprisonment has not demoralized him, as it does others:

> I was walking by the Thames. Half-past morning on an autumn day. Sun in a mist. Like an orange in a fried fish shop. All bright below. Low tide, dusty water. . . .
>
> They say a chap just out of prison runs into the nearest cover; into some dark little room, like a rabbit put up by a stoat. The sky feels too big for him. But I liked it. I swam in it. I couldn't take my eyes off the clouds, the water, the mud. And I must have been hopping up and down Greenbank Hard for half an hour grinning like a gargoyle.
>
> (11)

The typically brisk pace of the monologue is reflective of

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[15](cont'd) (Chicago: Northern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 78.

[16] The Times (London), Sept. 11, 1987.

the speaker's vitality, which his artist's preoccupation with "the eternal world" (11) helps sustain by taking his mind off his woes.

On the face of it, nothing seems to dampen Gulley's spirits and break his will to live. He struggles "to get on," with gusto and resource, improvising and substituting, for example, a dilapidated boathouse for a studio, walls for canvas, and a piece of rope for a brush, or cheating and stealing. But, of course, Gulley's gusto is, in Hoffman's phrase, a "comic mask" over his frustrations.[17] True to his philosophy of laughter, he pathetically grins, as above, "like a gargoyle" to prevent himself from weeping and succumbing to his woes, just as his former mistress, Rozzie, did when she "laugh[ed] right out" after she had "lost all her money and her left leg in the same week" (HS, 88). And, as Gulley himself virtually does when he is dying, she "died laughing . . . so as not to cry" (257). Both exemplify Ionesco's view: "We laugh so as not to cry."[18] Cary himself, it will be recalled, showed much the same kind of dark comic spirit, according to Enid Starkie: "For me, [his] gusto for life was, as it were, a kind of 'whistling in the dark' to keep his spirits up, a deliberate attitude of courage."[19]

With Gulley, this deliberate attitude is especially dramatized through his reaction to the recurrent loss of his

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[17] Charles Hoffman, "Joyce Cary and the Comic Mask," Western Humanities Review, XIII (1959), p. 135.
[18] Ionesco, p. 118. Kallen expresses the same view, and quotes Byron: "And if I laugh, Tis that I may not weep." Kallen, p. 48.
[19] Starkie, p. 112.

paintings, his life's meaning. Virtually every picture he paints, in his major phase, is somehow damaged, destroyed or lost before it is finished. Some are destroyed or damaged because they are seen as immoral, as is the case with his parish mural which the Vicar destroys in Herself Surprised, and "The Fall," which is mutilated while he is in prison, in The Horse's Mouth. Others, such as "The Living God," are lost while he is, again, in prison. Yet others, such as "The Rising of Lazarus" and his "masterpiece," in conception, "The Creation," are lost or destroyed because they are painted in a wrong place, a proper one lacking. Whatever the cause, in Cary's world, the creative process is ultimately futile: "men of imagination feel no triumph. . . . Imagination by its very nature must find in all completion a gaol, in all conclusion a grave" (DS, 36, 60). However, just as Sara takes the undoing of her nests easily and starts building again with enthusiasm, so does Gulley try to react to the fate of his pictures. Thus when, for instance, he finds "The Fall" mutilated, it is only Nosy who shows indignation:

> [S]omebody had been shooting at the birds [in the picture] with an air-gun and there was a piece about a foot square cut out of Adam's middle with a blunt knife. "What a sh-shame," said Nosy. . . ."You ought to tell the po-police." "Well," I said, "Adam hadn't got a bathing dress." "It's disgusting." "So he was, and somebody has made him respectable. Some mother, I expect. Anxious about her children. There's a lot of good mothers in this district. You'd be surprised." "But the p'picture's ruined." "Oh no, I can easily put in a patch."
>
> (15)

Gulley here acts as a kind of devil's advocate; he sees the damage from the point of view of the moralists responsible for it, and supports them, in a pathetic attempt to accept the damage. Later, when the picture is finally destroyed by Mrs. Coker, who uses its canvas as roofing material, Gulley reacts with similar calm, on the surface. It is his stammering young follower, again, who shows indignation:

> "A wonderful picture like that," said Nosy. "P-put on the r-roof."
>
> "A serious thing for me," I said. But I almost burst out laughing at Nosy's indignation. And I decided to give way to my gaiety. . . .
>
> "W-what is it," said Nosy, quite terrified. He thought I was going mad with grief.
>
> "I was laughing," I said.
>
> "You are too g-good, Mr. Jimson. . . . You oughtn't f-forgive a crime like that. . . . I'd like to cut the whole B-british throat. The d-dirty fffphilistines". . . .
>
> "L-look at the way they t-treat you--it's awful," said Nosy."You haven't even anywhere to live--it's aw-awful--it's t-terrible." And Nosy really was in tears. . . .
>
> And I felt almost like crying myself just because he was crying. Over my woes. And yet, as I say, I was in particularly good spirits. There, you see, I said to myself, talk to anybody in a friendly way and in half a minute he'll be pitying you and then you'll be pitying yourself. . . . And you can say good-bye to work for another week. And I flew out at Nosy. "What the devil do you mean, young man? Who's treated me how?. . . I've been very well treated. Quite as well as I deserve."
>
> (169-72)

Nosy externalizes the weeping side of Gulley. He is a reflector of the frustrated artist's indignation, barely masked by his mirthless laugh. Here and there, the boy stammers out complaints about society's mistreatment of his hero, which are, of course, Gulley's, but which the artist,

in his worldly wisdom, comically plays down to the point of refuting them. To save himself from self-pity, Gulley has to make a joke of his mistreatment by the "fffphilistines," who cannot appreciate his genius.

Gulley's philosophy of laughter is given its ultimate expression through his response to his fatal fall, when the wall of the condemned old chapel on which circumstances force him to paint his last mural, "The Creation," collapses with him, causing his death-stroke. While being taken to hospital in a police ambulance, he revels in talk, at times ribald, much to the shock of the nun attending to him:

> "I have been privileged to know some of the noblest walls in England, but happy fortune reserved the best for my last--the last love of my old age. In form, in surface, in elasticity, in lighting . . . [it] was the crowning joy of my life. . . . I have to thank God for that wall. And all the other walls. They've been good to me. The angel, in fact, that presided at my birth--her name was old Mother Groper or something like that--village midwife. Worn out tart from the sailor's knocking shop. Said, little creature born of joy and mirth. Though I must admit that poor Papa was so distracted with debt and misery that I daresay he didn't know what he was doing. And poor Mamma, yes, she was glad to give him what she could, if it didn't cost anything and didn't wear out the family clothes. And I daresay she was crying all the time for pity of the poor manny, and herself too. Go love without the help of anything on earth; and that's real horse meat. A man is more independent that way, when he doesn't expect anything for himself. And it's just possible he may avoid getting in a state."
>
> "Please don't talk," said the nun. "That's all right, mother," I said, "they can't hear me because of the noise of the traffic and because they aren't listening. And it wouldn't make any difference if they did. They're too young to learn, and if they weren't they wouldn't want to." "It's dangerous for you to talk, you're very seriously ill." "Not so seriously as you're well. How don't you enjoy life, mother. I should laugh all round my neck at this minute if my shirt wasn't a bit on the tight side."

> "It would be better for you to pray." "Same thing, mother."
>
> (296)

This closing passage of the story sums up Gulley's tragicomic life. He ironically calls his death-trap, the wall of the condemned chapel, his "happy fortune"! The obvious contradiction between his exaltation of it and his fate with it is at once comic and tragic. Yet from another point of view, his exaltation of the wall is quite consistent with his characteristic practice of trying to derive laughter from his woes by, among other devices, accepting and making the best of what he has. He believes that "things are never so bad that they can't be worse" (20), and so, lacking canvas and a place of his own, he considers himself fortunate to have found any walls at all to paint on; they could easily have been as lacking as canvas.

The next major point of the passage lies in Gulley's favourite quotation, disjointed here, from Blake's "Notebook Verses":

> The angel that presided at her birth
> Said, little creature, born of joy and mirth
> Go love without the help of anything on earth.[20]
>
> (129)

Gulley describes the quotation as "real horse meat," which connotes much the same thing as the title of the novel

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[20] Blake's verse, which Cary slightly alters, reads:

> The angel that presided o'er my birth
> Said, little creature formed of joy and mirth
> Go, love without the help of any king on earth.

Blake: The Complete Poems, p. 596.

itself; in Cary's words: "Le Tuyan Increvable. . .The Unbustable Tip" (FT, xii); or, simply, "the final truth."[21] As I noted earlier, this double-edged truth of man's existence, his independence or freedom and his isolation, lies in the third line of the quotation: "Go love without the help of anything on earth." Since "every man [is] his own candle," he is tragically isolated, like Gulley, in his own world which no one else understands. Thus no one is listening to Gulley in the ambulance. Society is deaf to him, and he must not "expect anything for himself" from anywhere else outside himself.

Gulley mingles this solemn implication of the quotation with levity when he interprets its first two lines in terms of his parents' situation at his conception. Even when he is dying, he cannot fail to distil humour from the tragic, and this is why he would laugh if it were not for his tight shir His argument that laughter and prayer are the same thing has received much critical attention, and some critics offer enlightening explanations. Douglas Stewart, in The Ark of God, says: "To laugh is to pray. To laugh is to affirm the ultimate goodness of life. To laugh is to triumph over death and disaster."[22] Robert Polhemus, in Comic Faith, employs Gulley's argument as a point of departure in his examination of the comic tradition from Austen to Joyce, and writes:

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[21] Michael Echeruo, Joyce Cary and the Dimensions of Order (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 75.
[22] Douglas Stewart, The Ark of God: Studies in Five Modern Novelists (London: Kingsgate Press, 1960), p. 131.

> At the end of Joyce Cary's The Horse's Mouth, the artist Gulley Jimson is dying, but he tells the nun attending him he feels like laughing. "'How don't you enjoy life, mother. I should laugh all round my neck at this minute if my shirt wasn't a bit on the tight side.' 'It would be better for you to pray.' 'Same thing, mother.'" That union of prayer and laughter asserts in a flash the existence in modern life and literature of what I call Comic Faith: a tacit belief that the world is both funny and potentially good; a pattern of expressing or finding religious impulse, motive, and meaning in the forms of comedy; and an implicit assumption that a basis for believing in the value of life can be found in the fact of comic expression itself.
>
> Cary's dialogue suggests the underlying original ties between religious and comic celebration. . . . Gulley's equation of the will to laughter with an act of faith . . . comes directly out of the comic tradition in English prose fiction.[23]

But there is also another meaning to the equation of laughter and prayer in The Horse's Mouth. As we have seen, Gulley mostly laughs so as not to cry. His laughter is a technique of survival, a "technique to make a good job of life" (58). As for prayer, the closest to it we have in the story is with Gulley's life-battered friend, Plant, who will be discussed later. Suffice it to say that he tries to transcend his tragedy through contemplation of God's glory -- a form of prayer and another technique of survival, of "making the best of a bad job" (86). Both acts, then, become more or less "anaesthetics or opiates" to make "the painful operation of living" endurable, and this should be one of the reasons why they are the "same thing" in the novel.

In a much-quoted aphorism, Horace Walpole says: "This world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those

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[23] Robert Polhemus, Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1980), pp. 3-4.

that feel."[24] In a sense, this is true of Gulley Jimson. For him, as for Edward in To be a Pilgrim, "life [is] tragic to the soul; to mind a joke" (TBP, 282). Reason obliges him to make a comedy of a tragedy he deeply feels. His heart-breaking tragic feeling as an unappreciated artist is shown through his comic mask, not only by his rage against the world, but also by his disparagement of his own profession. "I'm giving up art," he says in frustration, "it's a bit late, but I may still learn to respect myself before I die" (69). His father's ruin as an artist underlines his own to make him equate art with ruin and to warn his enthusiastic young follower against being infatuated with art: "Nosy, you're on the road to ruin. . . . Art and religion and drink. All of them ruin to a poor lad" (44-45). He even sees art, from the point of view of its enemies, as vice:

> What is art? Just self-indulgence. You give way to it. It's a vice. Prison is too good for artists - they ought to be rolled down Primrose Hill in a barrel full of broken bottles once a week and twice on public holidays, to teach them where they get off. (70)

The contradiction between Gulley's devotion to and delight in art, on the one hand, and his castigation of it, on the other, is a tragic measure of his suicidal frustration, which is underlined by the violence of his language:

> I should have liked to take myself in both hands and

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[24] Horace Walpole, "To Lady Ossory, 16 August 1776," in W. S. Lewis, ed., Horace Walpole's Correspondence with the Countess of Upper Ossory, Vol. I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 314.

> pull myself apart. To spite my guts for being Gulley Jimson, who, at sixty-seven years of age, after forty-five years of experience, could be put off his intentions, thoroughly bamboozled and floored by a sprout of dogma, a blind shepherd, a vegetated eye, a puffed-up adder of moralities.
>
> (51)

Gulley's frustration makes his intellectual efforts to master, with laughter, his plight and "get on" a battle he only wins with great difficulty. As he himself admits, "it's not an easy thing to [give way to gaiety] when you have a real grievance" (169). His life is plagued by a tragicomic contradiction between his rational and emotional imperatives. On the one hand, his reason obliges him to "keep calm": "anything like bad temper is bad for me. It blocks my imagination. It makes me stupid so that I can't see straight" (18). But, on the other hand, his aggrieved feeling drives him into "a state," compelling him to seek revenge. Thus although he rationally hates revenge--"revenge . . . feeds on corpses" (219)--he cannot avoid it. When, for example, Coker's mother evicts him from his boathouse studio, he wants "to hold on to wisdom" and leave her alone at the same time as he wants to pay her back by smashing her windows with a bottle:

> IT'S WISE TO BE WISE
> It pays all the time. Don't let 'em rattle you or you might as well take a dive into your coffin. So I walked away a little, with a bottle in my hand. . . .
>
> All the same, I thought, why should Mother Coker get away with it. I might throw the bottle through the window and move off quick before I heard the crash.
>
> (122)

Similarly, when a ruffian assaults him for selling faked postcards, to buy food, Gulley struggles to remain calm at the same time as he plans revenge:

> Forgive and forget. Till you have him set. Remember that he had a certain amount of excuse for his actions. Give him his due, but not till you are ready with a crowbar. Don't get spiteful. Keep cool. . . . Don't let him get on your nerves, that counts him one; but get on his face and push it through his backbone, that counts you one, two, three. . . . Your only resort in a case like this is the Christian spirit.
>
> (229)

Gulley's attitude to society or government shows much the same kind of conflict between reason and feeling. He hates government because it is inimical to original art, which it does not recognize and encourage. But, in typical self-contradiction, Gulley announces that it is stupid to "get irritated against the government" (215), as "it's no good telling [it] that an artist's time and peace of mind might be valuable to the nation" (217), while he goes on raging against it: "The only good government . . . is a bad one in the hell of a fright; yes, what you want to do with government is to put a bomb under it every ten minutes" (217-18). In another humorous twist, he adds: "If I wasn't a reasonable man . . . I should get annoyed with Governments and the People and the World" (219) -- a consciously ironic commentary on his anarchism and rage against the world.

But Gulley's tragicomic self-contradiction is mainly dramatized through his attitude to his former patron, Hickson, who, as the artist complains, "practically stole"

his famed pictures of the Sara-in-the-bath period and sold them "for hundreds of pounds" (16). To live with such injustice as Hickson personifies for him, Gulley tries hard to convince himself and others that "you can't get justice in this world" (92). He thus admonishes Nosy for complaining about society's treatment of the artist: "Get rid of that sense of justice, Nosy, or you'll feel sorry for yourself" (296). Yet, interestingly, Gulley himself cannot get rid of the sense of justice, which is, of course, why he rages against the world and acts against his own wisdom to leave his former patron alone. He wants to hit out at the "millionaire" and satisfy his sense of justice, even though he tries hard to restrain himself. No sooner, for instance, has the voice of reason advised him, "I mustn't get up a grievance. . . . I must keep calm" (16), than his aggrieved feeling compels him to ring up, as jocosely as seriously, Hickson, "uttering menaces":

> Just then I found myself in a telephone box. . . . I had some coppers, so I rang up Portland Place. Put a pencil between my teeth and asked for Mr. Hickson. The young butler answered in a voice like a capon's crow, "Who shall I say?" "The President of the Royal Academy." "Certainly, sir, please hold the line." Then Hickson droned at me like a bankrupt dentist with a toothache, "Mr. Hickson speaking." I kept the pencil well in front and gobbled, "Mr. Hickson, I understand you possess nineteen canvasses and about three hundred drawings by the celebrated Gulley Jimson."
>
> "I have a collection of early Jimsons."
>
> "Of which one small canvas was sold last year at Christie's for two hundred and seventy guineas."
>
> "Seventy guineas, and it wasn't mine. It belonged to a Bond Street dealer."
>
> "Even at that rate your nineteen canvasses are worth at least two thousand pounds, while the

> drawings and sketches would amount to about two thousand more."
>
> "Excuse me, but what name did you mention?"
>
> "I am the President of the Academy. I understand that Mr. Jimson is now destitute. And I was informed on the best legal advice that you have no right to his pictures. I understand that you conspired with a drunken model to rob him of this valuable property."
>
> "Is that you, Jimson?"
>
> "Certainly not," I said, "I wouldn't touch the bastard with a dung fork. But I have to inform you that he means trouble, and he's a dangerous man when he thinks he's got a grievance. He is in touch with your accomplice, Sara Monday, and he has powerful friends who mean to bring the case to law."
>
> "Then they will lose their money, as they have no case."
>
> "No doubt, Mr. Hickson, you've got tip-top lawyers. . . . And you have my full sympathy. Such dangerous blackguards as Jimson oughtn't to be allowed to live. But I'm speaking as a friend. If Jimson doesn't get his rightful due in the next week, he fully intends to burn your house down, and cut your tripes out afterwards. He means it too."
>
> (16-17)

Gulley's methods of hitting back at his former patron is "to make old Hickson jump" (60) by making a nuisance of himself to him. Since he cannot do anything else against the "millionaire," he resorts to harassing him through such joco-serious telephone menaces, which he repeats a number of times and turns into "a bit of a game" (53). He obviously derives fun from his clownish ways of menacing Hickson and making him "jump." The harassment thus becomes yet another way in which Gulley tries to make a comedy of his tragedy and contain his rage. As Cary tells us, "Gulley has to be vulgar and facetious as an alternative to cutting his throat" (FI, xiii).

Gulley's vulgarity, his escape from tragic consciousness through nonsense, is writ large in the story

and hardly calls for further illustration. It accounts much for his tragi-clownish character, and is generally expressed through his tendency towards irrational behaviour, in word and deed. Witness, for example, the "letter in large print" he writes to Mrs. Coker, in frustration over her eviction of him from the boathouse studio and her occupancy of it:

> MRS. COKER. A WARNING. DON'T LET THAT BLACKGUARD JIMSON PERSUADE YOU INTO TAKING HIS ROTTEN OLD SHED. IT IS HAUNTED BY THE SPIRITS OF THE BOGG FAMILY, WHICH DIED OF FEVER THERE AND WAS EATEN BY THE RATS. (132)

As with Hickson, Gulley derives fun from his nonsensical ways of frightening and scaring the self-interested old woman.

Gulley's vulgarity is especially expressed through his revengeful actions against the people he has a grievance against. It is from his vulgar treatment of them that he seeks to get "un out of . . . the miseries" (87) for which he holds them responsible. He particularly hates all the rich, the "millionaires," obviously because of his destitution, and his actions against them are as revengeful as they are funny, as shown with not only Hickson, but also Wilcher and, especially, Sir William and Lady Beeder. He depicts Wilcher, with verbal nonsense:

> Wilcher was a rich lawyer, with a face like a bad orange. Yellow and blue. A little grasshopper of a man. . . . In his fifties. The hopping fifties. And fierce as a mad mouse. Genus, Boorjwar; species, Blackcoatius Begoggledus Ferocissimouse. (180)

But it is through Gulley's treatment of the Beeders,

art-collecting millionaires, that his vulgarity in word and deed, is underlined. In a chapter which most readers describe as the most comic in the novel, he illegally occupies their house when they are on vacation, pawns virtually every movable property in it, paints a picture ("The Rising of Lazarus") on its wall, and allows an "insane" sculptor, Abel, to share it with him as a studio. The Beeders come back only to find a ruined home. In its savage comedy, the incident parallels the children's destruction of Burls House, in Charley is my Darling, which also belongs to an art-collecting millionaire, Mr. Wandle.

In his interpretation of The Horse's Mouth, Robert Bloom comments on the effect, on a tragic story, of such comedy as Gulley creates by his treatment of the Beeders and Hickson:

> [T]he major problem in The Horse's Mouth is whether the novel can hold its seriousness and its comedy together. . . . The novel, as a whole, is constantly mingling the exalted with the hilarious. This mixture is very much a part of Cary's design for the book -- as it is very much a part of his encompassing vision of human life -- but the question is whether the exalted is not finally and rather irreparably impaired as a result. Shakespearean admixtures of tragedy and comedy do not, ordinarily, involve the tragic protagonist, unless he is so elusive a figure as Hamlet or so mad a one as Lear. . . . But the irrepressible comedy of The Horse's Mouth tends, at the last, to leave Gulley more clown than either saint or symbolist. It is his comic vitality . . . which usurps the rest of him. . . . We remember him not so much as a desperate clown, a tragic clown, or a Blakean clown, who embodies the predicament of original art in a petrified unimaginative world, but simply as a clown.[25]

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[25] Robert Bloom, The Indeterminate World: A Study of the Novels of Joyce Cary (Philadelphia: University of

It hardly needs to be said that Bloom's objection to Cary's mingling of the tragic with the comic is a dated criticism of tragicomedy and out of place today. It is much the same kind of exhausted argument as Sidney's objection to mixing together discordant emotions, hornpipes and funerals. Bloom overlooks, with the sixteenth-century poet, what most modern writers and scholars recognize, with Henry James, as "the close connexion of bliss and bale,"[26] of laughter and tears, which is implicit in such mingling of the comic with the tragic as we have in The Horse's Mouth. Here, as in most modern literature, "comedy stands on pathos." Gulley's predicament is the matrix of his clowning, and so the clowning underlines rather than undermines his tragedy. Take, for instance, his bizarre conduct at the Beeders', which Bloom cites among other illustrations. The conduct is quite funny because of the obvious incongruity between normal human behaviour and Gulley's. But the same incongruity makes his behavior quite pathetic, once we reflect on the reasons behind it. It is the underlying pathos of Gulley's clowning that heightens our awareness of his desperation. Moreover, his clowning also underlines his tragedy through its consequences. His behaviour at the Beeders' house aggravates his situation by forcing him to run away, when they come back, to a strange place, where he becomes a veritable vagrant and where he is almost killed

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[25](cont'd) Pennsylvania Press, 1962), pp. 103-4.
[26] Henry James, Preface to What Maisie Knew, in R. P. Blackmur, ed., The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1962), p. 143.

for selling faked postcards. And, of course, his "hilarious" telephone calls to Hickson, another of Bloom's illustrations, aggravates Gulley's situation by landing him in prison. He pays for the fun he derives from threatening Hickson. So closely related are the tragic and the comic aspects of Gulley's story that it offers a good illustration of "what happens in modern tragicomedy" according to Guthke:

> The impression of tragic futility is surely not obliterated by the distinctly comic form and appearance it takes. And, conversely, the aesthetic appreciation of the comic constellation . . . is in no way weakened by the shrill tragic overtone that suddenly pierces our ears. More than that, full intellectual realization of the quality of such a scene or moment will make us aware that the tragic and the comic are here not only simultaneous and identical, but also that they heighten each other. That is: on the one hand, the tragic implication adds poignancy to the comic in giving it more depth or more obstacles to be 'overcome' by laughter, making the comic incongruity all the more appropriate for its increased crassness. On the other hand, the undeniable comic constellation gives acuteness to the bitterness of tragedy. And both kinds of interaction happen at once, depend on each other, and progressively and mutually increase each other. . . . This is what happens in modern tragicomedy.[27]

The Horse's Mouth is also typical of modern tragicomedy in its metaphysical character and attendant issue of "how to take life," a point which is implicit in Guthke's argument that "the tragic . . . adds poignancy to the comic in giving it . . . more obstacles to be 'overcome' by laughter." Robert Scholes explicitly states: "The Black Humorist is not concerned with what to do about life but with how to take it. In this respect Black Humor has certain affinities with

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[27] Karl Guthke, Modern Tragicomedy (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 57-58.

some existentialist attitudes."[28] Although, as we have seen, Gulley's rage at times overwhelms his better judgment about how to take life, he generally copes with his situation much more stoically and admirably than most of the other characters in the story cope with their parallel situations. The world of The Horse's Mouth is bedeviled with injustice, ill-luck, frustration and suffering, shown against a sinister back-cloth of the gathering storm of Hitler's war and "what's happening to the Jews in Germany" (58). There are, besides Gulley himself, frustrated artists, such as his weeping father who "worked sixteen hours a day for fifty years. And died a pauper" (25); the modern sculptor, Abel, who is always attempting to commit suicide; and the mechanical innovator, Ranken, whose genius, like Gulley's, is his misfortune. There is also a variety of other unlucky people, victims of cosmic injustice, such as the deaf and mute girl, in Gulley's village, whose mother had been deaf and whose fourteen children "were all rather more than a bit slow or deaf or crippled" (156); Captain Jones' wife and daughter, both of whom are also deaf; Plantie, a workman who loses his right hand; Harry, a dwarf and laughing-stock; and Coker, a frustrated ugly young woman. How such people take life in the face of "the damned unfairness of things" constitutes one of the central metaphysical issues of the novel.

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[28] Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 43.

For Cary, as we saw, injustice and ill-luck are part of existence. We only have to live with the evils as best we can. He endorses, therefore, Gulley's acceptance, if only rational, of injustice, as part of his "technique to make a good job of life" (58), by counterpointing his outlook on life to other characters'. Unlike Gulley and like Wilcher, most of them will not accept "the way things are" (292), life as it is. They expect life to be fair, and are overwhelmed by "the damned unfairness of things." Thus, for example, the young man who manages Ikey's junk shop, "that never has any luck" (113), reacts to his business frustration by hanging himself over the stairs of the shop. Likewise, Gulley's sister, Jenny, whose story is virtually a sub-plot of his, reacts to her desertion by her husband, Ranken, by putting her head in a gas oven and killing herself: "She'd only had Robert [Ranken] and when he went off, she had nothing and no idea of anything" (282).

Ranken himself is a suicidal victim of injustice, and he deserts his wife out of sheer financial frustration. His plight as an innovator in a conservative society parallels Gulley's. He invents a new model of a regulator (of an unspecified kind), but he cannot sell it; he is frustrated by businessmen whose old models are threatened, so that he is "in a state," without the benefit of Gulley's self-restraint:

> The Rankens went bust for the third or fourth time. They had to pawn their clothes for food. And when Jenny came to borrow a few bob from me and to

> tell me the story, she didn't exactly smile. . . . "Cheer up, old girl. Luck will turn." But she shook her head. "Why won't it turn?" "It isn't just luck." "What else?" "I don't know--just things, I suppose." So she'd got a dim idea at last. "Well," I said, "to hell with things. Send them to the devil." "But Robert is so wretched--it's awful to see how he suffers. . . . He'll kill himself. . . ." "The trouble with Robert is he won't face facts, things if you like. He wants them to come and lick his feet. But they can't. . . . Your Robert has got himself in a state, and now you're in a state."
>
> (235)

Ranken is one of the main character-foils to Gulley, whom the worldly-wise artist depicts as comically and pathetically naive in their frustrated sense of justice. Ranken "won't face facts" and keep calm. He naively thinks that the world owes him recognition and success for his invention, not realizing that he is a threat to others. His frustration, as Gulley laconically tells him, is "what happens to pioneers. And serve 'em right for upsetting people and business and old-established markets" (227). As he is himself a victim of a frustrated sense of justice, Gulley's criticism of other victims is a little comically incongruous. At the same time, however, his personal experience validates his criticism.

Two other characters, Coker and Plant, serve Cary to endorse, by contrast, Gulley's comic response to the tragic. Coker is a bitterly frustrated woman. She has had no luck with men because of her appearance, and hates God, men, and life, in general, so much that even "a million a year and a husband out of the films wouldn't have made [her] happy. She took life too seriously" (239). This is her tragic flaw and

folly. Like Ranken, in her naive sense of justice, she over-dramatizes her woes at the expense of "the bright side" of life (226). When we first meet her, she has been deserted by a young man, Willie, for a "Blondie," and she is comically raging against God and the Blondie:

> "No more religion for me. I hate God. It isn't fair to make a girl and give her a face like mine."
>
> "Don't let it get you down, Coke. Don't get in a state. That was my trouble, getting in a state."
>
> "I shall if I like," said Coker. "That's the only advantage I've got. I don't give a damn for myself. . . ."
>
> "Don't you believe it, Coker," I said. "You're young. You don't know. Things are never so bad they can't be worse. Don't you let anything get hold of you. You got to keep your independence. When I was a kid my father died and I went to live with an uncle who used to try which was harder, his boot or my bottom. And when my poor mother saw me cry, she would take me in her arms and say, "Don't hate him, Gull, or it will poison your life. You don't want that man to spoil your life. . . ."
>
> "No mother could make me forgive that Blondie," Coker said. "It would be a bloody crime not to hate her guts."
>
> (20-1)

Coker's case of injustice is the least serious in the story. Yet she complains most bitterly and relentlessly. She does not realize, as Gulley implies, that things could easily have been much worse for her. The contrast between her reaction to her situation and some other characters' reaction to their much more serious situations makes her almost purely comic in her exaggerated grievance. Her raging above is, for instance, juxtaposed to and contrasted with Mrs. Jones' and her daughter's calm acceptance of their affliction, deafness, as dispassionately disclosed by Mr. Jones:

> "My missus . . . can't take anything too serious."
>
> "Mrs. Jones is one of the lucky ones," said Coker. "Not a grey hair at sixty, and you'd take her for thirty from the back."
>
> "It was in the family," said the old man, "with deafness. Like bull terriers. She was stone deaf before she was forty. But she took it well. . ."
>
> "The girls get it and not the boys. My boys have ears like a water-rat's, but the girl is a bit hard of hearing already--at twenty."
>
> (21)

That Coker even sees the afflicted Mrs. Jones as lucky, simply because of her hair, is a satiric commentary on her frivolity and self-absorption. She is only redeemed by her sympathy for Gulley, which cannot be dissociated, however, from her need for a man, her declared hatred of men notwithstanding.

While Coker is a dominantly comic character, Plantie, Gulley's principal companion from the Greenbank group of fellow sufferers, is the opposite. He is a dominantly pathetic man who has "had a lot of bad luck in his life" (28). His

> mother died and papa married a widow with kids. No room for Plantie at home. . . . He went into boot trade, built up a nice little business, married a nice little wife. Then the Great War. . . . Joined up. . . . Nice little wife hooked up with a conchie, sold the business and got clear away with everything. Plant got one bullet in the knee and one in the stomach and had fourteen operations. Every time he found a job his leg gave out, and he had to go to the hospital. Took to drink and broke the other leg. Then . . . took to cobblery.
>
> (69)

As if he had not suffered enough, while at cobblery, a needle runs into his right hand, poisoning it and causing its amputation.

How, then, does Plantie take life, with such misfortunes? He adopts a different attitude from Gulley's, Ranken's and Coker's, although it is akin to Gulley's in so far as it also implies acceptance of misfortune, with the help of an "anaesthetic, or opiate." Plantie has read Spinoza, among other philosophers, and his outlook on life is as influenced by the Jewish thinker as Gulley's is by William Blake. He believes, with his mentor, that "that which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself."[29] ("No one on earth bruises his finger unless it is decreed in heaven.")[30] So Plantie tries to console himself that his suffering means something "or it wouldn't happen" (206). It means God, its cause, and to think about it, he believes, is to think about God and find happiness in "God's magnificence" (103). In other words, in searching, as he does, for the meaning of his suffering, he contemplates God; and through this "contemplation of the majesty and glory of God's being" (129), he seeks, as Echeruo remarks,[31] to transcend his suffering by "rejoicing in the glory of God" (128).

Thus where Gulley accepts human misfortune and laughs, because it is senseless, Plant accepts it and thinks, because it is meaningful, as exemplified by their response to the latter's loss of his right hand:

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[29] Harry A. Wolfson, The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of his Reasoning (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 385.
[30] Wolfson, p. 386.
[31] Michael Echeruo, Joyce Cary and the Dimensions of Order (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979), p. 72.

> Plant waved his stump in front of my nose. "This is a funny business, if you like."
> "That's what I said when I heard. A real surprise. It makes you laugh."
> "Didn't make me laugh. It made me think."
> "You ought to get a job, Mr. Plant. Why not a watchman. Nice job in the summer."
> "No, I don't want a job. I want to think. What I feel is, it can't be wasted--a thing like this. It means something."
> "Why should it mean anything? Does a kick in the stomach from a blind horse mean anything?"
> Old Plant shook his head. "It can't be wasted. It's a revelation. It makes me feel like I never knew anything before."
> "What do you know now, Mr. Plant?"
> He shook his head. "That's where the thinking comes in."
>
> (127-8)

There is a touch of the absurd to Plant's pathetic obsession with thinking about his misfortune; far from giving him any solace, as he seeks, it only depresses him more and more deeply. Yet he will not listen to Gulley and stop his comic-pathetic imitation of Spinoza, whom he naively sees as "the happiest man that ever lived, the God drunk man" (128)!

To Gulley, of course, Plant's view of life does not make sense. He finds his life-battered friend's contemplation upon the meaning of his suffering ridiculous, for there is no meaning in it; it is due to sheer blind luck: "a kick in the stomach from a blind horse." Plant and his Spinozism is, according to Gulley, "wrong about . . . the meaning of the world" (208). It is meaningless, and one has to create rather than search for meaning in it: "Contemplation is not the doings" (103).

Although Gulley condescendingly sees Plant's way of living with tragedy as "making the best of a bad job" (86),

he himself does the same thing, through his own "technique to make a good job of life" (58). Both men are, as Adams remarks, "in the same fix."[32] They are both comically and pathetically struggling to transcend tragedy--the meaninglessness of the world. The difference lies in the fact that Gulley is at least able to mitigate his tragic consciousness through his way of making a good job of life with his black humour. "I'm an optimist," he boasts. "I get a lot of fun out of fun, as well as the miseries" (87). He is a Blakean artist "creating form and beauty around the dark regions of sorrow" (141). Here, for example, is a typical dark region of sorrow before he recreates it:

> And I saw 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. There was a great clock ticking, and every time it ticked the tears all fell together with a noise like broken glass tinkling in a plate. And the ground trembled like a sleeping dog in front of the parlour fire when the bell tolls for a funeral.
>
> (21-2)

The picture he wants to shape of this world is comic:

> I thought I could do the girls--their legs would look like the fringe on the mantelpiece, but how would you join up the mountains. There'd just be a lot of ground stuck on. Unless you had flowers. Yes, everlastings. Yes, and a lot of nuns pushing perambulators, with a holy babe in each. Yes, and every nun with a golden crown.
>
> (22)

In practical terms, such transformation is shown through Gulley's distillation of the comic from the tragic.

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[32] Hazard Adams, Joyce Cary's Trilogies: Pursuit of the Particular Real (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983), p. 145.

through his art of laughter. In practical terms, too, Gulley's art helps to mitigate his tragic consciousness not through its idealization of the tragic world, but through its Carlylean work ethic, such as saves Conrad's Marlow from demoralization in Heart of Darkness. Gulley remarks after listening to the tragic story of Mr. Jones' daughter: "I thought of the deaf girl and wondered . . . if she knew how to be happy. Why, I thought, if I were a pretty girl and going deaf . . . I'd be an artist. Concentrate on my work. Like Edison" (22). Concentration on art work, in mind or in practice, is Gulley's most practical technique of creating joy around his miseries. By concentrating on his work, he is too "busy" to worry about his frustrations, as exemplified by the opening post-prison scene we saw, or by his absorption in his own pictures at Hickson's, when he seems not to have a care in the world: "I was deaf to the world. 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" (103). Concentrating on starting a new picture also seems to release him from his frustration over the loss of previous ones. As he remarks after the destruction of "The Fall," "I love starting. . . . Certainly an artist has no right to complain of his fate. For he has great pleasures. To start new pictures" (170).

That art is a saving grace is surrealistically underscored through the crazy sculptor, Abel, and his bizarre suicide attempts, which are foiled by his eye for

the artistic. As his wife, Lorie, discloses, Abel has tried to drown himself twice:

> "First time he jumped off Westminster steps, but it turned out well. Because the chap who fished him out had no lobes to his ears, and gave him an idea for an abstract bit of stuff; he was doing an urn or something; and the second time he put all his hammers in his pocket and jumped off Waterloo Bridge, but as soon as he hit the water, he got such a strong feeling of the horizontal that he shouted for the police. And he went straight home and did a thing called Plane Surface, which everybody thought was a joke. . . . But it kept him happy for six weeks." (208-9)

For Abel, as for Gulley, art is, as Cary says, "the creative activity that keeps the spirit alive."[33] But in Gulley's symbolic case, art is also the creative activity that kills: "the comic and the tragic are different sides of the one coin."[34]

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[33] Literature and Life , p.44.
[34] Walter Allen, Joyce Cary (London: Longmans, 1963), p. 10.

VIII. Conclusion

This detailed examination of Cary's key novels has supported the view that his fiction shows at once a comic vision of man as able "to manipulate his own fate" and a tragic vision of man as "ultimately conquered by forces greater than himself and beyond his control."[1] His characters have freedom to impose their own meaning on life, but they are ultimately defeated by the mighty forces of the recalcitrant outer reality. Most of the characters live up to his design: "I meant to create characters . . . working out their fates in a world charged throughout with freedom and individuality, and the consequences of that inescapable freedom" (CC, 6). Johnson creates for himself a romantic world, and his life ends in execution. Charley creates a delinquent world of children "in which he shall have his place," and he ends in prison. Sara's world of pleasure-seeking and nest-building results in her imprisonment and, ultimately, death. Wilcher's case is different in that we meet him when he is already broken by change and has lost his creativity. His conservative's world is his "failure in life." And Gulley's personal world of art is his death.

But with the interpenetration of the comic and the tragic in Cary's fiction, the forces which defeat his people also serve to reveal the characters' strength, before their final defeat. For, as we have seen, their heroism resides in

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[1] Angela Hague, Iris Murdoch's Comic Vision (London: Associated University Presses, 1964), p. 41.

their ability to "get on" in spite of their frustrations. Even Wilcher acquires this "spirit of Life" (DS, 62) in the end. If Cary's fiction is, as it is often read, an affirmation of life, a tragicomic approach to it reveals that this is not so much because of its "comedy of freedom" as because of its tragedy of freedom.

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