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THE SECOND TRILOGY OF JOYCE CARY
A STUDY IN THE FUNCTION OF THE MORAL IMAGINATION

By

Sister M. Ellen Agnes Dean, S.N.J.M.

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of English
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
at Assumption University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario

1962

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Sister M. Ellen Agnes.

October, 1962.

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ABSTRACT

From 1932 until his death in 1957, Joyce Cary wrote fifteen novels, many articles on the craft of fiction, and an essay in criticism, Art and Reality, which was the result of lectures he prepared in 1952. Critics have placed Cary securely among the most eminent novelists of the century. Scholarly reviews of Art and Reality comment on its power of discernment and its illuminating descriptive criticism. To my knowledge, no critic has examined Cary's fiction in the light of his idea of the creative process. Analysis of the second trilogy (1952-1955), and scrutiny of the main elements in Art and Reality show that Cary's insights had crystallized in a dual attitude towards his own work--as artist and as critic. These novels, Prisoner of Grace, Except the Lord, Not Honour More, are the product of years of observation of reality, of reflections upon art, and of the correlation of these two elements of the writer's craft. In the second trilogy, Cary communicates his intuition of reality by creating a fictional world which is rapidly losing its belief in the value of established sanctions. He develops his theme according to the pattern of the creative process which he had set forth in Art and Reality.

CHAPTER I

THE CRITICAL CONSENSUS ON THE SECOND TRILOGY

A year after Joyce Cary died in 1957 an English critic could assess his work as follows:

. . . it is as a novelist that Cary's achievement has been brilliant, original, relevant. It is as a novelist that Cary's ambition to draw a map of the landscape of existence, is realized. This landscape all can recognize, because it is a picture of ourselves.¹

That Cary should have attained, within twenty-three years, an eminent place among contemporary writers of fiction, and after an active military and administrative career, is a tribute to his creative powers. His family background and varied experiences at home and abroad were major factors in providing him with material when, at the age of forty-four, he submitted for publication stories upon which he had been working for ten years.

Arthur Joyce Lunel Cary was born in Londonderry in 1888 of Anglo-Irish parentage. The children, orphaned in early life, lived in England with the maternal grandparents, returning to Ireland for summer holidays with their mother's family.² Traditions and typical characters from the two backgrounds would later appear in his work; short stories and semi-autobiographical tales reflect many experiences with the numerous Irish cousins, while his

¹ Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary: A Preface to His Novels (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p. 57.

² Walter Allen, Joyce Cary (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1954), rev. ed., p. 6.

understanding of the English character and love of English traditions are the basis of his major work. Cary attended Tunbridge Wells and Clifton College, then studied art in Paris and Edinburgh for a few years before continuing his education at Oxford. In the Balkan war of 1912-13 he served in a Montenegrin battalion; when the Turkish conflict ended, his adventurous nature led him to Africa as an administrator in the Nigerian Political Service. In the first World War he was wounded during the Cameroons campaign, and when again fit for work he returned to Africa, to serve as magistrate and executive officer in the primitive, isolated district of Borgu in Nigeria where he was the only white administrator. In 1920, ill health forced him to retire from political service; he had never fully recovered from severe war injuries.

During eight years of intensely active life, Cary gained first-hand knowledge of political and administrative life--frustrations, exploitations, methods of expediency--and realized that corruption and intrigue cause erosion of ideals and values in public life. In these African experiences, Cary found material for his first published work, Aissa Saved (1932).³ This story was the result of ten years' search for a vehicle in which to express his ideas. Africa is also the scene of Mister Johnson (1939),⁴ the tale of the rise and fall of a native, whose grandiose ideas and wily schemes were outwitted by the superior intelligence and training of the British administrators.

Between 1932 and 1957, the year of his death, Cary wrote fifteen novels, a critical study, Art and Reality, and numerous articles concerning the technique

3 Joyce Cary, Aissa Saved (London: Michael Joseph, 1932).

4 Joyce Cary, Mister Johnson (London: Michael Joseph, 1939).

of fiction. The novels have been translated into several languages and have won world-wide acclaim. Critics who have studied his work with insight and sensitivity are unanimous in their praise, but their number is comparatively small. He has been called a "vigorous and extravert writer",⁵ "one of the most gifted of English novelists",⁶ an author who has "frequently been likened by the British critics to Laurence Sterne and Charles Dickens."⁷ In a penetrating study of Cary's work, George Woodcock observes:

Not only the most perceptive English critics, but also practicing novelists as far apart as Philip Toynbee and Elizabeth Bowen and the late Hugh Walpole have given unstinted praise to his work. Looking through a batch of reviews I find Richard Church comparing him with Conrad and Tolstoy, and John Betjeman describing him as a 'lord of Language'. L. A. G. Strong sees in his novels 'wisdom, compassion and a craftsmanship unsurpassed in our time', and Hugh Walpole declares ('quite coldly and even enviously') that 'the English novel had once again found a novelist who will preserve it in all its rightful glory.' These comments, quite apart from their critical appositeness or otherwise, reveal a significant sense among contemporary English writers of the need for those very qualities of boldness and vigour in which Cary seems to be almost the only important active practitioner since the death of Orwell.⁸

The chorus of praise includes American and English voices: Cary is a "virtuoso of prose",⁹ "a novelist who is not afraid to convince",¹⁰ a skillful

5 Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol. II (London: Hutchinson House, 1953), p. 177.

6 Orville Prescott, In My Opinion (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1952), p. 191.

7 Editor's Preface to Joyce Cary, "On the Function of the Novelist", New York Times Book Review (October 30), 1949, p. 1.

8 George Woodcock, "Citizens of Babel: A Study of Joyce Cary", Queen's Quarterly, LXIII (Summer, 1956), pp. 236-7.

9 Richard Hayes, "Felt in the Head and Felt Along the Heart", Commonweal, LVII (October 17), 1952, p. 42.

10 Illtud Evans, in a review of Not Honour More, The Tablet, CCV (May 21, 1955), p. 504.

artist in creating with perfect "objectivity"¹¹ characters that are incurably human, and he is also

a master of the moment of epiphany, that flash of revelation and insight into human motives and character that fixes them forever in the memory and compels an identification with some aspect of oneself or one's experience.¹²

It is not surprising then to learn that Cary was awarded "all of the literary prizes and honours his country has to offer",¹³ and that he has merited fame as a "'positive' novelist in an age without faith",¹⁴ as well as a master in portraying "depth of characterization."¹⁵ The eminent English critic, V. S. Pritchett, admires Cary's sturdy authenticity:

Mr. Joyce Cary is the chameleon among contemporary novelists. Put him down in any environment or any class, rich, middling or poor, English, Irish or foreign, and he changes colour and becomes whatever his subject is, from an English cook to an African delinquent, from a ten-year-old Irish hoyden to an English army wife or an evangelical lawyer. The assimilation is quick, delectable, sometimes profound. Many novelists have a wide range of character, but it is often merely a range of conscientious guesses; Mr. Cary goes further and becomes the person. He is the magician, the mimic, the fertile dissembler never short of the blarneying

11 Henry Reed, The Novel Since 1939 (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1946), p. 27.

12 Doris Grumbach, in a review of Except the Lord, Commonweal, LIX (December 4, 1953), p. 234.

13 Harrison Smith, "Artist of Affirmation", Saturday Review, XXXVIII (May 28, 1955), p. 12.

14 David Daiches, The Present Age (London: The Cresset Press, 1958), p. 276.

15 Mary Stack McNiff, in a review of Except the Lord, America, XC (January 30, 1954), p. 460.

word or the impenetrable disguise. At its best, the gift is empathy, and it never falls below the level of astonishing character-acting.¹⁶

Of his later work John Holloway states that

Cary's political novels have something in common with a work like Well's The New Machiavelli (1913) in their sense of the contrast between the corruptions of public life and the restoring strength of private affection; but Cary's sense of this is easily the fuller, and his rendering of it correspondingly more substantial. At its richest his work is almost poetic in its imaginative apprehension of life and its lyrical expression of this in metaphor.¹⁷

Adverse criticism of Cary's achievement is so rare that one questions the criteria by which such a reviewer judged the novels. In assessing the second trilogy, perhaps the author's most mature work, Frederick R. Karl contends that

Chester Nimmo, even with these volumes devoted to his activities, remains shadowy Even in Prisoner of Grace . . . he fails to attain individual status or to stand out against his contemporaries.¹⁸

This view is wholly contrary to the critical consensus. As I shall point out in Chapters III and IV, Cary has portrayed in Chester Nimmo, the central character of the second trilogy, a scheming politician and wily opportunist, monstrous in self-deception and masterful in the art of duplicity. To win and wield power is his sole preoccupation; to achieve his ends, he will use base trickery. We have three portraits of Nimmo: his wife's, his own, and his rival's. These

16 V. S. Pritchett, "Books in General", New Statesman and Nation, XLII (October 27, 1951), p. 464.

17 John Holloway, "The Literary Scene", in The Modern Age, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, VII (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), p. 86.

18 Frederick R. Karl, "Joyce Cary: The Moralizer as Novelist", Twentieth Century Literature, V (July, 1959), p. 193.

vary as would any self-portrait from that provided by the less subjective viewer, but herein lies Cary's skill in depth of characterization. Nimmo emerges at the end of the trilogy, not as a "shadowy" figure, but a three-dimensional character. Mary McCarthy, an acute commentator on modern fiction, deplors the lack of this sense of character in contemporary novels: "There are hardly any people" in modern stories, but she makes a notable exception of the work of Joyce Cary.¹⁹ Gilbert Phelps observes that Cary's use of vivid and concrete detail

is an outstanding achievement All the issues are conveyed through the destinies of fully realized individuals and there is none of that thinness of the imaginative and emotional life that spoils most other contemporary attempts at depicting the history of our times

The effect on the reader is both exhilarating and demanding.²⁰

We should note, however, that, while Frederick R. Karl finds fault with Cary's characterization, he has praise for the author's optimism:

Most novelists of 1940's and 1950's have been concerned with the history of the times and, accordingly, grim and baleful. Cary, with his light and graceful style, is of course an exception to these authors.²¹

From this sampling of critical opinion it is evident, I believe, that Cary has an important place among twentieth century writers and that he may be

¹⁹ Mary McCarthy, "Characters in Fiction", Partisan Review (March-April, 1961), p. 174.

²⁰ Gilbert Phelps, "The Novel Today", in The Modern Age, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, VII (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961), p. 484.

²¹ Frederick R. Karl, op. cit., p. 194.

considered to belong to the English tradition of social novelists from Fielding to D. H. Lawrence.²²

The second trilogy will be the centre of discussion in this study. I have chosen these novels for three reasons: they represent Cary's most mature work, they have more explicit contemporary relevance, and they seem to me most closely related to the critical theory which Cary set forth in Art and Reality. We have seen that Cary's writing career began in early middle age; after ten years of experimentation he decided on publication. Twenty years later, with twelve novels and much incidental writing on the craftsmanship of fiction to his credit, he produced the first novel of the second trilogy. Writing soon after the author's death, a critic has noted the advantages of this late professional start:

If there is any novelist likely to combine fullness of experience with artistic fastidiousness it is the man or woman who comes to novel writing in late years after leading an active life, like Conrad, for example, or among our recent contemporaries, the late Mr. Joyce Cary.²³

In addition to its value as illustration of Cary's maturity of style and depth of insight, the second trilogy offers an opportunity to study the author's work in relation to his views about the technique of the creative process. To my knowledge, no one has examined Cary's fiction in the light of his principles of criticism. The second trilogy was his last work of fiction; the lectures on Art and Reality had been arranged in book form and needed only a preface which Cary

²² John Holloway, op. cit., p. 86. Holloway alludes to "Cary's sense of the continuing collapse of traditions in the social revolutions of the two wars . . ."

²³ Mariam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 118.

dictated to his secretary in the month prior to his death, March 29, 1957. We might therefore regard the three novels of 1952-55 as a concrete example of Cary's ideas about the relation of art to life and as an illustration of the technical skills which Cary considered requisite for depicting this relationship.

Moreover, the subject matter of the second trilogy is extremely topical: the mood of the post-War I world is not unlike that of our space age. In the midst of moral anarchism, there is the same urgent craving for stability. Since 1918, thinkers and writers, leaders and followers have become more and more aware of the need for individual responsibility and a revival of faith in order that civilization may survive in the face of threatening peril.²⁴ Our chaotic cold-war world has not yet solved the problems inherent in the rights and duties of democratic society--problems even more acute now when imperialism and colonialism are being replaced by new self-governing nations. The perennial struggle for power encourages dissimulation and opportunism in ambitious individuals who dream of glory.²⁵ Moreover, the double standard of morality, which allows to the statesman or politician a wider margin of conduct than to the private citizen, often prevails today and tends to become the excuse or justification for unethical behaviour in public life.

24 See Ernest Barker, Reflections on Government (London: Oxford University Press, Galaxy Book, 1958), p. 399: "Mankind is confronted today, as perhaps it has never been confronted before in its history, by the problem of a deliberate and conscious choice of destiny."

25 See Cary, Art and Reality (Cambridge: The University Press, 1958), p. 148 where Cary points out how "art affects conduct"; he contrasts the "immense evil" wrought by Hitler's "art of the demagogue" with the influence of "great preachers, (who) with a similar rhetoric, have done immense good."

In the second trilogy Cary satirizes the creatures who pay lip-service to ideals of virtue. Chester Nimmo is the prototype of demagoguery. In his world, as often in our own, truth, honour, loyalty, conscience, the sanctity of home and marriage are trite terms. Love is merely the satisfaction of passion, personal advantage is the criterion of conduct. Without any overt 'message', Cary exposes this sham by his skillful characterization and first-person narration. In his preface to Mister Johnson,²⁶ Cary disclaims the use of a real life individual in depicting any of his fictional characters. He had had, however, experiences that often involved conflict with military and political authorities and he expressed strong aversion to "bureaucracy, (which) by its very nature, is the enemy of liberty. It exists to work the machine, to standardize, and left to itself it finds no room for the individual differences."²⁷ Since the ambitious leader is usually caught in the bureaucratic coil, Cary's satire is directed against the 'machine' as well as against the individual whose ambition knows no limits.

The second trilogy, even more than the first (Herself Surprised; To Be a Pilgrim; The Horse's Mouth) provides the contemporaneity requisite to a clear view of the clash of characters: a triangular love interest developed against the backdrop of political turmoil; the close-knit relationship between the three

26 Cary, Mister Johnson (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962). Preface, p. 7: "None of my characters is from life, but all of them are derived from some intuition of a person, often somebody I do not know, a man seen in a bus, a woman on a railway platform gathering her family for the train." This book was first published in 1939 and again, with Preface, in 1947.

27 Cary, "The Sources of Tension in America", Saturday Review, XXXV (August 23, 1952), p. 7.

novels with Chester Nimmo as the chief unifying agent; the central theme or view of life which coordinates the novels, namely, moral and social disintegration in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties when national life was undermined by individual inertia and hedonism and political chaos. The historical actuality of the second trilogy is closely allied to what we know from mass media about modern moral and cultural decadence. The first trilogy has equal vigour and robustness of language, dramatic power and psychological insight, but the bizarre characters and fantastic domestic comedy give the three novels Chaucerian or Dickensian proportions: Sara Monday, 'Herself' of the first novel, is a Wife-of-Bath type in her unrestrained femaleness, while Gulley Jimson, the central character of the first trilogy, is the picaresque hero, an eccentric, gifted artist whose masterpiece is to be a symbol of what the world needs--a new Creation which would enable man to regain his lost innocence.

Two points of interest concerning the first trilogy call for comment here, since this work will be only incidentally mentioned in the following chapters. These points concern the design and structure of the trilogy form as Cary uses it. In each case, the opening novel of the series is the woman's first-person narrative; the second and third stories are told by two men with whom her life has been involved. Through her self-revelation, we know her weaknesses, follies, moral aberrations, even degradation. The men are aware of her failings, but there is no word of condemnation. Each loves her still because he is to the end under the spell of what first attracted him to her--youth, beauty, loyalty, womanly sympathy and devotion.

In the first trilogy, the second novel tells of domestic life with the second

man in the woman's life, but her affections are always with the man whom she first loved, and he is the narrator of the third novel of the trilogy. The same pattern prevails in the second trilogy: the love interest comes full circle. However, there is a complete reversal of design in the configuration of setting. In Herself Surprised, Sara Monday reviews her life while imprisoned for theft; To Be a Pilgrim is the story of the man for whom she was housekeeper--a slightly larger yet limited field of incident and emotional range; The Horse's Mouth opens out into the wide area of the London slums where the indigent artist seeks canvas and paint for a final creative effort which will communicate his vision of reality. In the second trilogy, the method of composition is from the wide spaces around the girlhood home of Nina Woodville, a careless, hoydenish orphan who is the ward of eccentric, dominating Aunt Latter and the sweetheart of her older cousin, James Latter, and subsequently, the wife of Chester Nimmo whom she divorces to marry her childhood lover, now an army captain. Nina relates this story in Prisoner of Grace; then Chester follows with his life-story in Except the Lord, as did Thomas Wilcher in To Be a Pilgrim. In each case, the second novel of the series is the highly subjective account, the actions of the other characters being only peripheral to the incidents concerning the narrator. The second trilogy closes, as the first trilogy had begun, with a prison scene: Captain James Latter, on the eve of execution for the murder of his wife, Nina, attempts in Not Honour More to justify his deed as an act of honour. In the first trilogy, Sara Monday, a predatory female of the lower class as Nina Woodville Nimmo is an upper class type, leaves prison to lead a vagabond life, seeking in frowsy middle age to recapture the love of Gulley Jimson, whose sole

interest has become the achievement of his 'creation' masterpiece. In the second trilogy, Nina is dead, Jim Latter awaits trial for murder, while Chester Nimmo, in political disgrace, has a glimpse of the eternal verities--"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it."

A word about the titles of the six novels will show some significant affinity between the trilogies. The woman's story in each case has an enigmatical title concerning the narrator's dramatic situation and personality. Sara Monday, "Herself", is constantly "surprised", for life itself surprises her with its variety, its patterns, its ironies, its successes and failures. Nina is captive, 'prisoner', to Chester's need for her in his role as political saviour; for him, she is a grace, gift, blessing. To Be a Pilgrim has religious overtones, and the title of the second novel of the second trilogy, Except the Lord, is of biblical inspiration. The use of a proverbial expression in The Horse's Mouth is both ironic and ambiguous. As man, artist, and citizen, Gulley Jimson is literally down-and-out. Revelling in the beauty of nature and in the power of art to communicate truth, he is reduced to pilfering, scheming, cajolery, in order to find canvas and paint. In desperation, he fights against time, ill-health and poverty to get the work done. Is the author, who was both artist and writer, adroitly conveying by the colloquialism of the title his conviction that only a new 'creation', a spiritual and moral rebirth, a new 'revelation' of the meaning of life will satisfy man; that man is subject to higher powers, that he must act according to conscience and not from expedience, passion or greed, and that ultimately he will be judged not by human standards but according to the law of God in Whose image he was created? The ambiguity of the title of the third novel of the first

trilogy leaves this question open to speculation. The irony of the title is evident when we contrast it with the title of the third novel of the second trilogy: Captain James Latter's prison-narrative, Not Honour More, recalls the seventeenth century cavalier poet's farewell to his mistress as he leaves to fight for king and country. Latter, a class-conscious ideologue, is depicted throughout the trilogy as a traitor to the ideals which motivated the heroism of Lovelace, for his actions have never been above the level of self-interest. In contrast to the immense effort of Gulley Jimson to produce a work that would inspire men to seek and find happiness in spiritual values, James Latter is concerned with personal revenge for the sake of 'honour', a mere abstraction for men of his type. His prison cell is a symbol of his limited, unimaginative, self-regarding nature. Gulley Jimson's vast canvas, a riot of colour and creatures, is an image of the artist who, in life as in literature or the other arts, has a vision of reality and labours to communicate the truth as he sees it. It seems to me that Cary has structured the second trilogy so as to make it clear that Latter is the non-creative, rigid creature who merits condemnation because he has refused to love, to use human freedom creatively. His prison cell seems to be an image of the pit of the Inferno, --for Latter is a traitor to class (accepting no responsibility in life), to benefactors (Nimmo), and to all that life demanded of him. The cell might be an image of his imprisoned ego, --cold, heartless, ruthless in pursuit of what gives him security and satisfaction in being isolated from 'others'.

My approach to the analysis of the second trilogy entails a summary of the main points of Art and Reality. I shall also refer incidentally to Cary's

descriptive literary criticism.²⁸ My purpose is to stress the significance of Cary's artistic credo in relation to his fiction: he maintains that art gives form and meaning to reality, and that we can test the truth of art by our knowledge and experience of the real. Cary's second trilogy is the result of assiduous pre-occupation with complex social problems and searching criticism of the novel as a literary form.

28 Cary's critical comments concern aspects of the writing of Jane Austen, Arnold Bennet, H. G. Wells, Conrad, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Hardy, Henry James, Lawrence and Tolstoy.

CHAPTER II

JOYCE CARY'S THEORY OF ART IN ART AND REALITY

In 1952 Joyce Cary accepted the invitation to give the six Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, and three lectures at Oxford on The Novel as Truth. From the scattered notes of these lectures Cary prepared a reading text in which he set forth his conclusions about the creative process "through which the artist achieves and embodies his meanings".¹ Cary also discusses in general the nature and function of art and its relation to reality. He states his purpose as follows:

This is an attempt to examine the relation of the artist with the world as it seems to him, and to see what he does with it. That is to say, on the one side with what is called the artist's intuition, on the other with his production, or the work of art.²

In these pages Cary discusses the creative process from his own creative experience in two arts, painting and fiction; he gives us the insights of a practitioner. He had been an art student in his youth, a successful administrator in West Africa, an officer in World War I, and an acclaimed novelist; he had had a wealth of experience upon which to draw for the imaginative world that he depicted in his novels. He could speak with authority on art and its relation

1 Iredell Jenkins, "Recent Perspectives on Art", The Yale Review, XLVIII (Spring, 1959), p. 423. See Appendix I, post pp. 81-84 where Jenkins' perceptive comments on Art and Reality are quoted in full.

2 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 1.

to reality.

Intuition is for Cary synonymous with discovery, inspiration, a real though fleeting experience of objective reality. In this intuition the artist finds delight about an aspect of beauty and truth in the world of which he had not previously been so keenly aware. For the artist, particularly the novelist, the immense problem is to crystallize and communicate this discovery in its full force through concepts and symbols. This communication requires characters, plot, dialogue, details of imagery, and description; the author weaves these elements into an organic whole in such a manner as to "give the sense of an actual world with real characters".³ But the actual world is a chaotic mass of events and personalities from which the novelist must distil some meaning, some truth, before he can communicate it to the reader in a coherent form or order. This communication of facts and values is art, for "all great art has a meaning beyond itself".⁴ Cary stresses that the artist must give the truth as he sees it; he rejects the theory of "art for art's sake".

Cary, like every artist, was conscious of the great gap between intuition and satisfactory communication. The novelist's problem is a laborious task: to translate a fleeting intuition--something he feels--into words, phrases and symbols which will give the same effect, delight and meaning to another person. The art is successful only when the meaning has been entirely incorporated into

3 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 5.

4. Ibid., p. 18. "Truth" for Cary is what is verifiable by the senses, by reason and by reliable authority.

unique form:

The truth given by a novel is in close relation with the power of its expression. It is truth for feeling, it is truth about values. It is a personal truth.⁵

He elaborates on the function of the symbol in conveying the writer's meaning.

Throughout Art and Reality he refers to the power of the symbol in giving a work of art a significance beyond the merely factual and literal. Man finds it impossible to express the values with which he is most concerned except through symbolic language. The artist, and the novelist in particular, must, if he is to crystallize and communicate his most precious values, choose and present symbols that will convey to the reader the truth about reality, about human experience, as he has intuited this truth.

Cary alludes to the fact that symbols are transient and fragile impressions; they are at war with intuition, completely dependent for their emotional force and value on the reader's response to their connotations. Constantly losing their power, their initial freshness and vigor, they become conventional and sterile. Thus the novelist works at great odds in trying to bridge the gap between intuition and concept by the manipulation of words, description and character. Cary refers to the novelist's difficulty in finding the exact language he needs to express his meaning. Often he cannot communicate his intense experience in few words and thus must resort to longer phrases which dilute the immediacy of his intuition. In such a case, the writer will attempt to reveal his theme or view of life through the characters, their speech and their actions:

⁵ Cary, Art and Reality, p. 115.

Since intuition is experience, the only way to fix and convey it is by art. Painters do it by a sketch, one of those vivid and summary sketches which, from a master's hand, are often more interesting and exciting to a professional eye than the finished work. Writers must do it by a similar work; a scene, a piece of dialogue.⁶

The characters which the novelist invents must act as real people: "If you invent a man, a person, he has to behave like a person"⁷--flesh and blood realities subject to moods, whims and passions. Each "character in a story is part of the meaning".⁸ In emphasizing the care that is needed with details in a novel, Cary cites one of his favorite authors: "Tolstoy said that the difference between great writing and small writing is in the minute details".⁹ Details and character are closely bound together.

A further problem of the novelist is the form he will use as the best expression of his intuition. For Cary the autobiographical or first-person narrative was an artistic necessity in order to portray three-dimensional characters. It was in this form that he wrote his two trilogies. The structural device conveys particularly well Cary's idea that objective truth can only be tentatively inferred from the distillation of a number of subjective truths. The combined viewpoints of the three protagonists illustrate the process of distillation.¹⁰ In

6 Cary, Art and Reality, pp. 99, 100.

7 Ibid., p. 89.

8 Ibid., p. 167.

9 Ibid., p. 89.

10 It is interesting to note that Lawrence Durrell in "The Alexandria Quartet" uses this method which he calls a "word continuum". See Lawrence Durrell, Clea (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), "Author's Note".

each of Cary's trilogies the hero of the first novel becomes a minor character in the other two; by this technique he achieves a new perspective in each of the novels as well as depth of characterization in the trilogy as a whole.

This narrative method establishes immediately and unmistakably the identity of the character who is telling the story, and it gives the effect of intimacy and validity. Cary succeeds in making each protagonist's self-revelation and observations about the world psychologically valid and convincing. The author provides insight into the minds of his characters by this extended use of the dramatic soliloquy technique of Shakespeare.

All great artists, Cary reminds us, have a profound idea of the meaning of life--a view of reality, a theme which is the product of years of observation and reflection. This theme develops, becomes part of the writer's experience and finds expression in his novels. Cary was convinced that all the written arts "take a moral problem as their theme".¹¹ He himself is primarily concerned not with tragedy, evil, decadence, despair, but with human freedom. He sees the world as a place of change, of adventure and surprise. The conflict between innate human freedom and external authority became the theme, the unifying idea, of his two great trilogies each of which contrasts the extrovert--a man of creative power, with the conventional, the inhibited creature.¹² Between the

11 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 144.

12 This attitude of Cary towards his characters is, as Professor P. F. Flood has kindly pointed out to me, a tenet of Bergson who was a dominant influence in the 1930's when Cary's work first appeared. It is possible that Cary read The Two Sources. On the influence of Bergson on the younger generation see Raissa Maritain, We Have Been Friends Together (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), pp. 79-103.

two men stands an impulsive woman alternately, sometimes simultaneously, drawn towards both of them. For Cary life is full of possibilities; he is concerned with the joys and the sorrows that are part of human experience. He rejects erroneous simplifications--the gloomy view of pessimism and the euphoric glow of optimism. He sees life whole, just as it is; he is vitally concerned with individual man, with character and personality. He is essentially a novelist of character. In his work we find that society has no real existence apart from its members.

Human beings fascinate him--beings essentially individual and personally free, caught up in a world of incessant change. Out of this fascination he created his characters, each of them unique and each a free moral agent deciding his own actions and working out his own destiny. Through the novels we see Cary's quest for basic moral values in a world that is rapidly losing its belief in the value of established sanctions. He was haunted by a sense of the rottenness at the heart of society. The structure of the trilogy with its first-person narrative gives immediacy to his presentation of moral irresponsibility at the core of social and cultural decadence. This communication of a truth, as Cary sees it, comes upon the reader in a most subtle fashion. It is so wholly incorporated into the form of his novels that Cary is faithful to his sincere belief that "all serious artists preach--they are perfectly convinced of the truth as they see it, and they write to communicate that truth".¹³

Occasionally, throughout these discourses in Art and Reality, Cary inserts interesting autobiographical allusions which afford insight into his own

¹³ Cary, Art and Reality, p. 119.

creative process. One such intuition came upon him as he watched with curiosity a nondescript woman on a steamer round Manhattan Island.¹⁴ His interest aroused, he wondered about her background, her work, her reason for taking this trip alone. Some weeks later, the persistent memory of this encounter led to an urgent need to write a story at three o'clock in the morning. The essentials of the short story that finally resulted

were straight from the subconscious where they had formed themselves round an intuition, which had itself never emerged into conscious statement.¹⁵

Since the writer deals with reality directly, the whole of experience, it is his task to reveal not an ideal life, but life as he sees and feels it, life that is often incomprehensible, and yet in his tale he must convey an ordered awareness of the meaning of his experience. This Cary does in dramatic style, by reason of his powerful empathy. He can submerge himself as writer and become the character he creates at the moment. These people in his novels are alive, for he shows, not as an omniscient author but through the characters' self-revelation, their beliefs, their sorrows, their ambitions, their loves. They are so convincingly alive that the reader too can identify himself with each character. His trilogies exemplify his belief that the writer

becomes by intuition that character for that moment . . . the same familiar sympathetic action by which we enter into a friend's feelings and know his mood.¹⁶

14 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 127.

15 Ibid., p. 131.

16 Ibid., p. 127.

Through our sympathy with his characters we arrive at a knowledge of truth about the real world, of change, and vicissitude, of political and moral or immoral pressures as Cary meant us to attain; this knowledge enables us to perceive a new meaning in contemporary life or to become aware of what we had overlooked. This "revelation of a moral real"¹⁷ is the criterion by which we should judge the truth of a writer's work. Cary comes back again and again to this conviction that

all the arts can give . . . meaning to life A novelist creates a world of action and therefore he has to deal with motive, with morality. All novels are concerned from first to last with morality.¹⁸

For Cary this form of moral experience is the vital quality of the writer's art by which he gives the reader an intuition into the real meaning of human existence.

The foregoing analysis has touched only certain points in Art and Reality germane to his work as a practising novelist which I shall discuss in the next two chapters. Further discussion of Art and Reality will be taken up in Chapter IV.

17 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 145.

18 Ibid., p. 149. See also p. 154 "The story gives the meaning, the morality".

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND TRILOGY: THEMES AND SUBJECT MATTER

Cary's second trilogy, Prisoner of Grace,¹ Except the Lord,² Not Honour More,³ presents a picture of the political situation in the decades immediately before and after the first world war. Each novel is a first-person narration of the way historical actuality impinged upon the lives of the protagonists, respectively, Nina Woodville, Chester Nimmo, and Jim Latter.

Cary has stated that it was his purpose in these stories

to show individual minds in action and the kind of world they produce and the political and aesthetic and moral problems of such a world. In short (in the trilogy), the political situation as I conceive it in my world of the creative free individual.⁴

Freedom, as Cary uses the word, is not a synonym for the political concept of liberty as "absence of restraint";⁵ rather, it is a descriptive term, a

1 Cary, Prisoner of Grace (London: Michael Joseph, 1952). All of Cary's works have not yet appeared in the Carfax edition published by Michael Joseph. Quotations from and references to his writings are from texts accessible at the time of writing.

2 Cary, Except the Lord (London: Michael Joseph, 1953).

3 Cary, Not Honour More (London: Michael Joseph, 1955).

4 Cary, in a letter quoted by Wright, op. cit., p. 154.

5 Wright, op. cit., p. 35.

label for "the internal reality of a man's life",⁶ unrelated to his condition in society. Freedom means human power, a man's will to act; since he is capable of thinking, he is free. This is man's glory.

But if freedom is man's glory, it is also his tragedy. In fact, tragedy is inevitable as the outcome of the conflicts between man's free choices. Reconciliation is possible in the faith which realizes that these conflicts stem from the very freedom out of which the glories also proceed. So far as man's actions are concerned, reconciliation is possible in love and in art sometimes, but finally only in death.⁷

Cary interprets freedom as an incessant, complicated involvement of human wills at all levels of society and in all the affairs of life. This dynamic interaction forms the process of government. Cary's view is that government is not merely an organization or social system; it is a dynamic, moral relationship between diverse wills at all levels of life, individual activity and decisions operating to the benefit or detriment of humanity.

In the three novels under discussion, Cary shows this complex process at work. His view of life develops from his intuition of the "moral real", for, he maintains:

. . . all artists are concerned to give meaning to the actual, and
. . . for writers the actuality is that of human society, of individuals working out their own destinies.

All writers have, and must have, to compose any kind of story, some picture of the world, and of what is right and wrong in that world. And the great writers are obsessed with their theme. They're sure they're right, and their message would save

⁶ Edward Case, "The Free World of Joyce Cary", Modern Age, III (Spring 1959), p. 117.

⁷ Wright, op. cit., p. 36.

the world. This is as true of Lawrence as of Tolstoy, or Dante, or the monkish author of Everyman.⁸

Cary's picture of the world in the early nineteen-twenties reminds the reader at times of the waste-land reality depicted by T. S. Eliot. Corrosion of society through rampant materialism, moral corruption, and cultural decadence is the preoccupation of both the poet and the novelist as they contemplate the chaos of the post-war world. The dates mentioned in Prisoner of Grace refer approximately to the period that Eliot portrays; the novel has an explicit statement about "the terrible year of 1922, when everything seemed to be falling to pieces",⁹ as Nina Woodville recalls what happened at the end of the war. Eliot published The Wasteland in 1922, revealing a world as materialistic, harsh and sterile as we find in Cary's novel:

There is too much rottenness . . . We are afraid of the truth--
we are not honest with one another¹⁰ . . . there is no truth any-
where. Rottenness is the rule.¹¹ . . . Our life is eaten hollow
with falseness.¹²

Cary's novels of the second trilogy constitute a social satire. His target is the hypocrisy of the individual, specifically in the sphere of politics. This theme, or view of life, coordinates the three novels. He sees the chaos of society as a consequence of the dissimulation and opportunism practised by individuals struggling for power. This vice is symbolized in the character of _____

8 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 158.

9 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 321.

10 Ibid., p. 326.

11 Ibid., p. 327.

12 Ibid., p. 329.

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Chester Nimmo, the wily politician who is the central figure of the trilogy.

The author was aware of the difficulty of presenting visibly and plausibly a picture of life that would reveal the underlying complexity and multiple aspects of experience. He stated:

The writer as novelist has the problem of dealing . . . with reality direct, the whole of experience. His world is largely one of feeling. The novelist does not have to argue about facts. He is saying 'This is the world as I see and feel it.' He does not reveal only an ideal life, he has to organize a tale that conveys his sense of things.¹³

On another occasion he wrote:

The problem of construction . . . is to design a book in which all the characters and incidents form parts of one coherent experience for the judgment, and at the same time to give it the vitality of a narrative from actual life--which in itself, of course, has no meaning, or such a confusion of meanings that it adds up to nonsense.¹⁴

Cary accomplishes what he says here is the novelist's task: through his use of the first-person narrative and the structure of the trilogy, he achieves both emotional continuity and multiplicity of point of view. Each novel is a work of art in itself, but the total meaning of its theme depends upon its relationship to the other two novels.

This thematic synthesis is maintained in the novels under study where Cary explores the impact of individual actions on public interests. He emphasizes the interrelationship of private and political morality. Since each novel is written from the point of view of the chief character in the story, a three-

13 Cary, "Speaking of Books", New York Times Book Review (June 26, 1955), p. 2.

14 Cary, "The Way a Novel Gets Written", Harper's Magazine, CC (February, 1950), p. 90.

dimensional portrayal of each protagonist is achieved in the trilogy as a whole. For Cary, reality is an intricate relationship of creatures; art orders that world, giving it form and a personal kind of truth which is limited because the form is limited, all art being highly selective, owing to the "limited nature of reality". The discrepancy between the ideal and the real, whether it be in public affairs or in private relationship, occurs in the area of human conflict, which is the essence of drama; it is the basis of triumph or failure in life. Cary seems to have been acutely conscious of this discrepancy as a critic has pointed out: "It might be fruitful to suggest that the private lives of the three protagonists in the second trilogy present a microcosm of the world at large."¹⁵

We may justifiably apply to the second trilogy Cary's statement of his aim in using this form in order to communicate a coherent view of life:

What I set out to do was to show 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. They were to know each other and have some connection in the plot, but they would see completely different aspects of each other's character.

Their situation, in short, was to be that of everyone who 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.¹⁶

The autobiographical narrative is required, for each protagonist "had to write in the first person and reveal his own world in his own style", to enable

15 Charles G. Hoffman, "Joyce Cary: Art and Reality. The Interaction of Form and Narrator". University of Kansas City Review, XXVI (1960), p. 278. Cf. Art and Reality, Chapter VI, where Cary discusses this "mind-body gap".

16 Cary, First Trilogy (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. ix.

the author to achieve not only "a richer sense of life in its actual complexity, but a three-dimensional depth of characterization."¹⁷ By this structural technique Cary's theme gains breadth and depth by dramatic irony; each character, examining the motives and actions of another, reveals primarily and unconsciously himself.

Each of the three novels opens with the chief character's statement of the reason for making his communication to the world. In Prisoner of Grace, Nina writes in order to counteract pernicious "'revelations' . . . soon to appear about that great man who was once my husband, attacking his character, and my own."¹⁸ The "great man" is Chester Nimmo whose narrative, Except the Lord, had its inception when he visited his sister's grave in the village where the family had been humble, industrious, fervent, non-Conformists. Nimmo was inspired to tell about his "family life . . . in the conviction that my story throws light upon the crisis that so fearfully shakes our whole civilization. It is the story of a crime, of a soul, of my own . . ."¹⁹ In Not Honour More, Jim Latter, Nina's cousin, lover, and after divorce from Chester Nimmo, her husband, is writing his last testament in prison, on the eve of execution for the murder of his wife: "This is my statement, so help me God, as I hope to be hung."²⁰

Throughout their adult years, the lives of Nina, Jim, and Chester are entangled in one crisis after another. The complicated personal relationship is

17 Cary, First Trilogy, p. x.

18 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 5.

19 Cary, Except the Lord, p. 5.

20 Cary, Not Honour More, p. 5.

amplified when the three individuals become involved in political intrigue. Cary skillfully depicts their gradual and simultaneous corruption. Each one is led to sacrifice ideals of honour and truth, and these words are bandied about by all three, for the sake of personal gratification and political expediency.

All are responsible in one way or another for their own destruction and that of others--the three children, the old Aunt who has befriended them and advanced their careers, their social and professional acquaintances. They pretend to act from motives of love, of loyalty, or for the common good; in reality, each one seeks personal gain. Nina's marriage to Chester Nimmo safeguards her reputation and satisfies her ambition to win recognition as the wife of a rising politician; her divorce and her marriage to Jim Latter come when Chester's power is waning and life with Jim offers security and peace. Jim believes that it is his duty to expose the duplicity of Chester when he really desires revenge on the man who took Nina from him. She is capable of romantic intrigue with her divorced husband while she acts as Jim's devoted wife. Jim's efforts to discredit Nimmo are motivated by jealous hatred, not by a sense of honour as he claims. This hypocrisy permeates the trilogy as a virus.

The centre of the trilogy is the character of Chester Nimmo, a peasant who has climbed, or spiralled, to political power. A demagogue, who shifted party allegiance at the first threat to his influence and security, he has been described as a man "who in the course of his career is transmogrified from the free to the unfree man: so tantalizing, so difficult, and so repellent . . ." ²¹ and Nimmo

21 Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

is a symbol expressing Cary's belief that men live more by their feelings than by reason.²²

In Prisoner of Grace we discover that the course of hypocrisy and political chicanery began early in the life of each protagonist. Nina, at seventeen and an orphan, met Chester Nimmo, a protégé of her eccentric, politically-minded guardian, Aunt Latter. Romantic and ambitious, Nimmo lost no time in proposing to Nina to whom Aunt Latter gave this advice: "Don't be too unkind to him, Nina; he is much too useful."²³ And 'usefulness' is the keynote of the trilogy; individuals become pawns when expediency is the rule. When, sometime later, Nina is pregnant as the result of seduction by her cousin Jim Latter, he returned in haste to his army post, as a way of escaping responsibility. The Aunt solves the problem with typical expediency; the girl "would have to marry Nimmo".²⁴ So Nina was pressured into a marriage of convenience with a man twice her age in spite of her passion for her twenty-one-year-old cousin. Because Nimmo was ardently in love with the girl, the aunt kept the truth from him, solving the dilemma about Nina's "condition" by telling her, "Of course he knows."²⁵ After their marriage, when Nina had to confess the pre-marital affair with her cousin, to her amazement, Nimmo declared: "How could I know --no one told me. I had no reason in the world to suppose anything of the

22 See Cary, Art and Reality, pp. 22-5.

23 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 16.

24 Ibid., p. 19.

25 Ibid., p. 20.

sort."²⁶ When the aunt is forced to admit that she concealed the truth in order to save the reputation of her niece, Nina describes the woman's reaction:

(she) grew redder and angrier and said that, of course, Chester knew--she had told (Nina) as much, but she hoped I didn't suppose they had discussed the matter in 'so many words.' Did I really expect any decent man to take Jim's leavings if it was admitted they were leavings? 'It would have been asking too much of Chester with all his pushingness. After all, the man is a cut above the Hottentots.'²⁷

The grotesque understatement of the retort shows the keenness of Cary's satire, for Nimmo's amazing political career reveals a type of genius, one who can manipulate others by the power of speech. But the aunt had this quality less in mind than his ambition and determination to succeed by work, luck, and, if necessary, by guile. She dismisses Nina's apparently sincere concern about "mutual confidence"²⁸ as cheap drivel.

Nina's first real insight into Chester's tricky nature came early in their married life shortly after the birth of the son, whom Chester brought up as his own. His manner on one occasion perplexed his wife: "It seemed all at once as if Chester's consideration were the mask of something very ugly and dangerous."²⁹ Chester was beginning his political career in a murky way; each successful move involved lies, deceit, intrigue of various kinds, and Nina was shocked by his first circular which "from a non-political point of view . . . was

26 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 36.

27 Ibid., p. 37.

28 Ibid., p. 38.

29 Ibid., p. 26.

all lies."³⁰ Cary's oblique irony in the adjective is doubly effective, and the content of the circular reveals to Nina her husband's hypocrisy; he mingles religion and politics with reckless regard for values. She tells how this view of him was confirmed one night when he asked her to pray with him:

. . . against lies, and especially what he called the lie in the soul. 'Help us not to deceive ourselves about the wickedness and evil, low ambitions, and fleshly lusts of our own hearts.'

I thought again, 'Good Heavens, he is the liar . . .',³¹

Chester's first move in the political game was to instigate the Lilmouth riot, a workers' strike against the government. Watching him on the platform, Nina thought:

He pretends to love peace and truth and there he is working himself up . . . to cause as much trouble and tell as many lies as possible.³²

They "did put Chester 'on the map'", but Nina was bewildered by the unreality of the situation:

It was at this time I began to feel among 'political' people the strange and horrible feeling which afterwards became so familiar to me (but not less horrible), of living in a world without any solid object at all, of floating day and night through clouds and ambitions and calculations where you could not say that this idea was obviously selfish and dangerous and that one quite false and wicked because all of them were related to something else. The lies were mixed up with some truth.³³

The infiltration of hypocrisy had a parallel course in domestic life. Jim

30 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 28.

31 Ibid., p. 41.

32 Ibid., p. 52.

33 Ibid., p. 56.

Latter, having returned to England from army service in Africa, and invited by Chester to be a guest in their home, promptly renewed his love affair with Nina. He urged her to seek divorce and marry him. Torn between her love for Jim, her son's father, and loyalty to her husband, she felt it was wrong to desert Chester.³⁴ In yielding to his insistence that she support his political manoeuvres, she sacrificed her own freedom and, finally, her integrity: she is the "prisoner of grace", a free soul caught within the reality of an emotional experience. Nimmo convinced her that she had been given to him as a gift, a blessing in his role of political saviour.

This interpretation of the symbolic title occurs in a statement by Cary to the effect that Nina's "imprisonment" is made permanent in the scene at the railway station when her husband prevents her from elopement with Jim Latter:

Nimmo stops his wife from running away by purely moral pressure. That is, she becomes a prisoner of grace.³⁵

Their marriage was a matter of social and political expedience. Chester had impressed Nina with the fact that "Voters like a candidate to be happily married."³⁶ Politics came first not only for the husband but also with Aunt Latter who gave Chester vehement support while warning Nina that she would be blamed if her husband lost the election; so, Nina agrees to act the role of "political" wife:

³⁴ Cary, Prisoner of Grace, see Chapters 31, 32, 33.

³⁵ Cary in an interview by John Burrows and Alex Hamilton, "An Interview with Joyce Cary", Paris Review, VII (Fall-Winter, 1954-55), p. 74. Cf. Art and Reality, "The Total Symbol", Chapter 22, pp. 98-103.

³⁶ Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 100.

. . . though I did not at that time really believe in Chester's career . . . I assumed an indifferent air and said that, very well, if Chester wanted me to parade with him I could do it, but it would be his fault if it made things worse for him later.³⁷

The hypocritical interrelationship became a vipers' tangle. Suspected by Chester of infidelity with Jim, and constantly watched by the secretary Bootham, whom Chester set to spy on her, Nina began to lie to her husband "about the smallest trifles".³⁸ When Chester and his political group became even more "artful and insidious",³⁹ Aunt Latter declared that "He'd sell his soul for office, if he ever had one--or any of us."⁴⁰ Chester, who "already knew a great deal about power",⁴¹ would soon be in a state of moral paralysis as a result of his overreaching ambition. His wife sought escape from the labyrinthine existence of duplicity by two attempts at suicide.⁴² From Jim Latter's story we learn of a third effort at self-destruction:

I knew why she'd turned back from the door and thrown herself under the lorry. She could not pass that door into the lies inside, more wangles, more tricks. She was through with lies. I said in my heart, 'she had the truth in her soul--she was ready to die for it.'⁴³

Her son Tom at fourteen was well aware of his "legal" father's hypocrisy.

37 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 103.

38 Ibid., p. 127.

39 Ibid., p. 131.

40 Ibid., p. 147.

41 Ibid., p. 153.

42 Ibid., see pp. 174 and 304.

43 Cary, Not Honour More, p. 173.

When Chester reprimanded the boy for associating with the loud, vulgar Tribe girls and became eloquent about truth and deceit, Tom flared up: "I said you tell lies . . . and so you do. You know you do--beastly lies."⁴⁴ This outburst was an occasion for more lies and a violent quarrel that aggravated the boy's temper and made him determine to see more of his bohemian friends. About these visits, Nina was "drawn into such a mass of lies and tricks that (she) never had a minute's peace."⁴⁵

When Chester's obsession with power and fame led him to shift political allegiance, Nina "heard of his 'move to the left' . . . and the 'machiavellian tactics' which made him a 'by-word for hypocrisy and chicanery."⁴⁶ She reports Aunt Latter's sarcastic comments: "' You can always trust Chester--he never fails himself.'" And again: "' Chester has a very good conscience--it has to be good to stand Chester."⁴⁷ The aunt realized that her former protégé, now a typical opportunist, "was always ready to forgive anyone who was still useful to him."⁴⁸ The cancer of duplicity had spread not only through the lives of Chester and his family, but also through the whole nation, and Nina saw the horrible reality of its insidious growth:

44 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 188.

45 Ibid., p. 206.

46 Ibid., p. 220.

47 Ibid., p. 229.

48 Ibid., p. 234.

But, after all, there IS such a thing as decadence and it does happen to nations and arts and so it must begin sometime and somewhere.⁴⁹

Her musing seems to convey Cary's belief that social decay has its roots in the moral decisions of free individuals; in art as in life we must see human nature "incessantly striving towards a personal achievement"⁵⁰ and "the real world as a character".⁵¹ Cary asserts:

And we can say . . . that, though the actual worlds of Homer, of the Lady Murasaki and our own are enormously different, they present one common factor, they give us people who are free moral agents deciding their own actions in a world of incessant vicissitude, a world as far as possible removed from the consistency of a machine, a world in which every moral problem is itself unique . . . It is the fact of personal freedom and uniqueness in the individual soul that makes Homer and Murasaki still significant to us, or, as we can say, real. Given that world of free responsible action, we can accept and comprehend the most novel and unexpected background and motive; without it, we can't accept our own Everyman in our own Europe.⁵²

Each of Cary's portraits corresponds to this aesthetic conception of "a living character, whose real existence is the only limitation upon its freedom."⁵³

Although his followers hailed Chester Nimmo as a "prophet of Peace",⁵⁴ his enemies more accurately saw him as "an evil man . . . one of the chief architects of our destruction."⁵⁵ In the crisis Nimmo, a self-styled pacifist,

49. Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 237.

50 Cary, Art and Reality, pp. 155, 156.

51 Ibid., p. 157.

52 Ibid., p. 157.

53 Ibid., p. 156.

54 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 250.

55 Ibid., p. 258.

sacrificed his "principles" and accepted a lucrative key post in the War Cabinet. He considered that he had "a moral duty to change (his) mind."⁵⁶ Even with her experience of his tricky ways and his distortion of values, Nina tells that she

did not believe it possible that he could 'rat' on all his pledges, especially when the four other anti-war Ministers had already resigned.⁵⁷

The wily politician saved his career for the moment by issuing a statement explaining his reversal as a justifiable step "to support the cause of truth."⁵⁸ For his wife and some of his former associates it was treachery; for they knew that he was reckoning on the tension of the times to achieve his dream of becoming Prime Minister. Meanwhile, by artful, ambiguous and inflammatory eloquence he would lead people to see him as the patriotic leader they needed. His words and actions seemed to Nina to be a symbol of the basest iniquity, as if he were to say:

I can break my word with impunity, because, in all the rush of new and important events, people will forget about the whole matter.⁵⁹

As War Minister, Nimmo kept behind a bureaucratic wall; with the individual he no longer had contact. Government was a system and men were expendable. On one occasion, a report was circulated charging him with the murder of Brome, an opponent whose presence had become a problem; the youth was suddenly drafted, sent to the front, and died within a few days, ostensibly of

56 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 263.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., p. 264.

59 Ibid.

heart trouble. Cary's satire is evident in the casual explanation of the loss of a man's life:

Chester never heard of the bad heart till the man was dead. The medical report was held up among a mass of papers which were not urgent.

It was the secretaries who decided what was urgent and what not. And there were cases much worse than Brome's that never came out. A busy minister has to be 'callous', he hasn't time to look into each case; he is an institution that does not even know separate persons but only 'classes' or 'types'.⁶⁰

Old friends as well as strangers got similar treatment if they were no longer 'useful' to Chester. When Jim Latter, working in the interests of an African village, came close to becoming another of Chester's pawns, Nina, enraged and terrified, "saw, for the first time, that the government 'thing' could kill Jim and not care a farthing."⁶¹ She made another effort to escape from the morass of corruption, this time by flight to Buckfield, the home of Aunt Latter and Jim. In a fortnight she returned to Chester, to her prisoner-of-grace role. He had reclaimed her, because, ". . . you are my wife. No one can take your place with me or mine with you."⁶² Her return was due to concern for Jim's safety; Chester had threatened to kill him if she refused. She was in terror of her husband's power, and overwhelmed "with the sense of a fearful insecurity; it made me loathe the 'thing' that was destroying Jim's life and was proposing to destroy mine."⁶³

60 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 267.

61 Ibid., p. 277.

62 Ibid., p. 300.

63 Ibid., p. 301.

Ironically, Nina relates how, at that time, "Chester and Jim and in fact everyone of our age and standing anywhere, were growing alarmed at the general collapse of moral and social standards."⁶⁴ Stressing the hypocrisy of these individuals as the cause of widespread corruption, Cary has Chester proclaim, with even greater ironic force, that "the very framework of Christian Society was tottering".⁶⁵ This dramatic gesture is a "total symbol" of the second trilogy; the central character completely lacks moral principles and vision. He tells his wife that, to restore Christian Society, it would require "ten years of the strongest kind of government",⁶⁶ led, of course, by the great Prophet of Peace, Chester Nimmo.

Hope for his election was growing steadily; even Tom, his reputed son, championed Chester's cause and campaigned vigorously in that "terrible year of 1922 when everything seemed to be falling to pieces."⁶⁷ Defeat brought the collapse of his grandiose delusions and the revelation of a partial truth about his world, though not about himself. Ironically he says: "It seems to me that the country is rotted all through."⁶⁸

Stripped of power and influence, he lost interest in life. He had lived in a dream of glory; to achieve a great destiny gave his life its only real meaning.

64 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 309.

65 Ibid., p. 310.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., p. 321.

68 Ibid., p. 326.

To attain his ambitions--through money, marriage and political power--he had used words: truth, loyalty, honour, duty, without a thought of their significance, of their relation to existence or reality. When these words could no longer serve his utilitarian ends, they meant nothing to him. As Nina sees him at the close of his career:

. . . he really was alone. It was impossible to reach him. He had, so to speak, in thirty years of war, made such devastation round himself that to talk to him at all was like calling across a waste full of broken walls and rusty wire and swamps of poisoned water; full of dead bodies, too, like that of poor Brome.⁶⁹

The imagery in this sentence is an ironic contrast to Nimmo's speech about himself as the saviour of Christian Society. To his wife the isolated, ruined elder statesman is an image of pernicious leadership, a destructive force within the nation as Hitler was for the world at large.

Chester, writing his memoirs, is capable of self-scrutiny. As an old man, he admits a truth he had long known but had never acknowledged to himself:

We have been talking about the old spirit which we must recapture, but we have forgotten what it is; we have lost all knowledge of the spirit and our words are wind. They are worse than wind--they are a smoke screen to hide the vacancy of our hearts, the emptiness of our faith. The cold truth is that we have suffered the fate of every institution, of every party, in losing our way among the dust of our own achievement.⁷⁰

This fine speech of Chester's is Cary's ironic comment on achievement of power by the masterly use of the art of the demagogue. It reveals too that the erosion of the religious values that had inspired the speaker's early life did not

69 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 330.

70 Ibid., p. 377.

prevent him from using pious platitudes as useful weapons. Nina realized that he had become wholly "'devoted'--not to a human being but to something that seemed to his imagination infinitely more beautiful and worthy--the Cause."⁷¹ She is conscious of the fact that she had never loved Chester, but that now, at the end of his career, she is more than ever dominated by him, a victim of his ruthless ambition. Chester, having sought refuge with Nina and Jim, in order to write his "memoirs", still holds her a "prisoner of grace"; to turn him out, as Jim demanded, would be "a mean crime against something bigger than love."⁷²

This "something" remains Nina's secret. It could be an impulse--she is a creature of impulses, unpredictable in her emotional veerings--of natural loyalty to the man who had loved and married her without suspecting the deception of which he was the victim. Ironically, his own deceptions, though not less base, were wide-spread, inflicting immense harm on those who saw in him the image of the patriotic leader. In the end, Chester Nimmo was the victim of his own hypocrisy.

Chester's account of his early life in Except the Lord reveals the influences that were to shape his career. His story is not

the history of political events but of a boy's mind and soul, of one who came so near perdition that his escape still seems to him like a miracle.⁷³

The defeated and disgraced public servant adds many details to the picture, in

71 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 395.

72 Ibid., p. 398.

73 Cary, Except the Lord, p. 242.

Nina's story, of the perfidious, sanctimonious politician. For the first time, he evokes sympathy, for we understand how the child is father to the man. Nimmo grew up in a deeply religious atmosphere. His father, earnest and hardworking, was an evangelical lay preacher who exhorted his small congregation to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. The boy's early life was overshadowed by poverty, his mother's death, and spiritual crises. A great emotional experience occurred when he stole away with a group of boys to Lilmouth fair and saw his first play, an amateurish melodrama depicting oppression of the honest poor by the wicked rich. This crude performance was a turning-point in his life because it gave the innocent youth his first taste of the heady mixture of evil influence and resounding speech. Loss of faith was the next emotional upset; the father had on two occasions assembled his family and his flock for the Second Coming, but when the preacher's 'prophecy' was not fulfilled, Chester's reaction was disillusionment. Having lost his faith in God, he turned to Marx and the brotherhood of man.

In retrospect, Chester sees that, even as a child of seven, he had been puzzled about "how truth and sincerity were to live in the world of men."⁷⁴ Then, in the feverish excitement of the fair he found something that was to become significant in later life:

It is, I believe, no sentimental illusion that mechanism is the enemy of joy; no less than the mechanical centralism of bureaucratic Utopians is the enemy of true citizenship.⁷⁵

74 Cary, Except the Lord, p. 7.

75 Ibid., p. 81.

Respect for truth was the basis of Chester's home training. Falseness was the vice to fear:

Any kind of pretense, any kind of conduct having the least tincture of hypocrisy was not only a sin but a deadly trap. How often had I been told that the lie corrupts and poisons the very soul.⁷⁶

To his young mind, the failure of the Second Coming prophecy was a failure in truth itself. Marxist socialism was an appeal to his emotions and imagination, if not to his reason. He soon became an active union leader and relished the prestige and influence of belonging to the Party until disillusioned by the duplicity and violence in which he was often involved as a victim. He discovered how government could operate as a 'thing', a system in which men were pawns. Finding himself a tool in the shady dealings of his union boss Pring, he became conscious of

a truth I had always known and even gloated upon, but never applied to my own case, that no one on earth counted with him beside the Cause. . . . I told myself that Pring loved power too much and men not at all.⁷⁷

In disclosing the truth about Pring, Chester unconsciously reveals the truth about himself as he appears in Prisoner of Grace. Disenchanted with Marxism when he was expelled from the union, he experienced a spiritual crisis that resulted in his return to the faith of his childhood; he became a preacher to the small group who had remained faithful to his father. He tells us how his heart and soul were flooded with memories by the melody and message of one of his father's favourite psalms: "Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but

⁷⁶ Cary, Except the Lord, pp. 86-7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 271-2.

lost that build it."⁷⁸ He confesses that only after two years of pondering did he grasp

the full significance of that profoundest of truths not only for the man but for all his endeavours--not only in his family life but in his political activity--that unless he aim at the life of the soul then all his achievements will be a gaol or a mad-house, self-hatred, corruption and despair.⁷⁹

Chester Nimmo's story is a study in irony and ambiguity. Comparing the self-portrait in this novel with Nina's appraisal of her husband as a man of many moods and much guile, and with Jim's venomous attack on the trickster who sacrificed family, friends and followers to gain his own nefarious ends, we grasp more clearly what Cary means in Chapter 31 of Art and Reality:

Art has its immense power for good and evil because it deals always with fundamental passions and reactions common to all humanity. Even in its simplest forms, a single phrase of music, a colour pattern, it can give a shock of pleasure which makes life valuable. For that enjoyment has no relation with appetite or self-satisfaction. It is something freely given, a good, a grace, belonging simply to existence, to reality itself. For that minute, the meaning of existence is this special pleasure, the emotion of beauty.⁸⁰

. . . All the written and spoken arts, since they deal with an historical actuality, are bound to give meaning to human action which is always part, and commonly the greater part, of their theme.⁸¹

At the conclusion of Prisoner of Grace the reader can see the tragedy of Nimmo's fall from fame and power through vaulting ambition. Nina claims our

⁷⁸ Cary, Except the Lord, p. 284. Cf. Psalm 127: 1-3 (A. V.); 126: 1-3 (Vulgate).

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

⁸⁰ Cary, Art and Reality, p. 146.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 149.

sympathy as the victim of circumstances, in which her normal passions and ideals were submerged or thwarted. But Chester's life-history reveals that he had had greater obstacles to surmount: poverty, religious emotionalism without dogmatic foundation, the temperament to dream and the will to achieve that dream by his skill as a demagogue. At the end of his story Nimmo tells of his return to God and to the Liberal party.

In Not Honour More, Jim Latter's account of his relations with Nina and Chester, the central episode is the General Strike of 1926, when Nimmo, as "God's Minister" was called to save England from political and economic ruin. His version of the triangular, personal situation is the sequel to Nina's story in Prisoner of Grace and it further illumines the intricate relationship between individual and social corruption. Jim, with no religious allegiance and strongly conservative in politics, criticizes and censures all powerful persons. Early in the story, he declares that Nimmo is a fake, a hypocrite who "spent his life destroying the country and selling the people . . . he corrupted everything and everybody", and with his gang was able to destroy "all truth and honour in the country, including the sanctity of the home and marriage."⁸²

But Jim, as prejudiced as Nina is emotional and Chester passionate, is an unlikely standard-bearer of truth and honour. His seduction of the young Nina, his abandonment of her and the children, his irresponsibility about debts, --these deeds have been recounted in the other two novels. Nimmo, though a political

82 Cary, Not Honour More, pp. 8, 9.

trickster and a hypocrite, was a good father to Nina's son and daughter of whose paternity Jim was fully aware. Jim, like Nimmo in a different sphere of action, is a type described by Cary:

(They) live by the maxim, the slogan whether political, artistic or religious. They are ideologues who force all history to fit some preconceived dialectic or blueprint . . . They are people who have lost all contact with reality, who live in a fantastic world, and sooner or later they run head-first into reality and it breaks them.

The reality which smashes every ideologue and his system is human nature, incessantly striving towards a personal achievement in a world which is essentially free and personal.⁸³

Jim constantly denounces Chester as a "phony", wily politician, a double-crosser, a glutton for power, but the accusations lose force since Jim is equally a villain, though not a smiling one like Chester. Jim's glib "truth-and-honour" mouthings make him the greater villain in treachery: his life is an escape from responsibility, domestic and financial. Even as a public servant, his motives in handling African affairs are questionable. Nina has stated her love for him; there is little, if any, evidence, that he loved her or anyone. Enraged by Chester's efforts to reclaim his divorced wife, if only as a mistress, Jim killed Nina, as in duty and honour bound. In prison, on the eve of execution for the crime, he states:

. . . the trouble with the country was it was run from top to bottom by men without honour, men on the grab.⁸⁴

The truth of this statement we know from the other novels of the trilogy, but the grotesque element in the presentation of this view by a man without honour in

83 Cary, Art and Reality, pp. 155-6.

84 Cary, Not Honour More, pp. 222-3.

private life and without the will to work for what is worthy of honour in public life removes this novel from the tragic to the comic level. Within the context of the trilogy, Jim was the initiator of much of the corruption which, in his story, he bewails and berates.

The danger of hypocrisy and corruption to personal happiness and to the common weal is the theme of the second trilogy, and on this danger Cary pronounces the verdict:

Dishonesty in any form corrupts, and . . . a double standard of morality in politics can never serve as a valid motive or excuse in political action.⁸⁵

The three protagonists lived, and two of them had untimely deaths in the waste land that they helped to create. These characters are symbols of the author's belief that "a man without faith in some value beyond his own advantage sooner or later finds life meaningless."⁸⁶

85 Cary, Letter of December 3, 1956, quoted by Elizabeth R. Bettman, "Joyce Cary and the Problem of Political Morality", Antioch Review, XVII (Summer, 1957), p. 272.

86 Cary, First Trilogy, p. xv.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND TRILOGY: THE ART OF JOYCE CARY

From the applause for Cary's artistic achievement we may gain an idea of the values he upheld and his objective presentation of these values in fiction. The critics, however, have not specifically referred to certain qualities in Cary's art that merit attention, although in bracketing him with Sterne, Dickens, Conrad, Tolstoy and other masters,¹ they imply that he is a serious and also a comic writer.

I believe that his seriousness is due to his intellectual honesty as a writer. In Art and Reality he stresses that this is essential to genuine artistic achievement. He refers frequently to the necessity of the artist to find the precise words in which to express his intuition, his "feeling" about a world of "permanent and objective forms",² about which the artist must not express "his own idea of things, but the exact impression they had made on him."³ Native talent or even genius alone is not sufficient to attain artistic excellence; Cary emphasizes the need for "systematic education",⁴ training and discipline in the

1 See ante, Chapter I, p. 3.

2 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 30.

3 Ibid.,

4 Ibid., p. 37.

medium of the art:

It is only very wise and learned men who have the freedom of a quiet mind, and they do not achieve it by running away from civilization, and denouncing its culture and its scholarship.⁵

Even writers, such as Dostoevsky and Dickens, reportedly self-educated men,

Cary tells us, had what is available to every child:

a long and highly conceptual education at home, in ideas, in conduct. And every schoolboy learns to handle words and to write. That is why a person who is described as illiterate can often speak and write with such force, where his drawings or compositions would be quite worthless. Everyone except an actual idiot acquires a certain amount of literary education--ideas, however confused, to express, and the elementary technical power to express them.

And we notice that the most powerful influence in both Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's mature work is precisely the formal and dogmatic religious training of their childhood.⁶

Cary notes that "though Dostoevsky is at times contradictory [about his religious ideals], he is never confused,"⁷ and he continues to state quite emphatically:

He gives a sharp edge to all the arguments, he states every position with clarity and force. He shows that power of logical grasp which comes only from a dogmatic education. For dogma is the anatomy of thought. As scientists tell you, even a bad doctrine is better than none at all. You can test it, differ from it, your mind has something to bite on. You need the rock to plan the lighthouse.⁸

Moreover, the value of sound religious training in youth gave Dostoevsky the habit of forming clear ideas about life and this is reflected in his creative work

5 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 38.

6 Ibid., p. 41.

7 Ibid., p. 42.

8 Ibid.

as Cary illustrates by a comment on a passage in a chapter in The Brothers

Karamazov:

'Pro and Contra' is a monument to the integrity of the artist who loved truth a great deal better than he knew. And also it shows us how deep and strong were the effects of Dostoevsky's religious education as a child.⁹

In contrast to Dostoevsky, Cary cites the case of Dickens whose work, he finds, suffers from the lack of intellectual discipline: his effective ideas were not only contradictory but confused. He relied on sentiment to inform his judgment, and sentiment is blind."¹⁰ Cary assesses Dickens as "essentially a poet", who can "transport us into a region of feeling almost emotive Of all the great masters he has the least appeal to reason", because "he never makes us think".¹¹ Cary gives his reasons for this view of Dickens:

. . . he is boneless. And this is what we might expect. For, whatever his education, it was not systematic. . . . if Dickens had had a more solid education, he could have been the greatest of all novelists, or equally, he might never have written at all.¹²

Another clue to Cary's evaluation of intellectual integrity as essential to great art is found in Chapter 10 of Art and Reality, where he states his views on academic teaching, with illustrations from his own scholastic experiences. He asserts that education involves not only the acquisition of factual knowledge and a dogmatic framework to give these facts value and meaning, but also methods of instruction that will make the training purposive for life. This requires "the

9 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 42.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 43.

12 Ibid.

good teacher . . . a man of strong convictions who can put (the facts) over",¹³ and to be effective, he should have genius, enthusiasm, even "strong prejudices"¹⁴ in his likes and dislikes of technical procedures. Cary acknowledges a debt to some masters who, though lacking enthusiasm, drilled the students in "a set of principles . . . fundamental rules, the logic, the syntax"¹⁵ of the subject:

Teaching, in short, like everything else that conveys a meaning in words, is an art, and you can't be a good artist unless you believe you are giving a truth. The most effective teacher will always be biased, for the chief force in teaching is confidence and enthusiasm. To give merely information is to write on the sand.¹⁶

Cary's insistence upon the necessity of acquiring in youth a sound dogmatic basis for one's religious views and also the skills of a craft, underlies his theory of art and his idea of reality: "Boys want an education as children want knowledge. They want to know how and what to think."¹⁷ Thus the teacher's function is "to form a character of feeling about ideas and to do that he has to have pretty strong feelings himself, as well as clear ideas."¹⁸ Cary finds that the achievement of the recognized great writers of fiction has value relative to the kind of education they acquired. All had admirable command of

13 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 46.

14 Ibid., p. 48.

15 Ibid., p. 49.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 47.

18 Ibid., p. 49.

language and strong convictions about reality which they strove to communicate:

the great artist

. . . is in fact almost invariably a propagandist, he is convinced that his idea of things is true and important and he wants to convert others, he wants to change the world.¹⁹

This, he maintains, is true of the great Russians, of Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Wells, Kipling, Conrad, Galsworthy, Gide and Proust.

We can see the relevance of these statements about the urge of the artist to communicate his intuition of reality, when Cary, "speaking as a professional writer", avers:

that the great difficulty . . . is not only to see the objective clearly as it is, to value your achievement with an unprejudiced eye, but to know what it is all about. You are faced with a mass of words, and a story like many other stories, your characters and your general theme. But what is the meaning of it all, the real meaning? Where is the exciting discovery with which you started? That is to say, where is your revelation?²⁰

To find the answer to this question put by the author, we should note what Cary has to say about a book as a "total symbol". He points out that a writer must "fix and convey" his primary intuition, his experience of a truth about reality, by "a scene, a piece of dialogue", and he cites as example the opening chapter of Conrad's Lord Jim. This is "the fundamental point of experience", the intuition which Conrad developed into a theme or view of life: "a young man convicted by the court of cowardice and dereliction of duty."²¹ Cary alludes to

19 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 91.

20 Ibid., p. 93.

21 Ibid., pp. 99, 100.

Dickens's use of a non-dramatic scene to convey his intuition: the long description of the London fog with which Bleak House begins, for "that fog is the keynote of the whole. It gave Dickens back all the time, whenever he needed it, the sense of a dark, dirty and muddled world, of the confusion and despair of lost souls."²²

As another example of the introduction of the theme very early in a novel, Cary quotes a passage from D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow.²³ Cary observes:

Here we have the expression of Lawrence's whole intuition of life as lived finally at the level of fundamental passion and fundamental needs, of an order of life not reducible to logic or rational judgment.²⁴

In the light of these comments about the artist's preparation for an attitude towards his work, and his method of composition, we should seek in Cary's novels "a scene, a piece of dialogue" which will "convey to the reader the full impact of his intuition", the initial experience which he sought to fix and convey as a symbol of the total meaning of the work. He gives a hint when, in Art and Reality, he refers to the crucial scene in Prisoner of Grace and states that "the woman's change of mind" was essential to his plot:

I wrote the railway station [scene] . . . to show how the husband, by certain suggestions, makes it impossible for his wife to carry on with her elopement. She just daren't run away from him.²⁵

22 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 100.

23 D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow as quoted in Cary, Art and Reality, p. 101.

24 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 101.

25 Ibid., pp. 97, 98.

In the completed novel this scene was expanded to two chapters.²⁶ Having determined to leave her husband, obtain a divorce and marry her cousin Jim, now back in England from army service in Africa, Nina is perturbed when Chester has, through his secretary-spy, found her waiting for the train. By persuasion more than by argument, he breaks down her defenses. He declares his deep love, his urgent need of her to complete the great work in which she has been such a prop and which God has singularly blessed. He appeals to her conscience, to her marital duty, to the terrible consequences of breaking God's law. To these appeals she replies coolly, even cynically: "I . . . said that I did not think of God as quite so political."²⁷ Chester has one more round of ammunition and it proves effective:

And what I'm so afraid of is that you are being hurried into a decision that will spoil your life--I don't speak of mine or his. Is your cousin a man whose judgment can be relied on? I should have thought that you were the more responsible person. All I beg is that you will take a little time to think things over. You needn't be afraid that I'll try to influence you. If you come back now you will be left entirely to yourself.²⁸

A significant factor at this moment is that Nina does not spring to Jim's defense, does not in fact react at all to what Chester has just said, but takes him up on what he had previously said about her ideas of religion being "naturally . . . different" from those held by such a fundamentalist as the commonplace Mr. Goold. Even more significant is that after Chester's implied sneer at Jim,

²⁶ See Cary, Prisoner of Grace, Ch. 31, pp. 84-86; Ch. 32, pp. 87-90.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

Nina "could not bear any more argument", but retorted with a caustic speech about Chester's political tactics: "Is it so good to make bitterness and hatred-- even if it has helped you on and even if you do get into Parliament?"²⁹ In one of her characteristic parenthetical remarks which are so often slight redundancies, she adds: "(I said this to show that he was not really so high-minded about his work; he was thinking of his career, too, in case my going away should hurt it)."³⁰ The scene ends at this point, for "Then he jumped up, kissed my cheek and walked out on the platform and out of the station."³¹

There is much ambiguity and irony in this highly dramatic episode, which, in the context of Cary's allusion to it in Art and Reality, is an example of the writer's intuition, revelation, meaning and vision: "it recorded for me an experience fundamental to the book's meaning."³² The ambiguity results from the fact that we are not told in so many words why Nina, in the next chapter, goes through an "agony" of indecision and finally lets the train depart without her.³³ Chester's appeals were on emotional, moral, religious and even economic grounds: could Jim be trusted to look after her properly? Could he be relied on to assume responsibility for her welfare? This was the implication of Chester's final thrust, and Nina "could not bear any more argument." From

29 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 90.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 100.

33 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, pp. 91-93.

what we know of Jim in the earlier chapters, he has no sense of responsibility, moral or economic, except about his quixotic schemes for developing African transportation methods. We have had glimpses of Nina as concerned above all with creature comforts, as a girl of whims and caprice, as a woman who delights in the "sparkle" of life. When Nina returns to Chester's muddled world, it is to discontent, turmoil, unhappiness, even tragedy: her son Tom, after a bohemian life, is wounded in the battle of the Somme, leaves for the continent after recovery, and commits suicide. It is perhaps the only time when we are aware of her deep maternal nature, thwarted perhaps by the circumstances of her marriage to Chester to provide legal paternity for her child, and by her subconscious aversion to union with a man of inferior social status, with whom she has, however, all the material advantages she craves. This scene, then, is central to the plot the mainspring of which is a marriage of convenience.

It is also a symbol of Cary's theme or view of life; that marriage without love and mutual respect is fraught with tragedy. The verbal irony in the scene derives chiefly from Nina's sarcasm in the parenthetical remarks about Chester's "high-mindedness", for there is very little of this quality in Nina herself. Again, Chester's jibe at Jim's lack of judgment reminds us that the speaker rarely exhibits a rational approach to problems; his method is shrewd calculation to gain power through intrigue. The irony of the situation lies in the presence in the railway station of a group of peasants who are silent observers of the domestic crisis. Two women and a man recognize Chester as the "great man" featured by the press. With them is a grubby, bedraggled four-year-old boy, noisily and drippingly sucking a lollipop. All through the scene he draws

closer to Nina, who fears her dress will be ruined by the sticky fingers, while his mother keeps warning him to leave the lady alone. The juxtaposition of this group with the tense couple involved in a critical situation is an example of Cary's use of the grotesque to heighten the realism of the scene. The presence of the peasants, poor and probably ignorant, yet who appear contented with their lot, maintaining a certain dignity and well-being, since they seem to accept work as the normal state of man, counterpoints the explosive drama they witness. The man in the group had a more positive reaction to the affair than the women; they all "stared . . . the man . . . with rather a scornful expression as at a foreigner who does not know how to behave."³⁴ Perhaps the villagers, who are aware of the identity of the speakers in this scene, represent the vast majority in the world who go about their daily tasks, living and perhaps barely living, yet free from the pressures and complexities that beset the lives of those who choose to gain and wield power.

A similar treatment of a scene as a thematic keynote occurs in Except the Lord. Early in the novel we see that Chester, in his teens, lacking the brilliance and diligence that won for his older brother a scholarship to Oxford, seeks companionship with the village boys. A group decides to slip off to the Fair, the annual event in the district. He gets his first taste of the theatre and intoxication is not too strong a word for his reaction to the crude melodrama describing the seduction of a poor, honest girl by the rich, aristocratic villain.³⁵ He had never been so affected by the power of words, not even by his

³⁴ Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 89.

³⁵ Cary, Except the Lord, pp. 91-94.

father's evangelical sermons. This experience was chiefly responsible for his determination to leave home, find his brother, then working in London, and get into the whirl of life in the big world. The theme of the play, with its sociological implications, and the magic of dramatic art through word and gesture, haunted him. Histrionics left its mark on him and his actions thenceforth were motivated by the desire to captivate an audience--workers, voters, strikers, statesmen--by every oratorical trick he could master.

Cary is a superb craftsman in the art of description. A typical example of this skill is the very lyric passage describing Nina's sailing expeditions with Jim. It is almost poetic in the way that even the phrases undulate:

And I was just going to say that sailing on the Longwater with Jim gave me a similar joy and comfort, but, of course, it was only similar in the escape. What is called so often the bosom of the sea is not at all like a mother; it is too cold, too beautiful (or rather a quite different kind of beauty), and its coldness and strength and beauty are an important part of the joy of being carried up on it. You feel it as power, stronger than stone and smoother than snow, the most beautiful and strongest thing in the world; you could see it swinging and dipping and glittering all round you, so that its sparkles seemed to be dancing, not only on the tops of the little waves but right into the air at least two or three feet above; you were all among them, in a kind of gay triumphant procession, a wedding-day procession wherever you went, and there was no noise of engines, nothing smelly or clever pushing you along; it was the wind that did not care whether you were there or not, which had been blowing millions of years before there were any boats at all, which was simply moving on its own way and carried you with it when you caught a little bit of it in your sail.

I felt such joy, a deep peaceful complete joy, that I found myself quite excited with it; with a deep peaceful excitement which did not even want to speak; and a great deal of that peace was from Jim, because I knew him so well, and he was so simple and complete (even his selfishness was on a grand scale) that he was like another piece of nature.³⁶

36 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 73.

The balanced phrases and exquisite use of the vowel sounds in the long passages crystallize the experience as sailing with Jim gave Nina the joy and peace that she subconsciously craved. In the first part of the passage quoted, the preponderance of Anglo-Saxon words, "bosom", "sea", "mother", "cold", "kind", "strength", "strongest", "swinging", "dipping" brings out this facet of her character. The other side of her nature longs for admiration, gaiety, and excitement and so the words become derivative, Latinized and long--"triumphant procession, a wedding-day procession . . ." A hint of a threat to peace and safety comes with "there was no noise of engines, nothing smelly or clever pushing you along." Towards the end of the story we become aware of disaster pending as the political storm-clouds gather, and the winds of change bring chaos instead of security. "Smelly" is a disturbing note in the midst of nature's rhythmic harmony of air, sea and sky. We cannot help associating the word with the malodorous political machine, the foul corruption, which will destroy the happiness of all. The irony of the passage is forcibly impressed upon us at the end because Nina, revelling in Jim's protective concern for her comfort, would learn how little he could defend her against Chester's demands, and eventually Jim feels he is honour bound to take her life.

Another example of Cary's power of graphic description is the Coal Miners' Strike of 1926 which wrought such havoc among the poor in England. Chester, drunk with power and with his own eloquence, had become at the age of twenty-one, the chief aide-de-camp of the union leader, Pring. As a security measure in this important national post, Chester was always shadowed by a stevedore of massive proportions. He describes what he sees early one dark

morning in November walking along the side of the docks beside his huge body-guard:

The docks all round me are dead. Not a winch sounds, not a truck moves, as far as the eye can see. The cranes point crookedly towards the sky at chance angles, crazy and motionless as gibbets already struck with rottenness from which the very bones have fallen. The mist that hangs over the sea is like a winding sheet, cold with the death sweat; the pale sun gleaming low through the fog is like the glazed eye of death itself, or, as one might say, of commerce mortally wounded.

Half a million pounds' worth of freight along fifty miles of coast is held up in two million pounds' worth of shipping, and I am one of those who have commanded this death, who have wielded this spell.³⁷

The harsh resonance of the passage with the many initial consonants, emphasizes the starkness of the scene. Chester revels in the fact that it is within his power to have caused this spell. The death images: "gibbets . . . struck with rottenness", the "mist like a winding sheet, cold with the death sweat", and the sun as the "glazed eye of death" gleaming through the fog are powerful pictures of Chester's baleful influence on other lives and on social affairs throughout his life.

Cary provides many such symbols in order to evoke in the reader a feeling about the character. In Not Honour More, by short flashing images, we become aware of Jim's reaction when he discovers Chester in the bedroom of Nina who is now Jim's wife. He sends this monster, the former husband, packing and as the car drives off Jim observes:

37 Cary, Except the Lord, p. 243.

In five minutes, not a soul in sight, nothing in the drive but a few drops of oil and some dirty newspapers blowing over the spring flowers.³⁸

The "few drops of oil" and the "dirty newspapers" are images of all the platitudes and the collusion with a corrupt press by which Chester, throughout his life, had gained a following through his unctuous eloquence and foul tricks on friend and foe alike.

The events of the trilogy take place in or near London, with Jim's letters from Africa about possible colonial developments ironically ominous at this moment when imperialism was doomed. One focal point of the setting is the estate of Aunt Latter, called ambiguously "Palm Cottage"--the spot where all three protagonists seek refuge from the stormy atmosphere of political intrigue or when personal disaster threatens. The name of the place connotes peace, order, harmony, security and trust. Nina describes it vividly:

. . . the cottage itself, on its triangle of ground against the cliff, with its little wood, its half-tropical garden, its mass of flowers, belonged neither to the fashionable sporting beach just below nor to the bare romantic moor just above; it was like something from a thousand miles away, from the south of France or Italy in Spring. I always think of it (or rather feel it) as sparkling in all its walls and windows, in windy sunshine, or in mists of light rain, which made even the grass sparkle and which were so full of sun that they seemed like a liquid poured out of the sky and blowing about as it fell.³⁹

Some of these details, written in Nina's early girlhood, may be taken as symbols of her nature and of her future life. The basic cause of vicissitude

38 Cary, Not Honour More, p. 69.

39 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 13.

in her life was the "triangle" of her relations with Jim and Chester, and "against the cliff" of reality that is life itself and true love, of which she was seemingly incapable, her romantic nature led her far from "the beach" where much of her childhood was spent, to the "moor", the arena of politics. What she really sought in life was the sunny south, a perpetual youth, "sparkling" existence, of passionate warmth, with troubles as mere "mists", "a liquid . . . blowing" away care and responsibility so that the ground or base of her life could still "sparkle", --a verb that symbolizes Nina's aim in life.

In this beautiful country home the cousins, Nina and Jim, first met and fell in love; here Chester Nimmo, an ambitious agent, becomes Aunt Latter's protégé and finds the small girl entrancing at the age of "five or so",⁴⁰ and at seventeen irresistible, ready to accept his proposal of marriage.⁴¹ Jim Latter is at the Cottage when he dictates his statement to the police, having ended the drama of the love triangle where it began thirty years earlier.⁴² The transformation of Palm Cottage, the scene of carefree happiness, freedom and romantic passion into a place where the three chief characters are caught in a network of hatred, intrigue and treachery--for which each is in some way responsible--stresses the subtle irony that pervades the trilogy.

The titles of the second and third novels have ironic implications. Except the Lord with its scriptural aura and its explicit emphasis on Chester's reversion in old age, when all was lost, to the piety of his childhood when his father's

40 Cary, Except the Lord, p. 138.

41 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 13.

42 Cary, Not Honour More, pp. 222, 223.

preaching had an immense emotional effect on him, is in keeping with his lifelong use of slogans and platitudes as a would-be political saviour. The title of the concluding novel, Not Honour More, has Cavalier overtones, recalling the gallant poet Lovelace bidding his love farewell as he left to serve king and country. Such chivalric ideals are the antithesis of the image of Jim Latter as a lover, husband, and citizen. There is also some significance in Cary's handling of his material: Nina's account reveals--with frequent use of parenthesis to indicate that she cannot see all sides of a situation--the crudity, coarseness and callousness of the two men with whom her life is involved. But neither of them ever utters a derogatory remark about her. Cary allows to them, villains though they often seem to be, in personal and public life, the decency to refrain from vilifying a woman. The total meaning of this triangular relationship seems to be that a woman, when she acts in a womanly way, true to her deepest nature as wife and mother, has a right to respect and reverence. The author's success in this aspect of the trilogy can be expressed in the words of a modern Spanish critic:

The novelist completes his task when he has succeeded in representing in concrete form for us what we already knew in the abstract.⁴³

In Art and Reality Cary has much to say about the function of symbolism in fiction. He states:

There is no other means by which one individual mind can express itself in material form and so communicate with another. For the writer this form is language. By language the writer communicates both the fact and the feeling.⁴⁴

⁴³ José Ortega y Gasset, "The Nature of the Novel", The Hudson Review X (Spring, 1957), p. 19.

⁴⁴ Cary, Art and Reality, pp. 57-58.

The names of the chief characters offer examples: the diminutive "Nina" suggests a woman of whims, concerned with trifles, content with a butterfly girlishness. Light in sound and texture, when combined with her maiden name of Woodville, it has less connotation of frivolity; the sturdy British surname suggests tradition and gives a sense of balance to her personality. When she became Nina Nimmo the sound is comical, even fantastic, and reflects the hollow life, the ups and downs of a creature blown about by some external force, the solid 'Woodville' family potentialities weakened by alliance with the upstart enthusiast whose career was based on a romantic vision of power and influence. "Chester" suggests pomposity because of its association with prominent English place names and with illustrious persons, for example, Lord Chesterfield whose patronage Samuel Johnson scornfully rejected. It is possible that Cary coined 'Nimmo' from the archaic verb 'nim', signifying to steal, filch or pilfer. "Chester Nimmo" has overtones of a contradiction, a contrast between fact and feeling, and the trilogy offers evidence that the man had great gifts--courage, ambition, eloquence, moral and religious ideals in youth, all rendered nugatory by the ethical idealism which had no dogmatic foundation.

The third protagonist of the trilogy has an equally characteristic name: the solid traditional "James" and colloquial "Jim" gives the image of a good fellow, a man's man, reliable and decent; together with "Latter" it assumes an ultra-conservative, bluff but stubborn eccentricity. Where Nina's capacity for emotional veering enables her to see all sides of a question, fluctuate, and end by serving as the tool of another's will or caprice, Jim fails to consider any point of view but his own.

Cary is true to his theory that "the novel writer must excite sympathy-- never mind if he is writing satire, the reader must feel for his characters." By giving the trilogy a centre in the hypocrisy of three people who act from selfish and ignoble motives while professing to promote one another's happiness and at the same time save the country from ruin, Cary organizes his material into a work of art by this unifying principle. The truth of the triple account emerges from the fusion of fact and feeling in a picture of the author's world which shows how actuality impinges upon human lives. By his complete objectivity Cary makes it difficult for the reader to perceive which one of the characters reflects the author's point of view. He firmly believed that a novelist should not inflict his ideas on the reader:

I try to be clear--to keep out of sight. An author has no more business in a book than the microphone on a screen. It is hard enough for him to give a clear coherent impression without unnecessary distractions.⁴⁵

Orville Prescott has remarked that Cary has "a profound insight into the inmost depths of human beings."⁴⁶ And one of his earlier critics has said: "Mr. Cary's objectivity is of a kind seen nowhere else in the modern English novel."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Cary, "The Way a Novel Gets Written", p. 89.

⁴⁶ Orville Prescott, In My Opinion (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1952), p. 192.

⁴⁷ Henry Reed, The Novel Since 1939 (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1946), p. 27. It is relevant here to note Coleridge's comment that Shakespeare "transports himself into the very being of each personage". Quoted in George Watson, The Literary Critics. A Study of English Descriptive Criticism (Pelican Books, 1962), p. 126.

The structure of the trilogy as autobiography enabled Cary to forego the omniscient author or the narrator technique; consequently, dramatic irony heightens the actuality of the work: each character's revelation about the others is also a self-revelation. In practice, Cary adheres to the principle expressed in Art and Reality:

All the scenes and characters, all the events in the book, must contribute to the total effect, the total meaning. The book must give the sense of an actual world with real characters. Otherwise they won't engage the reader's sympathy, his feelings will never be concerned at all.⁴⁸

Andrew Wright has observed that, in spite of Cary's artistic 'distance', he does finally give a clue to where his sympathies lie:

He chooses the creative man. That is why . . . Chester Nimmo's defeat, for all that Cary makes us despise him, is a tragedy, and Jim Latter's fate sordid.⁴⁹

This may be an accurate interpretation of the empathy Cary intended, but another view is possible. Chester uses the art of the demagogue for self-aggrandizement. His veering political tactics make him a symbol of the Trimmers whom Dante places in the vestibule of the Inferno because they acted not from principle, from conscience, but from expediency. His return after defeat to the faith of his father in Except the Lord, may be as hypocritical as his shift from pacifist to Minister of War in order to hold and wield power. His animal instinct in seeking cover under attack is as patent as his political craftiness in a change of policy because he sees the "truth" about the state of the country.

48 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 5.

49 Andrew Wright, op. cit., p. 74.

His course of action seems to show that his conscience was ever his accomplice rather than his guide. For the stiff-necked Latter we may be sure Cary had no affection: a man with every advantage, cultural and social, Jim is a cold and complacent egoist.

A clue to the author's attitude toward the characters may perhaps lie in the titles of the trilogy: Prisoner of Grace suggests that Nina was a victim; with no early religious or ethical training, an impulsive, wayward child grown to be a creature of caprice, yet capable of loyalty to Jim who first won her love and to Chester who married her without a suspicion that she had been and would again become Jim's mistress. She was also capable of deep affection for her children and grateful for Chester's unwitting acceptance of paternity of two of them. In discussing Tolstoy's use of allegory, though "not . . . too obvious an allegory"⁵⁰ in Anna Karenina, Cary refers to its effect upon us of "the strong sense of the tragic relations between the wilful egotism of the man and the patient feminine devotion of his victim",⁵¹--in the allegory of the race meeting, the victim is the fallen mare who represents Anna, whose relations with her husband Alexei and with Vronsky may be compared with Nina's situation between Chester and Jim Latter. Moreover, it may not be too fanciful to conjecture that Nina is deliberately assigned to the character because it is the diminutive of the surname of Tolstoy's heroine.

Cary's versatility in style is a remarkable achievement: "style becomes

50 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 162.

51 Ibid.

the man or woman narrating the story being told."⁵² Prisoner of Grace is Nina's fluent, effortless flow of speech which gives the novel a looseness of texture. The pace is leisurely with, at times, a quickening of tempo when her animal spirits are aroused. Chester's tale in Except the Lord is in typical evangelistic style, the sanctimonious unctiousness of one whose youthful imagination was inflamed by the eloquence of his father and by the crude theatrical performance that he witnessed as a youth. The pace is measured and thoughtful; the texture dense and heavy. In Not Honour More the pace is rapid and the texture rough. On the eve of execution for his murder of Nina, Jim Latter dictates his last testament in a vigorous, almost telegraphic style. It is a symbol of his character⁵³--harsh, blunt, bitter and coldly passionate. This agitated, energetic tone has the momentum of an account dictated at high speed; the staccato effect of short sentences and the largely monosyllabic vocabulary, and the conventional, often trite similes reflect the narrator's contemptuous attitude towards the upstart opportunist and his henchmen. The forceful language is studded with homely figures of speech often streaked by flashes of colour:

For now the Nimmo fever was well on. My house was full of ladies sizzling in the dream of his glory like apple fritters.⁵⁴

The fact was people were getting rattled . . . the general atmosphere was getting charged up all the time, and now it began to crackle a bit. A lot of minds were melting like neopolitan ices

52 Wright, op. cit., p. 107.

53 Nina gives us a clue to Jim's character when she says: "All the bumps and hollows, the rocks, streams, chasms of his character were as well known to me as Slapton Moor . . ." (Prisoner of Grace, pp. 73-74).

54 Cary, Not Honour More, p. 19.

at a gymkhana when thunder is coming on, going soft at the edges and the colour running a bit. The white getting in the red, the red into the white, and the green all over the plate.⁵⁵

Whenever you went near Nimmo, you got in a blind spin, a mass of dirty fog full of wreckage like London in a November bomb raid. You could only bash yourself against the walls and break your nose if it wasn't your neck. I wanted something to steer by. I was after it now. A man who spies on his wife is a tout. I felt like a tout now but I was lost and sick of it. I wasn't going to take any more lies.⁵⁶

Each novel of the trilogy, as well as the work as a whole, shows that Cary's conceptual and emotional power through symbol and metaphor made him a master of his artistic equipment. In addition to the analogy of physical devastation with moral havoc caused, according to Jim, by Nimmo's knavery in private and in political life, the third excerpt looks back to Nina's story and the dangerous sailing episodes when Jim made her handle the rudder even in a gale. "Something to steer by" is more than a figure of speech: it is the reality all three characters failed to acknowledge until too late.

Jim's contrasted food images, "apple fritters" and "neapolitan ices", recall Nina's sensation of fear when her first husband was in a rage:

To quarrel with Chester, to deal with him at all, was like struggling with a shark whose teeth all point the same way. His love and his anger both swallowed me down a little further in a horrible stuffy darkness.⁵⁷

The physical details contribute to the emotional impact of one character on another: Nina is conscious of losing her identity, her personality "swallowed"

55 Cary, Not Honour More, p. 146.

56 Ibid., p. 71.

57 Cary, Prisoner of Grace, p. 171.

by the monumental human figure with whom life is a nightmare. Jim looks at the women fluttering round their hero as the most inconsequential bits of food, "sizzling", "melting" in the "dream of his glory". The external public life and the inner private lives of the characters are often linked by details of imagery or symbol: sometimes at a political meeting, at a dinner party, a shopping expedition when Nina and the hoydenish wife of Chester's newly rich colleague exploit their freedom in a frenzy of finery, in the private theatricals when Tom, Nina's son, caricatures Chester's art of the demagogue, unaware that the orator is in the audience. The author's rich comic sense prevails in these scenes.

The second trilogy is a coherent image of reality. Events reported daily in the press, broadcast by radio, depicted on screen and stage, woven into countless books of fiction and sociology, are related by Cary in a thematic synthesis which is meaningful for the moral judgment and therefore authentic. Andrew Wright has stated that Cary "is able to delight in the splendor and sordidness of man's very manhood, and thus to express his own sense of triumph over the world's idiocy."⁵⁸ If this be an accurate estimate of the meaning of his work, it can only be true in the sense that Cary, as artist, can "delight in the . . . sordidness" of human existence, as a fact of life and hence it has a place in literature. Aesthetically, and as Cary handles it, the sordid is a valuable facet of his work. Chapter 31 of Art and Reality is a lucid explanation of the principles upon which this aspect of his work is based. The controlling

⁵⁸ Wright, op. cit., p. 111.

idea which connects place and personality throughout the novels is the metaphor of captivity which conveys the sense of man's loss of identity, of selfhood, in a world beset with terrifying anxiety. In design and structure the trilogy moves from the perimeter to the centre: from the free, open space of Palm Cottage, to the stifling domestic atmosphere and political turmoil of life at the Orchard, then to London, and finally back to Palm Cottage with Nina in her own home, bound by some strange power to give Chester the tribute he demanded--loyalty to him and to his "cause".

The trilogy is the concrete form of Cary's belief in the novel as symbol:

. . . although a writer's details from page to page may seem to have no special difference, the whole is always highly particular. . . . That is to say, the form of a book, page by page, is not the book, the work of art. All these separate pages and chapters, like the movements of a symphony, do not have a complete significance until the whole work is known. They are, so to speak, partly in suspension, until at the end of the last movement, the last chapter, they suddenly fall into their place. This is only to say again that the separate forms do not possess their whole context until the work is complete. That's why I call the book a total symbol.⁵⁹

59 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 103.

CHAPTER V

CARY'S VISION OF LIFE: IDEALS AND REALITY

To attempt to define Cary's place among contemporary writers of fiction is difficult; only five years have elapsed since his death, too short a time for a balanced appraisal of his contribution to the English literary tradition.¹ However, analysis of his work leaves the reader with the impression that he may be called a positive realist. This means, simply, as I believe Cary would express it, that the writer sets out to tell a complete story, to give his "valuation of the real"² to give us truth. The nineteenth-century realism of Meredith, whose prophet was Zola, is naturalism, aimed to depict life with complete "scientific" objectivity, to present nature and human nature with photographic exactitude particularly the sordid, vicious, cruel, in a style marked by clinical adherence to facts. This method uses data available to observation and experiment-- concrete verifiable details. Another aspect of realism is that found in the English tradition from Chaucer, through Shakespeare to the nineteenth-century writers whom Cary admired so much: Austen, Conrad, Henry James, and this realism includes idealistic and moral values. The naturalist would deny,

1 Adverse criticism of the work of even the acknowledged masters of the novel is a current attitude. See Modern British Fiction. Essays in Criticism, edited by Mark Schorer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), e.g. Lionel Trilling, "Howard's End", pp. 195-209; Ian Watt, "Story and Idea in Conrad's The Shadow - Line", pp. 119-194.

2 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 104.

implicitly or explicitly, the reality of non-material or spiritual values and in so doing, he is not, on artistic grounds, a realist at all, because he limits himself to a partial view of human existence in as much as his view of life lacks the rational and the moral referents which are essential to a presentation of human beings.³ To stress the reality of sin, and at the same time, disregard or minimize the reality of conscience is naturalism and can become pornography. The idealistic or positive realist is one who depicts the whole truth; his vision will include the existence of non-material, or spiritual values. Sin may be part of the total picture, but it will be sin presented as evil, a violation of law of which every normal human being is aware.⁴ In such a story there is tension and drama from the inner struggle between man's higher and lower natures. However implicitly or objectively the artist conveys the impression, we are aware of his values, that sin is related to the ideal, to man's moral and spiritual aspirations. The dichotomy inherent in human nature is not ignored by the true realist.⁵

Joyce Cary, I believe, is this type of realist. His tone of compassion in the portrait of the crooked Nimmo is evident; Chester's own story reveals factors of heredity and environment, temperament and training, ambitions and opportunities that could have made him a power for good. Energetic, generous,

3 See Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction", in Schorer, *op. cit.*, p. 9, "'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss."

4 In Prisoner of Grace, Chester tries to impress upon Nina the sanctity of their marriage: ". . . we have to fear Him; . . . we have to fear the consequence of doing wrong." P. 89.

5 Cf. Art and Reality, Chapter 31.

mentally alert and ready to assume responsibility, religious at heart and loyal to those he loved, he became a demagogue rather than a statesman owing to two factors in his career: lack of training for the role he assumed in public life and a hasty marriage with a woman whose emotional nature never developed beyond that of a spoilt girl.

Throughout the trilogy there is an undercurrent which says as clearly as overt comment--the intuition of the author lies in his awareness that human frailty and folly cause a derangement of the order of things; it is on the whole a story of sordidness and sin, of illicit and licit sex, of deception and hypocrisy. But there are scenes where tenderness, loyalty, courage and family piety balance the picture. Cary's positive, realistic attitude is boldly exposed not only to the outer shocks, but to the inner springs of life. He is "devoid of self-pity, sentimentality, bitterness and morbidity."⁶ He has a keen curiosity about the real motives and actions of brilliant, ambitious men, and frivolous, self-centered women. He is interested in human behaviour in so far as it presents us with moral problems, not with problems which can be solved in an obviously heroic or ignoble way, but with problems of daily life. The trilogy exemplifies what Cary believed was the essence of a work of art, the "revelation of a moral real":⁷ that individual sincerity, loyalty and honour are possible and eminently desirable and worth all our striving, but that the pressures of group life, of

⁶ Julian Maclaren Ross, "Story of a Full Life", Times Literary Supplement (November 11, 1949), p. 732.

⁷ Cary, Art and Reality, p. 150.

accepted social conventions, and of a secularistic, mechanized society work very hard against the attainment of ideals which are usually the mainspring of human actions. In a conversation with Nathan Cohen, Cary defended his positive ideas about life--"that good is, and man has freedom to pursue it":⁸

A man is either a behaviorist--he says the world's a machine, and none of us are free--or he is a theist. If he has a sense of any goodness in the world, even the smallest good act, unselfish act, that's ever good, he has to be a theist. Because the world has stopped being a machine, I mean the world can't be a cash register if it feels goodness and feels love and understands beauty I've always been interested in individuals I'm more interested in life than in books. And every writer must have the power of entering into another person.⁹

By this standard Cary is a theist, and that is why I consider him to be a positive realist.

His world in the second trilogy is materialistic, harsh, sterile, and through his characters' self-revelation in word and actions he communicates his "meaning".¹⁰ This seems to be that the true wasteland is not so much our culture, mechanized and soulless as that is; it is rather the proud, barren and selfish human heart that needs to be touched with supernatural charity. Hypocrisy, selfishness and deceit are the perversion of love. It is a paradox that the most startling if not the most effective way to present virtue is to dwell upon its opposite and this is the technique Cary uses with such skill in his second trilogy.

⁸ Carlyle King, "Joyce Cary and the Creative Imagination", The Tamarack Review, X (Winter, 1959), p. 44.

⁹ Joyce Cary in an interview by Nathan Cohen, "A Conversation with Joyce Cary", The Tamarack Review, III (Spring, 1957), pp. 9, 10.

¹⁰ Cary, Art and Reality, pp. 5, 18, 92, 163, 164.

Nimmo, its central figure, as seen by Nina and by James Latter is all self-dramatizing posture and talk, apparently bereft of any real quality of faith or love, a hollow figment of a man who, like Eliot's hollow men, ends his life only with a whimper. But from his own story in Except the Lord we are aware of extenuating circumstances: the early poverty, lack of education, evangelical piety without dogmatic foundation--and he merits compassion rather than condemnation.

Cary has a certain Chaucerian vision; his trilogy opens a window on the world and shows people as they are, exposing in dramatic monologues and recorded dialogues, their faults and foibles. He loves life; he loves the person, but not the sin. Enid Starkie, "his oldest and closest friend in Oxford"¹¹ during the last eighteen years of his life, tells us that Cary "never lost admiration for man himself",¹² because "his insight into the inmost depths of human beings is profound."¹³ In an interview, as he chatted about his second trilogy in Oxford, Cary commented on the "free" soul of his novels:

To the free personal soul we owe all love, beauty, everything that makes life worth living, and also the everlasting conflict and insecurity that makes it tragic. Freedom is all our joy and all our pain.¹⁴

He expressed this view a few years later in the preface to his first trilogy and it is equally pertinent to his second. His characters live, as we all do, in a

11 Enid Starkie, "Joyce Cary, A Personal Portrait", Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVII (Winter, 1960), p. 110.

12 Ibid., p. 133.

13 Orville Prescott, In My Opinion, p. 192.

14 Joyce Cary in an interview by Bernard Kalb, Saturday Review, XXXVIII (May 28, 1955), p. 12.

background of "continuous revolution . . . which is at once the field of freedom, our opportunity and our tragedy."¹⁵

Like other Irish writers, particularly Swift and Shaw, Cary's background within the two cultures provided him with experience and vision which allowed him to rise to satire and irony on many issues intensely English. He was able to objectify situations about which an Englishman would be impassioned--for example, in the portrait of James Latter, the conservative, class-conscious army officer and colonial administration. This 'distance' contributed an important element to the second trilogy--its ironic tone about events in Edwardian England,--"a period whose special flavor Cary marvellously conveys."¹⁶

The "universal" in Cary's work, as he has indicated in Chapter 33 of Art and Reality, lies in the type of world into which he projects his characters. This world is none other than the actual world of Homer or that of the Lady Murasaki, whose Tale of Genji, he tells us, written in the eleventh century, is the first full length novel extant. This world gives us

people who are free moral agents deciding their own actions in a world of incessant vicissitude, a world as far as possible removed from the consistency of a machine, a world in which every moral problem is itself unique It is the fact of personal freedom and uniqueness in the individual soul that makes Homer and Murasaki still significant to us, as we say, real.¹⁷

In Cary, too, we find such a world; the same positive values illuminate Cary's

15 Cary, First Trilogy, p. xi.

16 Richard Hayes, "Felt in the Head and Felt Along the Heart", Commonweal, LVII (October 17, 1952), p. 43.

17 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 157.

novels. His characters are not pawns in a determined world; each is a unique human being, a free moral agent exercising his free choice, making his own decisions. In a letter to Ruth G. Van Horn, postmarked Oxford, and dated November 10, 1953, Cary expresses his concern about his reviewers missing the point of Prisoner of Grace

which is to show the whole political world, not only as commonly restricted to parliaments and congresses, but as it works in marriage and the nursery, in all human relations; that is to say it is the study of another aspect of that world which has been imposed upon us by freedom, individuality and the necessary isolation of the individual in a free world.¹⁸

Malcolm Cowley has assessed Cary's work quite succinctly:

For a born fiction writer like Cary, the world is composed . . . of people having interesting experiences that change their lives (as our own lives may be changed when we read about them). But the change in ourselves is one of heart and not, or not primarily, of social institutions. Instead of reforming the world, [Cary] writes to present the world in its diversity, while imposing a form on it that makes it in a sense, his own possession. Instead of enouncing laws, principles and messages, he gives us human examples.¹⁹

In his second trilogy Cary succeeds admirably in living up to Cowley's definition of a novel. A year before writing the passage just quoted, Cowley defined the norms of the novel.²⁰ He tells us that with Cary the protagonists as well as the minor people present a "group of lifelike characters in a plausible situation",

18 Joyce Cary in a letter to Ruth G. Van Horn, "The Novels of Joyce Cary", The New Republic, CXXVIII (January 12, 1953), p. 2.

19 Malcolm Cowley, "The Story Teller's Story", The New Republic, CXXXVII (December 9, 1957), p. 20.

20 Cowley, "The Limits of the Novel", The New Republic, CXXXV (July 9, 1956), p. 16.

and the story as it unfolds "leads to a change in their relationship". Nina, Jim, Chester, Aunt Latter, the newly-rich Goolds, and the bohemian Tribes are people "in whom the reader can believe"; the drama of their lives does "create a mood of expectancy".

Cary was an admirer of the "great artist";²¹ for example in Jane Austen he finds economy, subtlety, clear and precise style. "Her world is limited in surface but deep in content";²² Cary's world, Edwardian England, with its international repercussions, is not so limited in space or time, for depths are sounded which the Austen novels lack. However, in each of his novels the area is, as in the Austen world, limited;--only in the trilogy do we find expanse of scene and action. But this broader scene of the trilogy is so unified in subject, theme, tone, action and dramatic situation that the reality presented in these novels is in accord with Cary's aesthetic principle that the form of a work of art must be "in close relation with the power of its expression. It is truth for feeling; it is truth about values. It is a personal truth."²³ In this, Cary resembles Tolstoy, another master whom he admired. Because of Cary's unifying techniques, the trilogy's total meaning is completely integrated into its form and thus it is a work of art based on Cary's own criterion: "although it preaches, the message it is meant to give has been entirely assimilated into its form."²⁴

21 Cary, "On The Function of the Novelist", New York Times Book Review (October 30, 1959), p. 52. See also Art and Reality, pp. 53, 121, 125.

22 Cary, "On The Function of the Novelist", p. 52.

23 Cary, Art and Reality, p. 115.

24 Ibid., pp. 109, 110.

Nimmo's journey into the political wasteland is a revelation to the reader, and Cary made it so by his objective dramatic presentation of character against the background of historical actuality. The novelist must believe that something matters, or at any rate, his characters must believe that something matters. Something must matter, either as an object to be attained or avoided, and the trilogy leaves no doubt as to what this something is. As a positive realist, Cary confirms in his fiction what he affirms in Art and Reality. The whole trilogy illuminates his "intuition into the moral real" which is the germ of his art:

. . . what makes life worth living are such common things as family love, ordinary goodness and truth, the duty and self-sacrifice which we know every day in the smallest as well as the greatest actions. This the great artist accomplishes by manipulation of the symbol, with all its defects.²⁵

25 Cary, Art and Reality, pp. 172-3.

APPENDIX I

A PASSAGE FROM IREDELL JENKINS' REVIEW¹ OF
JOYCE CARY'S ART AND REALITY

Joyce Cary subtitles his book "Ways of the Creative Process," and he defines his interest as lying "on the one side with what is called the artist's intuition, on the other with his production, or the work of art." But this seemingly straightforward declaration is apt to lead understanding astray unless its exact intended meaning is kept carefully in mind. For the innocent little phrase "the work of art" conceals, through its very brevity and simplicity, a radical ambiguity. It permits different interpretations, and suggests divergent lines of inquiry, as stress is placed upon its second or its fourth word. The natural inclination of common sense toward the latter emphasis has been reinforced by recent critical practice. We tend to think of art as a finished product, internally complete and externally independent, that is simply "there" to be enjoyed and analyzed and evaluated, without necessary reference beyond itself. Indeed, the latter-day esoterics have gone much further than this, and now virtually refuse to deal even with the aesthetic artifact--the poem or the painting--and instead concern themselves only with exegeses of one another's

¹ Iredell Jenkins, "Recent Perspectives on Art", in The Yale Review, XLVIII (Spring, 1959), pp. 420-423. The editors of The Yale Review have kindly given permission for reproduction of Professor Jenkins' article.

explications. "The work of art," having first had autonomy conferred upon it, is then shunted aside as irrelevant.

These reflections of a great practicing artist speak out eloquently against such an interpretation. It is their fundamental thesis that "the essential thing about the work of art is that it is work"; it is their purpose to search out the nature and conditions of this work, the impulse from which it arises and the end it seeks, the difficulties it encounters and the techniques with which these are mastered. In sum, what we have here is a powerful reassertion, against the weight of current dogma, that the work of art is throughout intentional, with a point of departure and a destination that dominate its creation.

Mr. Cary disclaims any close acquaintance with "aesthetic philosophy," and writes exclusively out of his own artistic experience. He neither defines his concepts as they are introduced nor develops them systematically, but leaves their meaning to emerge gradually from the series of concrete cases and contexts to which he applies them. So his book is rather a series of discrete insights and partial explorations than an argument that pretends to either coherence or completeness. But I think that a pattern can be discerned, woven into these episodes.

This pattern is composed of seven terms--or strands--which designate the elements and stages of the creative process: subject matter, intuition, concept, symbol, development, the art-work, and the audience. The first two and the last two of these elements furnish the artist with his materials and his problems; they stand outside "the work of art" proper, and constitute its matrix. Their status for Mr. Cary is not so much that of items to be analyzed as

conditions to be accepted. This comes out clearly in the treatment of intuition, which is said to be characterized by immediacy, directness, the sense of surprised discovery that it conveys, and the urgency with which it impels the artist to bring it to expression so that it may be embodied and communicated. In this rather meager description, it is the latter features that are important to Mr. Cary's thesis. For they affirm his conviction that the meaning and importance of the artist's intuitions lie in this double reference that they make: backward to an external reality that is their source and object, and forward to an audience to whom they are to be communicated after first having been fixed and clarified. On these points he is insistent. "All great art has a meaning beyond itself." The great artist is always persuaded that it is his function "to reveal a truth about some permanent and fundamental reality"; "he is convinced that his idea of things is true and important and he wants to convert others, he wants to change the world." These are articles of faith that are proclaimed, not argued. It is the passage between these poles--from intuition to communication--that constitutes the work of art.

The artist cannot communicate his intuitions directly because they are tentative and fragile, obscure and incomplete. The principal tools that he uses to repair these deficiencies are concepts and symbols. The meaning of these terms, beyond the sense that they bear in common discourse, is developed functionally, not substantially. For it soon becomes clear that what Mr. Cary actually understands by concepts and symbols are simply all of the devices and techniques, both material and formal, through which the artist expresses and embodies the content of his intuitions. These vary with each art; for the

novelist, they include most notably such features as character, plot, situation, scene, dialogue, and imagery. Mr. Cary does not attempt any logical or philosophical analysis of these notions. He accepts them as the elements of the artist's craft, and proceeds to discuss matters with which he is intimately and expertly familiar: the ways in which the artist uses these elements to clarify and convey his original intuitions.

So the largest and most interesting sections of the book consist of the author's reflections upon the possibilities and the problems with which these conceptual and symbolic tools confront the artist. Especially illuminating are the discussions, pointed and reinforced by examples, of the manner in which artists gradually distill from the manifold of their intuitions an idea of life which then becomes a "symbolic system" or "theme"; of the difference between a "theme" that an artist derives from his intuitions as their lived outcome and an "ideology" that he imposes upon them as an alien schema; of the powers and dangers of allegory; of the creative process as the exploration by the artist of the possibilities of his characters, his theme, and his techniques; of the necessity for the writer to continually examine his work in progress both "as artist, to know its possibilities of development" and "as critic, to know if it has the effect he intended."

The observations in this book are much too random and episodic to serve as even a sketch of a theory of artistic creation. But they constitute a rich mine of insights and insistences which, if taken seriously by aestheticians and critics, can give body to contemporary theorizing and save it from the artificiality and remoteness in which it often issues.

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