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The life story as a device of characterization in Joyce Cary's First Trilogy

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THE LIFE STORY AS A DEVICE
OF CHARACTERIZATION IN JOYCE CARY'S
FIRST TRILOGY

by
Camille Botta Shenk

A Thesis
Presented to the Graduate Faculty
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Master of Arts

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This thesis is accepted and approved
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts.

James R. Frakes
Professor in Charge

May 24, 1965
Date

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I have attempted to examine the life story as one of Joyce Cary's devices of characterization in his First Trilogy. The novels that comprise the First Trilogy are Herself Surprised, To Be A Pilgrim, and The Horse's Mouth; each is a written autobiography of one character. Cary chose the technique of first person narration for his three principal characters because he thought it could best express his own views concerning the isolation and loneliness of the individual. I have sought to demonstrate in this paper the way in which Cary creates his characters through the medium of their own written life stories.

My thesis opens with Cary's comments about his original conception of the trilogy and his estimation of its success. These comments include Cary's opinion that the books were not "sufficiently interlocked" to give the "three-dimensional depth" of characterization he had hoped to achieve by the form of trilogy (each speaker was to include the other two in his book). I affirm Cary's opinion of the novels, and have, therefore, treated them in this thesis as individual character studies. I have included a brief discussion of point of view--kinds of narration and classifications of first-person narration--in order that Cary's methods of revealing his characters

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may be more clearly understood.

The bulk of my thesis consists of a discussion of Cary's application of the narrative technique of the life story in order to draw the three speakers. Because of the scope of the trilogy, I have concentrated on the characterization through narrative of one main figure of the trilogy, Sara Monday, speaker of Herself Surprised, with more general comments about the other two figures, Thomas Wilcher (To Be A Pilgrim) and Gulley Jimson (The Horse's Mouth). I have chosen Sara because her relative lack of complexity affords for a first reader of the trilogy a more lucid demonstration of Cary's method.

My final chapter summarizes the successes and failures of the life story in achieving characterization in the novels of First Trilogy. I conclude that Cary brought his characters fully alive, but was not able to make them completely credible.

Some authors are generous enough to share information about the development of their works with their audiences. Joyce Cary, fortunately for us, is one of these; he tells us in the preface to First Trilogy about the original conception of the novels Herself Surprised, To Be A Pilgrim, and The Horse's Mouth:

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. . . .¹

A particular attitude about the isolation which is a necessary correlative to individualism determined Cary's choice of method for telling his stories:

We are alone in our own worlds.

We can sympathize with each other, be fond of each other, but we can never completely understand each other. We are not only different in character and mind, we don't know how far the difference goes.

That's why each of my three chief characters had to write in the first person and reveal his own world in his own style (x).

The revelation of each character by means of his life story shall be the concern of this paper. I shall attempt to demonstrate how Cary utilizes the technique of first-person narration to reveal each speaker of the three novels. According to the original conception,

the main figure of each story was also to tell about the other two so that "not only a richer sense of life in its actual complexity, but a three-dimensional depth of characterization" (x) might be gained. However, Cary had to relinquish this scheme in the main because his characters began to assert their individuality so much as to be out of touch with each other. For example, it soon became evident to Cary that if the unsophisticated cook Sara, narrator of Herself Surprised, were to talk about politics and art (the respective interests of Thomas Wilcher in To Be A Pilgrim and of Gulley Jimson in The Horse's Mouth), she would quickly lose "vividness"; Wilcher's and Jimson's books were already too packed with their own pursuits to discuss each other's (although Cary thought he did capture their conflicting ideas of each other and the contrast between their ideas of life [xi]).

"In such a problem, familiar to every writer, my rule is character first, so I sacrificed the politics, and so far lost the richness of contrast between the books" (xi).² This paper shall be concerned with each of the three individuals, not with the three as a trinity; I shall explore only how each written narrative brings forth from the page its particular author, not how one character views the other. There is some "three-dimensional depth of characterization" among

the books, but it is not so solid as can be explained easily within the limits of this paper,³ for, as Cary realized, the novels are not "sufficiently interlocked" (xiv). Barbara Hardy (1954) adds that the major character of his own book becomes an entirely different figure in the stories of the other two characters.⁴ I shall concentrate, therefore, on the novels as single achievements.

It is first necessary to clarify the term "first-person narration," that technique which Cary found most fitting to dramatize what he wanted to say about the loneliness of personhood. An author necessarily assumes a "point of view" in telling a story; the kind of viewpoint he decides upon involves the identity of the narrator (the author or a mask) and his position in relation to his fictional materials. Prior to the twentieth century, the most common point of view for telling a story was omniscient narration; that is, the speaker (not necessarily the author) who relates the events knows all about the people and action in his story and reveals the pertinent information at will. He may do this by creating a personality for himself and intruding it into the narrative, as Fielding or Thackeray does, or he may remain aloof and without discernible personality as Arnold Bennett does.

A variation from this basic device is the limited,

or oblique, point of view. Here the narrator is usually one of the characters in the story, as is Nick Carroway, who tells about the Great Gatsby. The narrator may also be held responsible for anything he might conceal. As Wayne Booth points out, there may be two kinds of these "dramatized" narrators, the mere observer, such as the "I" of The Egotist, and the narrator-agent who produces some measurable effect on the course of events, such as the speaker of Tristram Shandy.⁵ The effect of the limited point of view is that we know, as Booth says, that the story is mediated,⁶ that the author wants the events to be seen through the eyes of one who cannot see with certainty the motivations of others. The speaker may be limited to realistic vision and inference or he may be privileged to know, temporarily or more permanently, what could not be perceived by ordinary human means. (Ishmael in Moby-Dick, for example, can break through his human limitations when the story requires.)⁷

The three figures of the First Trilogy may be considered as narrator-agents, those who tell the story of their own lives. Sara, Wilcher, and Jimson all speak in the first person, although a character's self-reflection may be handled by third-person vision (the speaker temporarily inhabits the consciousness of a character and reveals his thoughts, even though the form

"He says . . . He thought" is used--as in A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man).⁸ In first-person narration, the author must reveal everything about the character which he wants us to know through the character's own words. The person is reliable, as Booth defines it, when he "speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not." The unreliable narrator is further defined as one whose characteristics change in the course of the work he narrates; "It is most often a matter of what James calls inconstancy; the narrator is mistaken or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him."⁹ In contrast to a reliable narrator like Marlow in Lord Jim, Sara Monday, Thomas Wilcher, and Gulley Jimson are, by their nature as characters telling their own stories, unreliable speakers, because, in analyzing their own personalities, they necessarily fall short of the complete reality which is themselves. And that is precisely Cary's point--he wants to reveal, insofar as the character's words will allow, that person's unconscious life as well as his conscious one.

This type of narration may have the advantage of an ambiguity which expresses the complexity of human personality; on the other hand, the most serious disadvantage of first-person narration is that the reader

is never completely certain whether he is perceiving what the author intended him to perceive about the speaker and that which he relates. Since the reader must provide the final judgment (the character is limited by his egoism), he may well feel unsure.¹⁰ To insure roundness of character, the author may undercut or expand his speaker's view by playing the views of others against it, or he can expose his narrator in the course of his own words.

The final distinction to be made among these techniques of vision, and one most necessary in order to approach the three books, is that between the narrators or observers who are not aware of themselves as writers (Meursault in Camus' The Stranger) or of the fact that they are writing, thinking, speaking, or "reflecting" a literary work, and narrators who are conscious of themselves as writers (Holden Caulfield in Salinger's Catcher in the Rye).¹¹ The fact that Sara, Wilcher, and Jimson are ordering and articulating their thoughts must be taken into account when we analyze their personalities, for much can be concealed by deliberation. Moreover, the written story gives us the added dimension of "emotion recollected in tranquillity."

Each of the three stories in First Trilogy, the first a public confession, the second a personal diary, the third a memoir, presents not only action, but mind

in action--the interplay between what a character says about his life, and the personality which he reveals in interpreting the experience he has had. As Hazard Adams says:

In Cary we have the narrators coming face to face with the forms. They are not merely thinking, they are attempting to think and communicate. Cary's method expresses the creative freedom of his characters insofar as their language will allow it; but it also expresses, insofar as they fail, their isolation. The constant tension expressed by the isolation and creativity of each of these characters provides me with much respect for Cary's achievement.¹²

How does an author make the written life story a manifestation of personality? The first matter of concern would seem to be the reason the character is writing about his life and the kinds of events which happen to him, since these are an indication of the kind of person he is. Secondly, the way he orders these events in his tale provides another clue. Does he make comment (exaggeration, understatement, humor, seriousness) or give a journalistic report? Attitude toward other people and the natural world, and writing style (imagination, tone) are also telling. Finally, apparent inconsistencies, confusion, or defensive rationalizations in the narrative often reveal certain traits of character which the speaker wishes to hide or of which he is not fully aware; as a tentative standard to measure the truth, we have a kind of stage direction--the comments of others about himself which the writer may include, even though

he may not realize the implied criticism.

For example, Sara is making a public confession for the newspapers following an arrest for theft. Since she has had a strong moral upbringing, she thinks that she ought to appear repentant, particularly before the community, for her indiscretions with men and for her petty pilfering; the comedy lies in the fact that Sara undercuts her moralizings and genteelisms by the avidity with which she records her downfall, and by the readiness with which she excuses her sins.

Thomas Wilcher, on the other hand, tries to discover the meaning of his life by setting it before him on the page. The seventy-year-old lawyer, very ill and close to death, tries to perfect himself in these last days. Cary attempts to show through the device of the private journal how honest a man is with himself. The author very subtly allows Wilcher's protest that he is a pilgrim to become a desperate recurring theme which counterpoints the old man's glorification of the past. Cary provides also the additional complexity of Wilcher's suspicion that he is fooling himself but is unable to do anything about it.

Gulley Jimson records in his memoir only that period of his life which he considers to be the height of his artistic production; occasional flashbacks almost always relate to his becoming an artist. Yet he belie

this pride in his art and his dedication to it by the offhand manner with which he talks about painting. The sensitive reader quickly realizes that Gulley is concealing the sorrow of his life by dwelling upon his only source of joy, painting, and that he is masking sincerity toward it behind a facade of flippancy. Gulley emerges from his story as a tragic clown who becomes himself optimistic and gay in order to redeem the cruel indifference of the world.

Joyce Cary seems to have adopted an interesting technique for creating character. How much can a writer reveal about the essence of a person who is trying to interpret himself? Every word, every turn of phrase, recorded gesture, in addition to the content and organization of the content, draws in the lines of characterization. Moreover, the device of a story written with a particular audience in mind may be a subtle way of approaching the interplay of the conscious and unconscious minds. I should like to examine how Cary creates a distinct personality by means of a character's telling his own story. This paper shall be limited to a rather general study of Thomas Wilcher and Gulley Jimson and a detailed analysis of Sara Monday. Of the three, I have chosen Sara because her relative lack of complexity affords for a first reader of the trilogy a more lucid demonstration of Cary's method.

Let us look first at To Be A Pilgrim. Sara's story may be a means of earning some cash, Gulley's a tongue-in-cheek memoir, but Thomas Wilcher's journal has only a moral value. The old lawyer, dying at Tolbrook, the house where he was born, tries to prepare himself for heaven, and to release himself from the bonds to his beloved home and lands by rationalizing them away. We are more aware of his desperate need to write than he is.¹³ As Hazard Adams so well puts it,

[Cary] can present Wilcher in a particular way, which symbolizes his central concerns, for Wilcher's compositional problem is an analogue of his whole emotional problem: to strike a balance between the present and his attachment to the past.

.
In order to express this tension between past and present in Wilcher's mind, Cary chose the device of the journal, because in it we can see Wilcher's finished, most complete attempt to meet his problem rationally while at the same time overpowering emotional complications shine through the effort.¹⁴

The lawyer's journal reveals that he, like Sara, wants to believe what he can't feel, for his protests that the way of salvation lies in looking ahead are repeated too often, and they conflict with his desire to be still. He knows, rationally, that one can only live in the moment; yet the moment is insignificant for him in contrast to the past of his memory: his niece Ann is a dull child of her "brilliant" father, Edward, and Tol-

brook, in its unkempt condition, is a sad relic of its former loveliness.

Meaning for Wilcher lies only in the people of "power," his sister, Lucy, his brothers, Edward and Bill, and his sister-in-law, Amy, who are all now dead. His diary reveals the true place of Wilcher's heart, for most entries slip back to years gone, and he can no longer separate past from present. Robert Bloom notes that:

The fact that Wilcher's advocacy of a non-traditional confrontation of the present takes the trouble to trace its own tradition is a token of the irreparable cleavage in him. The whole weight and structure of the book exalts the Victorian experience; the contrasts almost always imply a regrettable falling off in the present. Yet the past is found wanting as well.¹⁵

It is the closeness of death which brings the realization to Wilcher that he had never seen the people he now loves when they had moved before his eyes:

Familiar shapes are changed before my eyes.
And seeing these strange patterns, these
immense shadows reaching to my feet, I say,
'I never knew this place before, I have
lived like a mole in a run, like a cat in
a kitchen.' (TBAP, 339)

Such tragic knowledge is only compounded, however, by the tragedy we see in Wilcher at the moment he is writing, for he is only partially aware that in returning to a life which exists now only in memory, he is bound more than ever to an illusion. We find concrete example here of Caryl's intention to expose his char-

acters' souls beneath the disguise of their self-reflections; Wilcher asserts a truth about himself which is only partial. I agree with Kenneth Hamilton that Wilcher is a dreamer behind a conventional façade of reason, but I disagree that the old man finally affirms the meaning of time on his deathbed.¹⁶ Because Wilcher admits in the present that he sought so for a dream as a young man that he failed to see that which he now considers to be real, so we see the parallel with his immediate inability to cope with the moment. The old man does affirm the meaning of time, but with unconvincing words: "What I do care [about heaven] so long as I lie in Tolbrook churchyard?" (341). So also does he affirm a new spirit of courage which will imbue him with a gay acceptance of the world, a carefree heart, and self-confidence; he believes that he shall overcome the timidity and over-solemn self-consciousness of his younger years. Yet the desperate tone of his diary, along with his admitted fears and suspicions of his family, and the guarded quality of his revelations, seems to show that Wilcher is still afraid of life. The moral scruples of his old age point backwards more than they indicate a growing spiritual perfection (though the latter motive is not totally lacking). They demonstrate another facet of Wilcher's inability to deal with the moment: he worries because he knows he must assume responsibility; yet he

hates responsibility. It places a strain upon affection, and in the past as well as the present, Wilcher has wanted to be dependent, no matter how opposed his conscience. His diary is only proof that he is still trying to avoid commitment by multiplying his doubts. The evocation of the past in the present shows a continuum of personality which has a tragic meaning; Wilcher regrets his failure to stop his sister from joining the Benjamite sect which ultimately destroyed her, but he has made seventeen wills during the past few years because he is torn between obligation and self-concern, and he resents worrying about the pregnant Ann, her unhappy marriage, and her husband's care of the house at Tolbrook.

Although Wilcher's emotions have always been powerful, they have also always been tempered severely by an anxiety that the world which is suitable to him at the time, at least by custom, will crash about his ears. Thus his longing for the intensity of life which he thinks he missed in the past is only a playful longing, for he reveals, unconsciously, in recounting past incidents, that he did not really want it. He was afraid that the leader of the Benjamites, Pug Brown, who later became Lucy's husband, would convert him, and he gives his niece Ann the impression that he did not like Brown very much, although he hastens to assert that he had

"real greatness." He had never succeeded in becoming a foreign missionary (although he cannot really say why) because the "responsibility" for Tolbrook is put upon him when his father dies, but Edward implies (as Wilcher reports) that Thomas never wanted to leave the house. He cannot say why, either, he treated his family unjustly; we alone realize, as Wilcher does not very much, that he became attached to them only when he could dream about them.

Wilcher understands somewhat his failings in these situations and attributes them to his timidity and lack of "faith," but what he is not conscious of is that he must force himself, and has always had to force himself, to be dynamic, as at the very moment he tries to make himself into a pilgrim. He has been "moved by every voice of power" (70) because in passion he has envisaged direction; and he can find for himself no strong motivation for action in the face of time's destructiveness. One of the most beautiful and tragic entries in the journal sadly explains the person Thomas Wilcher:

The blue shadows had stretched across the fields, and were rising up the front of the house until nothing was left except the golden chimney pots against a sky as dark as a lawyer's blue bag. 'It is like a Christmas card,' I thought, 'except that it is real and I am seeing it, and it is far more beautiful than any picture. Because it is real, and so it must die. It is dying so fast that I can hardly bear to look at it.' (195)

This intuition, possibly only for a highly sensitive per-

son, paralyzes Wilcher and sets him apart from Lucy and Edward and Bill, who acted without thought. In his fear before the ultimatum of death, he clings in a dream to those who appeared to have purpose, even though he knows their aim was often a feeble one (Lucy had joined the Benjamites as an adventure, Edward was a cynical failure, Bill irresponsible). Now he clings for life to Sara, justifying his dependence by a language of religion-- Sara's strength and independence are her "faith"; she is his salvation.

Wilcher transforms the dogma of Christianity because it deserts him in his terror at leaving the familiar things of life; since he wants not heaven but earth, he makes the earth sacred. His affirmation of traditional Christianity sounds hollow even to his own ears, and at times the devil seems to have more power than God for him, although he prays steadily and chides Ann for her nihilistic attitude: "Why do you do the devil's work, Ann--trying to make me believe that there is nothing in the world but selfishness and self-seeking?" (100). Ann answers that such a world might be rather restful, a reply which demoralizes him: "An abominable remark that tunnels like some devil's miner into the very ground of hope and love, to blow all up" (100). He analyzes himself as a "dead frog" animated only by the power of others, the withdrawing of which leaves him

once more as a "preserved mummy" (77). Out of desperation, he is forced to make a distinction between Christianity and what he calls "faith"--the confidence in oneself to live--because those who have what he calls faith are not demonstrably Christian. Finally, Sara becomes his last hope of "salvation" because she is self-sufficient and he can depend upon her for sustenance; quite sure that her essential motivation is not Christian, Wilcher nevertheless makes of Sara the true pilgrim who is bound to nothing but her own soul. His sophisticated reasoning is a powerful reminder that Wilcher is not at all prepared for heaven but is grasping indiscriminately at whatever threads will hold him for a while to the world.

The technique of the private journal has functioned well in defining Thomas Wilcher for us. The very form of the journal (with its imperceptible transitions from actuality to dream) embodying the flux of past and present in Wilcher's mind, the well-controlled but sometimes lyrical style of writing, the overserious and forceably disguised tone of desperation, reveal a man who is unable to adjust his passion for perfection to the vagaries of time and the world. That Wilcher has never told anyone of the experiences he has recorded, that he is unmarried and, admittedly, rather stingy and fussy, are further indirect signs that indicate his particular

personality.

Moreover, Cary is also attempting to show, through the device of the written life story, how what a man thinks and says about his life, either to himself or to others, is part of his personality. Wilcher pores over his life, scrupulously scraping it to discover himself somewhere within. He seems to dwell on the hurtful embarrassing experiences or to suppress them altogether (the question of his marriage to his mistress Julie, for example). His prose strains against the order of rationality which he imposes, revealing an intense romantic who can accept neither the boredom of time nor the prospect of nothingness. Wilcher's journal creates for us a character who is real and complex; Cary has handled an indirect method of characterization with quite a bit of subtlety.

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Gulley Jimson, like Sara, is writing his memoir for the public. Lying in a hospital bed paralyzed by a stroke, he dictates his story to his "honorary secretary" who will publish it as part of The Life and Works of Gulley Jimson. Unlike Sara, though, Jimson exercises more rational control over what he writes so as not to reveal too much about himself. The narrator of the third story is the eternal artist; Gulley Jimson we can never fully know. Why do we realize there is a distinction? Because we suspect that the Jimson who tells the story is too clever to reveal himself, particularly since the self which he creates is much larger than life.

Gulley Jimson hasn't told the truth since he was a "kid" (he tells us); he believes that to talk is to tell a lot of lies, and "what makes it worse, not even meaning to" (THM, 79), and he hates to tell people about himself because "they try to put you in their box" (35). Moreover, every incident in which he confronts the lovers of art displays Jimson's delight in playing the artist while giggling behind the mask at the intense aesthetes (143). He knows, too, that it is easier to tell people what they want to hear than what is true, for they can't understand that which is outside their own frame of reference. Thus Gulley can fabricate as typical a picture of the artist as his biographer, Mr.

Alabaster, "a cricket" so serious that he is almost blue, can wish for. Jimson has told us how he has turned "the Professor" upside down without that reverent scholar suspecting it in the least:

The Professor smiled quickly like one who says, 'the eccentricities of genius. But really it's a pity.' Then he became very serious again, . . . and said, 'Mr. Jimson, I have been planning for some time, subject to your approval of course, and I hope, assistance, a definitive biography, and a descriptive and appreciative catalogue of your art, with reproductions of principal works.' Reproductions of principal works was a good one. If I hadn't been in company, I should have lain down on the pavement and kicked my legs in the air. Was he real? (126)

He makes Mr. Alabaster promise a deluxe edition of at least four hundred pages with lace-edged reproductions.

So Gulley's imagination would be caught by a project such as an artist's autobiography, especially since his ingenuity has little to work upon in the hospital. Again, the story would be the last laugh on critics. Therefore, it is most likely that Jimson is creating an artist who is basically himself, but enlarged for dramatic and comic purposes. And so Gulley Jimson's story tells us that he lives only for his art, that he begs, steals, and murders (at least Sara) in order to paint. His style of narration is clever, witty, vulgar, and racy. He debunks everything, including his work when he is asked to explain it.

Why does Gulley conceal personal feelings? In addition to fabricating the artist which is basically him-

self, Gulley provides other suggestions which seem deliberately intended (by Cary) to show us that Gulley is a naked soul who has learnt to cover himself with an offhand manner. We are told by Jimson, for instance, that he had tried for years to protect his sister, though she did not want to be protected, from a husband who ultimately destroyed her. He says several times that if he allows the sufferings of others to affect him he would never paint; he cries at the deaths of "Hickie" (Mr. Hickson, his patron) and Sara, and cries for himself when he can't paint or when in joy he finds a wall for an epic work. It soon becomes clear to us that Jimson assumes a pose in telling his story as much to deflect ridicule away from his most intimate feelings as to spin a fanciful tale. We know that his father was ruined, economically and psychologically, by the changing trends in art, and that Gulley sorrows for him, although he brushes the sentiment away with typical flippancy. He tries to discourage the young boy Nosy from pursuing a career as a painter by exaggerating the difficulties of creation and underplaying the achievement; he praises the virtues of middle-class mediocrity with a sarcasm that often reveals his resentment against the indifference and ill will of that class. This is what he tells Nosy about his son, Tommy, whom he also tried to discourage from art:

'You needn't be afraid, Daddy,' said Tom, 'I haven't any taste for art.' And, thank God, he did really hate the whole racket. Too polite to say so, but he thought me a dirty old faker, and his stepmother a slummock who would rather flop around in a wrapper listening to Wag-ner or Bee-thoven than wash her face or darn his socks. Tom went to a good school and it cured him of art before he was fifteen. And see where he is now. A gentleman and a scholar. Who doesn't know an illustration from a picture. And can't tell "God Save the King" from "Sleepers Awake." (35)

Gulley, if we can judge by his discussions of aesthetics and philosophy, is highly intelligent and aware of the meaning of reality. From the words of Blake and from his own insight into experience, he feels that the isolation of the individual is a necessary result or by-product of what he calls the perfect freedom of man, the human heritage of the Fall:

' . . . love doesn't grow on the trees like apples in Eden--it's something you have to make. And you must use your imagination to make it too, just like anything else. It's all work, work. The curse of Adam. But if he doesn't work, he doesn't get anything, even love. He just tumbles about in hell and bashes himself and burns himself and stabs himself. The fallen man--nobody's going to look after him. The poor bastard is free--a free and responsible citizen. The Fall into freedom.' (165)

He displays a courageous nature in his attempt to apply this philosophy to his own maltreatment by all those people who, by exercising their pursuit of freedom, crush his: "'I'm going to get a kick in the stomach that would paralyze an elephant. Not that it would

worry me. No, I've had some. . . . I'm an old hoss!" (105). He fights self-pity: "'Who are you to make all this fuss about yourself? Things are moving, that's all'" (45). The repetition of the sentiment encouraging himself not to take things too personally gives us more evidence of his sensitivity. We hear his real voice when he takes us into his confidence and complains about the artist's difficulty in explaining himself to non-artists (here to two clergymen):

And I couldn't get out a word. It was most embarrassing. There was the poor chap doing his best, and I had to pretend to be stone deaf. Come, I said to myself, say something, anything. Something they can understand. That's all they want. Something about the weather. Something to knock a hole in this awful situation and let down the pressure. Come, I said, you're not one of those asses who takes himself seriously.

. . . .
 And making a strong manly effort, I opened my mouth, smiled my charming smile from ear to ear. . . . (38)

Gulley manages to adjust somewhat his sensitive nature to the unrefined world by taking on an attitude of not caring. As Hazard Adams says, "Both the comedy and the tragedy of Gulley's situation as artist are heightened by Cary's allowing Gulley to dictate his memoir, for throughout the novel we find Gulley trying publicly to keep to his own ideals."¹⁷

Unfortunately, the man and his public image do not always seem to exist in the same person. I believe that

Cary goes overboard in creating the caricature of the artist, Jimson's coy and happy-go-lucky painter, so that the profound utterances of the speaker, the truths straight from the horse's mouth, are subject to ambiguity. They seem to be meant seriously, but jar with Gulley's actual confrontation with the world. For example, Gulley's rejection of home and family for the vagabond life of art, the death of his mistress Rozzie beneath a bus, his own accidental murder of Sara, do not receive much more notice than the color of the sky or the walrus face of a passerby. Yet this man philosophizes about the nature of human freedom, of love, of art. The reader remains unsatisfied by an endless stream of clever similes which brushes by a real confrontation with experience that we would expect a man of Jimson's awareness to make. Although the contradiction appears to be a deliberate one on Cary's part (The Horse's Mouth is Gulley's way of appearing before the world), the result is not completely believable. As Robert Bloom says, the mixture of comic and serious "is very much a part of [Cary's] encompassing vision of human life--but the question is whether the exalted is not finally and irreparably impaired as a result."¹⁸

Therefore I cannot agree with Hamilton when he says that Gulley is one of the few artists whose genius we can really believe in.¹⁹ Although I don't think, as

James Hall does, that The Horse's Mouth is often dull, I do agree that it is harder to reread than most comic novels.²⁰ Sidney Monas, too, notes elements of caricature which are not fitting (the ghost of Sara, the crew which topples Gulley's wall as ten thousand angels);²¹ and Frederick Karl feels that Gulley, as well as the other two main characters of the trilogy, lacks the depth to confront moral issues.²² Thus the flow of images which seem at first to be witty and as original as the images of the metaphysical poets soon begins to tire and Gulley begins to seem like an animated-cartoon figure.

Yet let us see to what degree Cary succeeds. How might he show that his narrator is the man of vision that he claims to be, who sees the physical world as the veil of the eternal? Have him paint an epic, The Raising of Lazarus, on a full-sized wall, complete with a "glass-green Lazarus up the middle stiff as an ice man; cactus and spike grass all round, laurel green, a lot of yellow ochre feet in the top corner and bald heads in the bottom triangle. . ." (187). How give an artist his own unique flavor? Pamela Johnson shows us that the opening paragraph of The Horse's Mouth (part of which I shall quote) presents everything that we need to know about Gulley:

I was walking by the Thames. Half-past morning

on an autumn day. Sun in a mist. Like an orange in a fried fish shop. All bright below. Low tide, dusty water and a crooked bar of straw, chicken-boxes, dirt and oil from mud to mud. Like a viper swimming in skim milk. The old serpent, symbol of nature and love. (1)

Miss Johnson points out that the concern with form, the particular quality of imagination and speech rhythms, the harsh and coarse image of the "viper swimming in skim-milk" all bring alive the eccentric, volatile, artist Gulley Jimson. The tone of the passage is "incurably optimistic."²³ Gulley cannot contain the jump of life within him, and the mythic artist Jimson which he creates is as much an outlet for his overflowing creative energy as a conventional means of accosting the world with his intensity.

He is excited about the wonder of the world, and we can see that his imagination ranges experience from the striking originality of his analogies ("Like an orange in a fried fish shop"). He draws himself and other people with the flair of the caricaturist; most men are to his eye walruses or fish, and preachers in particular are dog collars. Here he tries to show how he feels when the clergy thinks it ought to support religious art:

As if I had been a happy worm, creeping all soft and oily through the grass, imagining the blades to be great forest trees, and every little pebble a mountain overcome; and taking the glow of self-satisfaction from his own tail for the glory of the Lord shining on his path; when all at once a herd of bullocks comes

trampling along, snorting tropical epochs and shitting continents. . . .(37).

He describes his friend Plantie's eyes in a state of excitement as "running out of their holes and then running back again, like children at the nursery door, just before the party" (59). The dome of St. Paul's is the "everlasting muffin dish," and his descriptions of nature are as colorful as they are racy:

Clouds all in blue and blue-and-soot. Blue-black smoke drifting up like smoky candles, and a blue sky as blue as blue spectacles with long pieces of sooty cobweb floating high up. Stars coming through like needle-points; green-blue, and neon blue; and the river pouring quietly along, as bright as ink out of a bottle.(49).

Gulley is also as earthy as he is etheric, and this quality often combines with an ability to fast-talk that provides very funny results (here he is arguing with a saleswoman over a painting):

She asked me twenty pounds for a Constable, two trees, four clouds, and a little piece of dog-shit in the foreground. The usual junk shop Constable, value four-and-six. Or with two bits of dog-shit, and a spot of genuine synthetic cobalt blue between the two bottom clouds, five-and-six. With frame, string, and patent hook ready to hang, five-and-ninepence.(104).

His appreciation of Sara is not merely aesthetic:

And she sat down again in the old way; looking at the chair first, like a cat at the rug, and then giving it a pat, and then pulling up her skirts and then taking her seat. Taking her seat is the word. And then disposing her skirts, and pushing out her front and arranging her arms, and throwing up her top chin, and assuming a handsome expression. . . . I'd seen

her do the whole act a thousand times and wanted to give her a rap. Just to bring to her attention the existence of the forgotten man. A slap on the nap. And I pulled my chair up nearer. Took up a strategic position on the left flank.(27).

The image we receive of the speaker is of a little man whose legs fly off in all directions and who likes to sit in the laps of big women. He is ugly, stuffs his clothes and shoes with newspaper to keep out the damp, but never feels sorry for himself, because he is living and because he loves to paint. Gay and exuberant, he jumps into the air when an idea hits him in the street despite the shower of orange peels which the neighborhood children fling at him. What crimes he doesn't commit in order to get money for painting he indulges in for joy or to test his cleverness. At the opening of his story, Gulley has just been released from jail for haunting his patron, Mr. Hickson, on the phone; very soon (and many times thereafter), he drops into another telephone box:

Put a pencil between my teeth, and asked for Mr. Hickson. The young butler answered in his voice like a capon's crow, 'Who shall I say?'
 'The President of the Royal Academy.'

 'Is that you, Jimson?'
 'Certainly not,' I said, 'I wouldn't touch the bastard with a dung fork.' (7)

Racing away from telephone boxes with the police at his heels is one of Gulley's principal forms of entertainment, for he can thus tantalize the representatives of his two chief irritants, the bourgeoisie and bureaucracy,

as well as keep himself creatively occupied. Desperate and frustrated because the world will not allow him the freedom to catch "glimpses of the eternal world," he forces himself to do the next best thing--to transform the bonds of the physical world into the rainbow of the imagination. "They say a chap just out of prison runs into the nearest cover; into some dark little room, like a rabbit put up by a stoat. The sky feels too big for him. But I liked it. I swam in it. I couldn't take my eyes off the clouds, the water, the mud" (1).

Cary manages the narrative in such a way that Guller's shrug toward the world is an indication that he cares very much about the feelings of others toward him, and that his whimsical and frenzied story is the escape of his imagination from the strictures of the ordinary.

iv

Cary found the technique of the written life story suitable to explore the "tension between the official and the human versions"²⁴ of Sara Monday's life. Sara tells her own story, according to Cary's plan, so that she may have a chance to defend a kind of existence which society would call, at the least, questionable-- a life of fornication, adultery, theft, perjury. For if the sin be flagrant, the sinner is not simply so; he has motives which are rarely either good or evil but more often hopelessly mixed. Cary shows through the dramatization of Sara, as of the two other speakers of the trilogy, that the complex personality of the individual can never be measured by the norm of conduct which a society necessarily upholds. A knowledge of motives so twists our immediate judgment of actions that we can neither condemn nor approbate Sara's deeds. We can only lend willing ears to the long confession of her downfall, or admire her gusto in going about life.

Sara tells us her motives, explicit and implicit, deliberate and unconscious, when she relates the story of her past. All are integrated in the person Sara, along with her interpretation of them and her deliberation in revealing them to a public audience. The story

that results is the complex pattern of a number of inter-related forces. One principle of action in the pattern, which is not unlike that of Moll Flanders' life, is Sara's sincere belief in the ten commandments; interwoven with this conviction, however, is a strong instinct for pleasure. Seemingly, the two modes of living are opposed, but Sara's problem is that she cannot consider seriously her afternoon tea, parties, clothes, and "poor little mannies" as paths to everlasting fire, although stern childhood lessons in religion and the fear of hell certainly compel her to try. Thus, another part of the design which is Sara's total personality is her effort to juggle both ways of life at the same time--please Sara, please God--and if the most ingenious sophistry is the result, Sara can always hide behind the facade of doubt, the excuse of not knowing herself well enough to choose the right path of action. Her defensive rationalizations are not all conscious either, but when she is aware of her self-excuses, they become only the more prolific and ingenious, to the delight of the reader.

Finally, what Sara cannot see of herself, as we can, is that hedonism is more fitting as a way of life than orthodox Christianity ever could be; no matter how she may try to desire church service, her huge feathered hat and bright attention-getting Sunday clothes give

her away. Her very zest for life, as we shall see, approaches a spirituality that is Sara's own confrontation with reality, even though, as a well-brought up Christian, she mistrusts or thinks she ought to mistrust unorthodox feelings. In her conflict lie the humor and charm of the story.

As Sara opens her tale, for example, we are impressed with a tone of moral gravity which does not quite conceal the kind of relish usually designated for past operations and illnesses; "The judge, when he sent me to prison, said that I had behaved like a woman without any moral sense" (HS,1). Her next sentence is a bit more chatty and intimate: "'I noticed,' he said, and the paper printed it all, 'that several times during the gravest revelations of her own frauds and ingratitude, Mrs. Monday smiled.' . . . When he spoke in this way I was upset and wanted to tell him that I had never been against religion, far from it. . ." (1). Cary has given us the first clue to Sara's personality, and all that she tells us subsequently is subject to the knowledge that she savors the memory of that which the judge calls a "'laxity and contempt for all religious principle and social obligation which threatens to undermine the whole fabric of civilization.'" (1).

Thus Sara never suspects (or lets it be known that she suspects) that the story of her moral downfall

ostensibly recorded for the purpose that "some who read this book may take warning and ask themselves before it is too late what they really are and why they behave as they do" (2) is requested for the newspapers by a "kind gentleman" as a spicy confession. Sara loves to strut before interested eyes, as we shall see in ample evidence throughout her book, and if she can ease her conscience in the process, all the better. "'Know thyself,' the chaplain says, and it is true that I never knew myself till now'" (2). Sara is proclaiming self-knowledge, a state of soul which we, the witnesses, always tend to regard with suspicion, and which jars particularly with her smiles from the witness chair.

As proof of her sharpened conscience, Sara recalls a previous self-revelation which had come to nothing and which, of course, is no longer the pattern of her moral life. She remembers that she had caught a reflection of herself in the mirror of a "grand" Paris shop, and been stunned at her "new hat as big as an Easter cake": "Look at that fat, common trollop of a girl with a snub nose and the shiny cheeks, jumping out of her skin to be in a Paris hat" (3). She tells us that she realized then that she had not seen herself with the world's eye, but had overpraised her nose, her "wonderful" brown eyes, and every "bit" at one time or another. "So I had made a belle of myself when I was nothing, as they

used to say at home, but maiden meat" (3). But the "upshot" of the affair (Sara's characteristic conclusion) was that she couldn't resist the hat, consoling herself with the advice ". . . if people looked at me I thought: If I am a body then it can't be helped, for I can't help myself" (3).

We have been introduced, then, to Sara's pattern of self-indulgence, defensive rationalization, and protest of weakness. But Sara says she has changed, and it is up to us to discover whether the present is merely a repetition of the past. Thus Cary leads us into Sara's reflections about her past life which has been a series of "surprises." She still is surprised at having been able to capture a gentleman, Matt Monday, for a husband when she was only a cook, until it occurs to her (or she allows herself to reveal) that perhaps she hadn't discouraged him too much by running away from him. Again, looking back on those days, Sara still sees herself as a "sober maiden" although she admits dropping her moral handbook, Pillars of the House, to meet the milkman, who was not only a "good-looking boy, and a charmer" but a philanderer who had "misused" several girls as well. Although Sara speaks from a vantage point far removed from the early days of her maidenhood and thinks that she is able to analyze the past, she cannot yet tell why she acted as she did,

as this memory of her pre-marital adventure with Matt reveals:

All that evening I was surprised at myself. Yet it seemed to me that I could still draw back, and that it was all a kind of play. . . . I was not flighty then, I was a sobersides. If I had been flighty, I would not have been so surprised at myself, as I was for many a day, until I had not time to think of anything. (10)

Each time Sara becomes involved with a man, the excuses become more profuse and less believable, as even she sometimes admits in the retelling. The fact, though, that she in each succeeding incident and in the present often dismisses moral judgment causes us to believe that Sara, even in her old age, has always been a man-catcher. For example, a little later in the novel after Sara has gotten over her surprise in succumbing to Matt, she begins to flutter her eyelashes at Mr. Hickson, a business associate of Matt's; she feels sorry for him because he is lonely, she assures us, but she also hopes to advance Matt in the world (which she also tells us) and to enjoy the admiration (she lets this motive pass). She flirts with him at the church bazaar (" . . . I'll own I put that in my eye which, among us village girls, had meant: 'I have a soft place for you'" [207]) and he had responded in an expected manner as the other small-town ladies stared. Hickson comes to tea then every day, whether Matt is at home or not, and Sara knows very well what he has

in mind: "he would know how to fiddle all tunes which women dance to" (24). The comic results, therefore, of Sara's protests of innocence when Hickson responds a little more aggressively are rich: ". . . he began admiring my frock, which was a Russian blouse all ruffled down the front, lifting the ruffles and pretending to see how they were sewn to the bodice, but really to touch me. I did not think I liked it. . ." (26). But we can already predict what her next reaction and response will be, having become familiar with Sara's conflicts between ladylike conduct and baser urges: ". . . and yet I thought, what harm if he enjoys it, poor little man. I owe a great deal to him, I thought, for he has got for me much I could never have got for myself" (26). Her next justification brings down the curtain: ". . . it was no great crime in Mr. Hickson, to be a man and like me as a woman. Or if it was so, then Providence must answer for our shapes" (26). We, Sara's audience, finally take her subsequent affairs with Gulley Jimson and Thomas Wilcher with several grains of salt.

Robert Bloom says that many of Sara's elaborate schemes to protect herself from the judging eyes of the world are, ironically, unnecessary because her urges "consist for the most part in seeing to it that people whom she can construe as family are decently provided for, and that her own days are spent among things that

are clean, fit, sparkling, and tidy."²⁵ Such an interpretation is only partly true, though, because Sara is also a manipulator of people, desiring to insure the continuance of an easy life and, as James Hall rightly points out, longing for excitement beneath the facade that she wants only security and children.²⁶ Sara does not fall only because she has found that placating men often brings her luxury--marriage into the home of a gentleman, favors from a millionaire, a safe tenure in a household. Sara's love of ease may be instinctive, but her methods for gaining and holding on to luxury are well calculated, a bit of worldly wisdom which jars with her professed ethics.

Sara's professed moral standards are not really so opposed to her shrewdness as they may seem. Virtue develops character and character gets a husband, Sara was instructed by her mother: "For if you want to get a husband . . . you'll have to do it on your temper and your character. Your face and your shape will take you no farther than the workhouse" (8). Religion is joined in Sara's mind with her training as a kitchenmaid in a "good religious house" and her certificate for sewing along with her prize in Scripture at school. The code of morality which she professes is as much tied up with the bourgeois ideals of the way a maiden ought to conduct herself in order to find a proper husband as with

the cleanliness, good housekeeping, and good sense which Sara upholds.

Thus while Sara is sincere in desiring to uphold the commandments she was brought up on, these tenets focus on the middleclass virtues of decorum, chastity, self-discipline, and longsuffering. Sara, as a result of her good home-training, associates these virtues with husband-seeking, and so utilizes them to attract a "good catch." But after she has captured her man, Sara finds these virtues a slight burden, not too difficult to cast off. She has learned well the lessons of independence and thrift, though, as well as (it must be added to Sara's advantage) gained an insight into her tendency to overindulge in the physical pleasures of the world.

Heavenly virtues do not preoccupy Sara so much as the quest for a guarantee of comfort, and the continuance of the pleasures of good food, a cozy home, and pretty clothes. Her philosophy of life is that "There's not so much happiness in the world that anyone can afford to waste it" (61). Her pursuit of enjoyment, springing from a generous heart, is yet often selfish. But an understanding of charity is outside of Sara's scope; she loves her Matt but plagues him with bills, loves Gulley Jimson because he is an imaginative lover but leaves him for a steadier income than an artist's. Sara tells us that she did not care greatly for Matt

("a poor thing, with his long neck and long nose, his bulgy eyes and his bald head" [9]) when she went to work in his mother's house and did not even like him very much when he proposed marriage. But after marriage she falls in love with him (as she does ultimately with every man, no matter how virile or weak, handsome or ugly). Matt provides her, too, with the means of making their house at Bradnall a center of social activity. Sara arranges for teas and pageants and plays, party after party, dancing all night, "three nights running." She looks back nostalgically on the world which was all gaiety, when she was in the "fury" of her life, although she hastens to assure her readers that she spent most of the time in the nursery. And she says she came to love her Matt more and more because he was so sweet and good. But when her husband is dying, Gulley is already at the kitchen door, "as stupid as any man in that state, quite hangdog with love" (85). If Sara protests more than the Wife of Bath living up her fifth husband, the sentiments of each are not too dissimilar: "I could not drive the man away as long as he behaved himself. He was so pleased to come" (80). Matt slips away, while Sara's story is filled with Jimson and how she tried to get him out of the house, the result being a subsequent liaison.

But if Cary takes care to reveal the selfish side

of Sara's nature, he allows her ample space to display the positive face of this trait--which is a full commitment to life. Gulley Jimson draws out Sara's exuberance and zest to its fullest expression; as she writes her story, she recalls fondly that she loved him best of all her men. Jimson finds a way to Sara's heart through her domestic instincts; a hole in his coat and loose trouser buttons gain him more attention than words of love (as Sara is anxious to show her widow's weeds to the community): "Now when I found myself sewing his trousers and he in his sleeves, I thought: This is not fit for a new widow, and I looked severely enough" (92). She protests against a marriage so soon after Matt's death but leaves the possibility open: "the end of it was I gave way to him enough to say I might make inquiries [as to Jimson's whereabouts when she comes to town] if I had time, and I took the address. And so I made time. . . ." (94). Jimson manages to capture Sara in a furious series of scenes which are the funniest in the book--Sara won't have him; he leaves in anger; she goes after, trailing a myriad of excuses (a forgotten scarf, his painting). They become engaged in Brighton, but Sara puts a chair against the door until the wedding night (for Jimson keeps trying to get into her bed):

. . . he came to my room at one or two o'clock and tried to get into my bed. I was surprised at his impudence and told him to get out quick.

So he apologized and said he had only come to say good night. The next night he was half in before I waked up, and I had to jump out and take him by the shoulders and fairly put him through the door. (108)

But the desire for peace and the hot afternoon/sun on the beach combine to give Sara justification for losing her control of the situation and "God forgive me, it was only when I came to myself, cooling in the shadow, that I asked what I had done. Then, indeed, I felt the forebodings of my misery, and punishment, and I was weighed down all the evening" (110). But of course, once having given in, Sara cannot bar the door any more, and the climax of the situation is that she becomes his mistress instead of his wife. Gulley confesses that he cannot be married because his other wives are still alive, but Sara can weather even adultery now that she has gotten her man and enough glasses of brandy and beer so that "the thing got to look more ordinary" (112).

When Gulley rebels against domesticity--being clean, finding a job, painting for the public (Sara's attitude toward Gulley's lack of acclaim by the art world is "What good will it do him to be famous when he's dead?" [124]-- and leaves Sara, she too moves on, although her heart is broken for a while. After the scare of a probation order for writing bad checks, she resolves to turn a new leaf, congratulating herself for her luck at finding a position at Tolbrook since she had lost her "char-

acter." She cannot tell why she did "so foolish a thing" as giving bad checks, thinking that the "friendly" bank manager in Queensport would let her owe a little, but admits now that she did not care what she did because she wanted to get away from the house where Gulley had stayed. Brimming with the admiration of the police sergeant, who had told her that she had the complexion of a baby, Sara struts off to the conquest of another householder, Thomas Wilcher.

Sara's vitality is as much her saving grace as the source of her conflicts with morality; it sidesteps a conventional code of ethics because Sara can only live, given her personality, by instinctive energy, not by a set of rules formulated by another. Cary felt that for Sara to express her own thoughts in her own words, the logic of her private world might be made believable. So, although Sara uses the excuse that she does not know herself in order to enjoy the pleasures she suspects might be forbidden if she investigated further, the dictates of preachers which demand suppression of her natural instincts genuinely confuse her:

Yet I could not make out even then how bad I had been, or how guilty. . . . And people use words so that you can never be sure what they mean. When the preachers used to speak of adulteries, it would turn out after all, in the thirdly or fourthly, that they were thinking of silk stockings, or women's bicycles, or mixed bathing. . . (70).

She wishes that her heart were like one of the new glass

ovens so that she could see what was really there, whether she was the "worst of women, or just the common run of ladies in rich houses, with friends, who are guilty indeed of worldly living, but not of deadly sin" (70). It is hard for Sara to believe that her attraction to men, her vanity, her love of parties are really sinful. She delights in the squish of silk against her stays, in the brightest colors that will attract the most notice, in her afternoon tea, in the feel of the hot sun against her flesh. She is alive to beauty at every moment and in all places, whether the sky at sunset or a gleaming kitchen. So she finds it hard to believe that the most beautiful things in life, and those which give her the most intense feelings, are vain and wrong.

Her narrative is filled with "I love"--Matt's house, Matt, parties, driving, Gulley, Wilcher's house at Tolbrook, Wilcher, his town house at Craven Gardens. Her natural gusto is as evident from her selection of friends (Rozzie and Gulley) as from her choice of flamboyant clothes and large hats. Rozzie comes to visit Sara shortly after she becomes Mrs. Monday, and, although Rozzie wears her most respectable dress, the one she uses for "customers' funerals, old ale color," she cannot quite hide her bar room manners in a gentleman's house:

But though Rozzie tried to hold herself in, she couldn't do it. She told Matt at dinner not to kick her under the table. 'If you have enough for Sara, it's as much as your life's worth,' and she said to me: 'Don't be jealous, Sara-- I wouldn't have him for a back-scratcher, in spite of his nose.' (14)

Matt turns purple, but the "upshot" of the situation is that Rozzie finally attracts the attention of the whole town, to Matt's mortification; she comes out in a pink silk dress with green sash and a green hat with ostrich feathers to the waist and Sara buys the same kind of clothes.

The bright scene of Sara (a widow of six weeks), Gulley, and Rozzie guzzling beer in a temperance hotel is another comic highlight of the book:

. . . all of us in a row on an old horsehair sofa with its springs burst. First it was when the springs made noises under us that Rozzie made remarks, and do what I would, she set me off. Then Gulley was such a queer sight, the little spindle, between us two big women, bulging out over him, that it made us laugh to see him. (98)

Though Sara protests offense at the vulgarity of Gulley and Rozzie, not a man passes by Sara's eyes without calling forth a comment upon his physical attributes: Mr. Hickson's "handsome chin"; Gulley's grin, which makes up for the loss of his tooth; Wilcher's long, thin red lips, which, Sara says, are evidence of his hot blood. Her second sense is always directed toward the charms of men, even when her mind is on something else; for instance, she complains about Rozzie's inertia

in setting up a boardinghouse: "she didn't really want a place . . . but when her brother-in-law, who was a sergeant major, and one of the finest men I ever saw, came down to see us . . ." (101).

Sara not only enjoys life but, because she is so aware of its beauties and joys, savors it. Knowing very well when she is in a good spot, she marvels at the fact that a mere cook can marry the master of the house, that she can light the garden with paper lanterns for a big party and dance all night, that she can regain a position as housekeeper with her own garden after she has lost her "character." But her joys with Jimson surpass even these comforts, as Sara recalls tenderly the days of her "honeymoon":

Jimson and I caught up every moment, every bright day, every laughing face that passed, and every calm night, and rejoiced in it to each other and put it away in our minds. (119)

Sara possesses a wisdom about life which surpasses the understanding of those who divide living into good and evil. She converts everything about her into her own particular system of joy, as she rises for early service on Sunday mornings in order to enjoy all the more the bacon and eggs which follow. Her system of joy is that of a "first-class" cook who carries on an affectionate dialogue with every schnitzel and soufflé prepared for a man. As she grows older, Sara comes to believe that

the role of housekeeper is not only important but a source of peace not to be found in the backbiting and envy of the drawing room. Her hymn of celebration to the kitchen is as charming as it is delicately humorous:

How many women, I thought, can sit before a fire like this one among such a noble property of books and pots and cups and plates and knives and forks and whisks and pestles and colanders, bottles and kegs and jars? Why, I thought, the mustard pots alone would make a regiment, and a kind of awe came on me at all these many things put into my sole charge. Well, I thought, if you tied a knot of all the roads and railways and pipes and wires in the world it would come to a kitchen in the middle of it. (183-4)

Sara need never look too far outside herself to find happiness, even if she worries, a little, that true happiness might be found only in Sunday service. Only we can see that the orthodox approach to spirituality is as unsuitable to Sara's personality as are decorous clothes and a staid manner; Sara is directly spiritual because she is conscious of the joy of being: "There's not so much happiness in the world that anyone can afford to waste it" (61). As Walter Allen says, "If [Sara] cannot square her behaviour with her sincerely held religious beliefs it is because they cannot in the nature of things be squared. In her own eyes she is a sinner; but to the reader her life is a hymn of praise to creation and the Creator."²⁷ And when

Sara's joy is 'severely rationed, she heads in a new direction--usually toward another man.

When Gulley deserts her in a rage, having cut open her head against a bedpost because she nagged him to sell his paintings, Sara leaves the house at Ancombe too, because it is no longer a home with anything "reasonable to do . . . cooking nor shopping; and why should I mend for a man that wasn't there?" (163). Man means home to Sara; so, curling her hair over the cut, she packs up and registers for a new cook's position. As she has told us earlier in her story, she "never had Rozzie's art not to care for anything and to keep [her-self] going on, like a horse, without any kind of happiness or hope or proper object in life" (142). Sara's warm heart expresses itself in a hearty benevolence to all those who don't endanger her immediate security; she loves to take care of everybody, if Sara is taken care of first. For example, she returns to Gulley and his new mistress after he has left Sara, scrubbing the house and caring for the pregnant girl as if she were her own daughter, but she also loves the company, the chance of getting out, and posing for Gulley again as well. Sara is always apt to make the best of a situation, whether it is alleviating Matt's embarrassment in bed or playing confessor to the outpourings of Mr. Wilcher's scruples (although she takes small naps during

the recital). She never condemns the roughness of children, but understands that Bobby, Wilcher's nephew, is trying to show affection in his boy's way, or that Gulley's son, Tommy, can love only the gift of chocolate bars as yet. Of course, it is not an accident (on Cary's part) that we hear little of Sara's four young daughters in the early part of her narrative but much about parties and Mr. Hickson.

So Sara is both generous and indifferent as the situation suits her. We know very little, really, from Sara, about Wilcher's illness or Gulley's paintings, and she does not have much to say about being dismissed from Tolbrook because she wants to divert interest from the exact nature of her thefts. Moreover, she does not reveal the total extent of her illegal possessions since she has not apparently done so for the judge, but masks all behind the gusto of her intention to "keep upon a steady line" (273). Prompted by the chaplain, Sara agrees enthusiastically that the seed of sin was in her "from the time when [she] ran about wild in a pigtail and flirted with three boys at the same time" and that she had always been "all in a moment, like a dog or a cat" (273). But "a good cook will always find work, even without a character, and can get a new character in twelve months, and better herself, which God helping me, I shall do, and keep a more watchful eye, next time, on

my flesh, now I know it better" (275). So Sara's story comes to an end, trailing a small echo of self-justification.

Sara has come to exist fullbodied before us though she has tried only to write a confession demonstrating that experience has taught her moral wisdom. Cary has managed to produce the live image of a large voluptuous woman, not very beautiful, who more than compensates for lack of beauty by a delight in her body which is certainly communicated to others; who chatters happily away about beautiful days, tea-time, and masculine charms; who tries to relate her ethical teachings to her sexual avidity. All the devices which Cary uses in enabling Sara to tell her story--the chronological recall; the concentration on vivid events, such as parties, seductions, new kitchens, while intervening years pass by with little comment; the simple writing style which is vividly direct--suit tale to teller admirably. Sara's education is suitable for a cook, not a literary stylist. She tells us that her daughters were embarrassed when she talked "broad": "Only the week before, when Belle [her daughter] had a crowd of her friends, talking about literature, I had said that the old books were the best for the new ones had no religion. But I spoke broad and said 'bestest' and 'they'm'" (84).

Her flamboyance and vivacity are caught as much by

the tone of Sara's narrative as by its content, a tone of zest which is assertive and unembarrassed, as this cataloguing of her assets demonstrates:

For thank God, I had my health and my strength, all my teeth, which, though I say it, were the wonder of every dentist . . . and not a gray hair. No one would have taken me for forty-six, nor yet thirty-six. For if I was plagued by my heavy body, yet I had this for a comeback, that my fat kept my skin tight and firm.(167)

The worse genteelisms expose her middle-class upbringing as much as a shrewd calling of a spade a spade paradoxically does. For instance, she calls leaving her door unlocked at night when Jimson is around laying herself "open to a villainy," but this is how she interprets neighborly love: "why should I poison a gift with looking beyond it, especially in the country where, God knows, a bad thought about a neighbor is as good as grease in your own soup" (153).

Finally, even though Sara's language is simple, her powers of articulation display an imagination which is creative if untutored. Since what she knows best are the homemaking arts, she apprehends the natural world in these terms: "the elms rich like cucumbers halfway through August" (171); a hole in Jimson's coat "like a baby crying to be taken up" (91); a soufflé in the oven "that needed watching like a young child on its first legs" (78). Cary overdoes the similes in Herself Surprised as much as in Jimson's book, ultimately making

tiresome a clever trick. But the technique works superbly well at times in defining Sara:

But what a delight to go bowling along in the old Argyll and look once more on the fields, especially about harvest time when Edith was born, and the corn as ripe brown as a duck's egg and the barley as white as a new-washed hairbrush. And three larks at a time trilling and tweeching as if the sun had got into their brains and made them glorious. (27).

Sara's most permanent possession in the world is a kitchen; yet she needs nothing else but the joy of the earth.

▼

How successful, then, may we consider Cary's use of the life story written in the first person for embodying character in First Trilogy? The severe limitations of self-knowledge which first-person narrative imposes do dramatize, as Cary hoped, the isolation of the individual. Sara is a woman, concerned with the internal relations of home and family, and because she is profoundly different psychologically from the men in her life, she cannot understand their need to act in the world--why Gulley must endanger the security of their home in order to manifest his ideas, why Wilcher fusses so much about the responsibilities of his position. Wilcher displays by the account of his life that senility is a blanket term which has no regard for the individual, who is never "normal." Perhaps unstable from the viewpoints of some people, each of whom considers another a little less normal, Wilcher acts in a way peculiar to his personality and his experiences. When he explains his situation, the peculiar pattern of variables which motivates him in a certain way, then we begin to realize that personality analysis is not so simple. Gulley Jimson pierces through so many of the superficialities of others that he is in danger of losing his sanity trying to live in such a world. As a consequence, he must detach himself from

people and, in his own highly aware sphere, is as self-absorbed as Sara or Wilcher. Though he realizes that every other man is the same as he, he imposes his will upon others by violence when he cannot assert his own needs in society.

Cary was most able not only to demonstrate the logic of his three characters' way of acting through first-person narration, but he found this technique suitable for making his characters sympathetic. Because we cannot depend on any other knowledge about the narrators, we must listen--and then we hear their gaiety or sadness, determination or confusion. It is the emotion behind the explanation that touches us. The power of first-person narration can lie in the fact that the value of the novel or story depends entirely on the credibility and vividness of the speaker. Cary has given a great deal of life to his three narrators.

He has tried also to gain sympathy for his characters, by means of the life story, through the dramatized conflict of public image and secret passions. For instance, Sara may appear to be a crude and calculating professional mistress, but her sheer delight in masculine attention gives a completely different slant to the picture; and her reasons for making herself available (to have a home, someone to take care of, and some luxuries) are understandable enough. Wilcher ap-

pears to be a fussy old-maid type, but given his insights into the tragedy of transient human life, who can not understand his paralysis? And Jimson, having been defeated enough by a harsh world, learns finally to brush off conventional attitudes. Cary tries to show that deep within the individual personality exists a unity which expresses itself in ways only apparently contradictory. But here he gets into trouble.

The unity of personal traits within an individual is revealed so clearly, in order to bring him forth from the page, that the character becomes at times nothing but a cliché. Cary does not want to mislead his readers, as he states very firmly in the introduction to First Trilogy, by making ambiguous revelations about character (although the hearts of the characters are finally ambiguous), but he falls into the other extreme of making too definitive statements about the personalities of his narrators, although indirectly, through their own words.

For example, since Cary apparently means Sara to be a hedonist with a Christian conscience, he makes almost all of her reported experiences and her reactions of like kind--temptation, downfall with profuse excuses, spirited but weak resolution to do better. The author wants us to know, too, that Sara is so much a housekeeper that she sees the world as a kitchen; consequently, her

every description of the non-domestic world is accomplished by analogy to the domestic. We have no doubt about how to interpret Sara (first-person narration, as I have shown in the opening chapter, can be responsible for author and reader's coming to different conclusions about the personality of a character), but she becomes linear in the process, and the narrative becomes satiating after a few readings. She reacts to far too many situations with surprise, and in the same degree; after a while, the joke becomes a little worn.

The problem is not exactly one of lack of complexity in characterization, for certainly Thomas Wilcher, as well as Sara and Gulley, has a great deal of imagination and insight. What they think about is profound (Sara's awareness of the beauty of flesh, Wilcher's life-long meditation on the meaning of time, Gulley's interpretation of the fall of man), but the way in which they act is theatrical if not often like slapstick. Perhaps Cary found that larger-than-life characterization was necessary to make vivid his speakers, since everything the reader knows about them depends on what they tell us and what we can glean from their gestures. Wilcher, at the time he is writing, is less one-dimensional than the other two characters, but his past, which takes up three-fourths of his book, is not so real as Wilcher's seriousness seems to

demand. In short, the three characters, acting pretty much according to one principle--Sara, weak flesh; Wilcher, timidity; Jimson, defensive tenderness--do not display the varied manifestations which such dominant motivating forces would seem to take in living persons. Cary did not succeed totally in revealing character through the technique of the first-person life story.

Yet he created his three characters as alive and hopping, if not totally real; such an accomplishment for first-person narration is a considerable one. The color and verve and tenderness of the characters--Sara in all her glory flirting outrageously with a man, Wilcher sneaking away from his family to court Sara like a young lover, Jimson playing the aesthete with Mr. Alabaster--remain with the reader even if he does not wish to return to their worlds.

Footnotes

Chapter I

¹New York, 1958, p. ix. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited in my text. Each book of the trilogy shall be designated as such: (HS), (TBAP), (THM).

². . . I was aiming at a high concentration of character. In this I did achieve something of my intention. My three characters did gain some three-dimensional depth from their contrasting views of themselves and each other" (xiii).

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 "The three different worlds were also distinct. My failure was in the contrast or overlap of these worlds. They were not sufficiently interlocked to give the richness and depth of actuality that I had hoped for (xiv).

³Hazard Adams in "Joyce Cary's Three Speakers," Modern Fiction Studies, V (1959), 108-120 has some important comments to make about the relationships among the three novels.

⁴"Form in Joyce Cary's Novels," Essays in Criticism, IV, 184-185.

⁵The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961), p. 153.

⁶P. 152.

⁷Booth, p. 160.

⁸ Cary talks about his own attitude toward first-person narration in "The Way a Novel Gets Written," Harper's, CC (February 1950), 92.

⁹ Booth, pp. 157-159.

¹⁰ See Robert Bloom, The Indeterminate World. A Study of the Novels of Joyce Cary (Philadelphia, 1962) on Cary's embodiment of "intellectual irresolution" in fiction.

¹¹ Booth, p. 155.

¹² "Joyce Cary's Swimming Swan," American Scholar, XXIX (1960), 238.

Chapter II

¹³Adams, MFS, 110.

¹⁴Adams, MFS, 109-110.

¹⁵Bloom, p. 93.

¹⁶Kenneth Hamilton, "Boon or Thorn? Joyce Cary and Samuel Beckett on Human Life," Dalhousie Review, XXXVIII (Winter 1959), 436.

Chapter III

¹⁷MFS, 113.

¹⁸P. 103.

¹⁹Dalhousie Review, 434.

²⁰"Directed Restlessness: Joyce Cary," The Tragic Comedians: Seven Modern British Novelists (Bloomington, 1963), p. 97.

²¹"What to do with a Drunken Sailor," Hudson Review, III (Autumn 1950), 471.

²²"Joyce Cary: The Moralist as Novelist," The Contemporary English Novel (New York, 1962), pp. 138, 145.

²³"Three Novelists and the Drawing of Character: C. P. Snow, Joyce Cary, and Ivy Compton-Burnett," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, N.S. III (1950), 91.

Chapter IV

²⁴Andrew Wright, Joyce Cary. A Preface to His Novels (London, 1958), p. 112.

²⁵Bloom, p. 88.

²⁶The Tragic Comedians, p. 86.

²⁷Walter Allen, Joyce Cary in Writers and Their Work, No. 41 (London, 1953), p. 20.

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Vita

I was born in New York City on October 10, 1940, to Sebastian and Rose Botta. I attended Saint Kevin Elementary School, Flushing, and the high schools of Bishop McDonnell Memorial, Brooklyn, and Mary Louis Academy, Jamaica, all in New York. I took my B. A. degree, magna cum laude, in English at Marymount Manhattan College in June, 1962, where I was a member of the Curian Honor Society and recipient of the senior medal in English. I was also awarded an honorable mention for a Woodrow Wilson fellowship. In September, 1962, I came to Lehigh University on a three-year National Defense Education Act Fellowship leading to the Ph. D. degree in English. During the years spent at Lehigh, not only have I taken a master's degree and completed my course work for the doctorate, but I became the wife of my classmate, Franklin Shenk, on December 21, 1963.