

# *The Free World of Joyce Cary*

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*A novelist who rose above the dreary errors of our age.*

WHEN JOYCE CARY LAY DYING in the winter of 1957, after some years of suffering courageously borne, it seemed for a moment that the conscience of the literary world was stirred. Reporters interviewed him, he was photographed and discussed, the progress of his affliction was carefully followed in the press. There seemed to be an uneasy feeling that a light was going out which had burned more purely and brightly than the bloodshot eyes of our time could bear.

And then he died, and after the obituaries were written the makers of literary opinion continued to write about lesser artists, and there was no sign to indicate that anyone understood that one of the greatest creators in the history of the novel had finished his work.

When an artist is appraised at less than his true worth, he may fairly be said to be neglected. Cary had a devoted audience in Britain, and to a lesser extent in America, despite his American publisher's propensity for fast remaindering. His books have usually been favorably reviewed. Yet it is one of the most curious and damning facts about the contemporary literary en-

vironment that Joyce Cary has, somehow, never been regarded as really important by those to whom graduate students and ladies' literary clubs alike apply for their guides to edifying fiction. The great novelists of the age are variously designated, by critical consensus, as Faulkner, Ford, Forster, Gide, Greene, Hemingway, Joyce, Kafka, Lawrence, Mann, Maugham, Wolfe and Woolf. Lately, for reasons which are difficult to determine, Camus has been added to this list; and one may add or substitute two or three others. Cary is seldom included in this baffling pantheon. He is, rather, fobbed off with the honorific appellation, "distinguished," the Kentucky colonelcy of artistic rankings. Even when he is praised it is almost always by including him in a list of "five or six more gifted contemporary British novelists," usually toasting him together with such shorter snorts as Henry Green, Angus Wilson, Elizabeth Bowen, Evelyn Waugh and the like; and clearly suggesting a peerage incommensurate with the patent letters available for any discriminating reader's inspection. It would seem that almost any corn-pone Dostoevsky babbling into his cotton gin can command profound critical appreciations by the score; and the same is true of any Englishman who gets religion but manages to leave his typewriter in the bedroom, and any Gaul divided

between Notre Dame and Moscow. But Joyce Cary receives no such attention. And I would suggest that it is not apparent even to Cary's admirers wherein his greatness lies. The reason for this huddles deep within the fashionable philosophies of our time. For Joyce Cary has brought back the idea of freedom to the modern novel. And freedom has become a strange idea.

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Cary's biography is in many ways a clue to the nature and spirit of his art. He was born of vigorous stock in a time of confidence, in the golden afternoon of a great tradition, both imperial and familial. He was true to his heritage.

Joyce Cary was born on December 7, 1888 in Northern Ireland of an Anglo-Irish family resident for 300 years in County Donegal. The family was prolific and multi-branched, and the warm and eventful clan life, the relatives, friends and servants of all kinds who surrounded him from infancy were fortunate and enriching influences.

He was sent to Clifton College, an English public school. When he left Clifton he spent three years studying art at Edinburgh and Paris. He was an ardent Impressionist, and reproductions of his drawings reveal a surprising talent. More than this, however, it is certain that his training in art played a germinal part in the development of his art as a writer. It gave him an eye for the shapes and colors of the world, and it gave him much more.

After three years of study he evidently realized his limitations and, also, he must have felt the need for wider intellectual horizons. He went to Oxford. There he behaved as many gifted men do at universities. He studied little, but read and talked much.

Avid for experience, he left Oxford for the Balkan War of 1912-13. Returning home after adventurous experiences with the Montenegrins, he joined Sir Horace Plunkett's Cooperative Society in Ireland. Soon resigning, he joined the Nigerian

Service. "In Africa I passed some of my happiest years as magistrate, road builder, a general Pooh Bah of State." During World War I he was attached to the West African Frontier Force, fought in the Cameroons, was wounded at the Battle of Mora Mountain, and contracted several ailments, the effects of which finally invalidated him home after the war.

In 1916 he had married Miss Gertrude Ogilvie and in 1920 he settled down with his wife and young sons at Oxford to devote himself to writing. He wrote incessantly for more than a decade, accumulating vast piles of manuscripts, but "found, to my surprise, that as soon as I had finished a book, or even half finished it, I could not bear it. The truth was, as I see now, that I was still an imitative writer. I had a genuine desire to create, in writing, but I had not yet found an idea of life satisfying to myself." He did not publish his first novel, *Aissa Saved*, until 1932, when he was already forty-four years old. This is surely one of the most dedicated apprenticeships in the history of letters.

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What filters the clear and fluent art of Joyce Cary from the stagnant carp-hatchery of current literature is this: Of all those who may be styled the major novelists of this century he is the only one whose dominant theme is neither tragedy, evil, decadence, guilt, anxiety, neurosis, nor despair. His many-volumed subject is human freedom. He sees the world as a place of change, of adventure and surprise. He sees life as full of infinite possibilities of experience. He embraces joy as readily as sorrow. He rejects the illusory simplifications—the dungeon view of pessimism and the skyscraper stare of optimism. He sees life whole—which is the shortest way of saying that what he begins with is man rather than society, character rather than manners, personality rather than events.

This is counter to the spirit of the modern novel and, indeed, of modern society and philosophy themselves. And it is the

real reason why Joyce Cary's ultimate reputation is still in abeyance.

Cary, as he himself repeatedly declared, is a novelist of character. For such a novelist society is the "given"; it is the world; it is life, itself, which he rejoices in. For him society has no real existence apart from its members. Opposed to this kind of novelist is the novelist of manners, whose characters are illustrations to an underlying text, whose characters are not pets but rather laboratory specimens to be dissected in the quest for general laws. The novelist of character sees a man in the context of human society, but always first as a man. Not so for the novelist of manners, for whom society is not an invigorating atmosphere but a fog to be seen through, a problem rather than a fact. The novelist of character burns to create life, whatever theories he may be persuaded to mouth in innocent leisure. The novelist of manners burns to tell some "truth" about the world. These are different passions with different issues.

The fanatic revival of interest in Henry James, the preoccupation in literary circles with the "symbolism" of Melville and Faulkner, the Kafka-cult and the Joycean affliction, the psychoanalytical dogma in which so much of modern literature is couched, the varieties of red-and-grey flannel social significance—these all form a pattern. They are all manifestations of the same world-outlook: the view, consciously held or unconsciously acted on, that the individual has a more profound meaning or symbolism or explanation or genesis, that he is the effect and appearance of more permanent and meaningful underlying phenomena and cannot help, therefore, being less meaningful, interesting, and valuable in himself.

Contemporary Marxism, Institutionalism, Naturalism, Environmentalism — whatever label may be attached to one or another seizure of this prevalent dogma—all proclaim to the novelist that the individual may, and must, be described in terms of his social derivation. And thus the social

order, rather than the individual man, has come to be the subject of our fiction.

It is the immense distinction of Joyce Cary that he has reintroduced the idea of freedom to the modern novel. As a thinker Cary sees the nature and aspirations of men and the shape of human history under the form of freedom. The entire body of his work is a vast definition and elaboration of this idea.

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"Freedom" is not a political term, as Cary uses it. He is not talking about liberty. "Freedom" is descriptive. It is the label for the internal reality of man's life, whatever his condition. It is the *fact of humanity*, which is the fact of conscious individuality, conscious will and aspiration, however thwarted or muted by physical circumstance. It is that drive of self which is the very definition of human consciousness. It is that inward autonomous realm where man knows his own needs and yearnings, and ponders their realization. Freedom, above all, is *human power*. It is the capacity for action. It is actualized by knowledge and means. It is a fact beyond good and evil. It is the creative principle itself. It is the first consequence of awareness. Man thinks, therefore he is free.

And, being the essential fact in human action, it is also a guide to conduct. And it is also a metaphysical view concerning the nature of the world. But, more than anything else, it is an all-embracing vision of life. The nature of the world, as Cary describes it, is "a reality shot through and through with creative freedom and imagination." It cannot be explained or categorized save within the limits of agreed definition.

Whoever holds this view of life finds the universe an exciting place. He abandons dogmatism and is chary of categories. And when he writes about human lives he begins with their precious differences.

In Cary's scheme the process of freedom is really that ceaseless and infinitely complicated interaction of human wills at all

levels and in all the affairs of life which forms the process of government itself. And in his most unified achievement in the novel, his last trilogy (*Prisoner of Grace, Except The Lord, Not Honour More*), he has depicted this eternal process in terms of a fictional synthesis of supreme power and scope. Taken as a whole this is undoubtedly the greatest of political novels.

In each book of the trilogy one person speaks. The cumulative effect is a vista of three intertwined lives from three vastly different perspectives. And each stands for one great area of the process of government among men.

Chester Nimmo—farm boy, agitator, evangelist, politician, cabinet minister, Liberal leader—speaks for the view of life embodied in British radical politics and deeply rooted in Protestant evangelism. This view is dynamic, Utopian, believing in the perfectibility of man and in his progress on earth. It is the view of social progressivism, involving, necessarily, communal action. It is at heart utilitarian, hence it employs the techniques of mass pressure and, because it is directed at materially expressed goals, of quantitative compromise.

Jim Latter, officer and gentleman, Chester Nimmo's moral antagonist, is the embodiment of an equally tenacious view, the bulldog stare of dogged conservatism. This view is cautious, believing in the wisdom of tradition and experience, aghast at the voracious appetite of the mob and the strong stomachs of its leaders, knowing that men are imperfect, that plans go astray that power corrupts, believing that humane values and amenities are hardly won and easily lost, understanding that satisfactions are transient and judging, therefore, that progress is largely delusive, believing, finally, that order is a fundamental good and not a legitimization of current injustice.

The one is the view of public morality, the other of private morality. The one is visionary in its ideals, yet practical (because it must work in the world) in its

methods. The other is practical in its knowledge of human nature, yet uncompromising in principle. And between them there is no common ground of understanding or definition.

The middle ground between them, of course, is the world of the family, which is both private and several-souled. And Nina Latter, first Chester Nimmo's wife and then Jim's, represents the politics of female government. For Cary understands that "government" is a verb, the relationship between different human wills at all levels of life, a pervasive human activity existing wherever bodies or souls embrace, barter, or war. And it is this fullest image of government which we see complexly and brilliantly evoked in the character 'depiction of Nina in contrast with the group dynamics in which Chester Nimmo is immersed and the lonely private morality of Jim Latter.

And it may be remarked that Cary's treatment of Nina, so lucid, sane, and penetrating an appraisal, told with such insight and clarity of nuance, is possible only because of his wonderful way with women in general. But it is not a special, inexplicable empathy which allows him to write with such miraculous conviction in the first person of a woman's changeable yet changeless mind. It is simply that he treats women as people rather than as objective images of the male sex drive. For Cary woman is a sex rather than Sex, and by granting fullness to her character as well as to her bosom, by refraining from seeing her simply as a function—wife, mother, mistress, daughter—by seeing her rather as a person who may happen to be or need to be one or all of these things and many other things as well, Cary has given his women an amplitude and vitality unmatched in modern fiction.

Indeed, there is not another as glittering a cotillion of vivid and abundantly created women in all of literature. Taking equal place in this array with the subtly and complexly evoked Nina Latter, who spoke for herself in *Prisoner of Grace*, is the

heroine of his first magnificent trilogy, (*Herself Surprised, To Be A Pilgrim, The Horse's Mouth*), Sara Monday, that great, robust, large-hearted mother-image, immortal cook, wife, mistress, model, and force of life who will stir her cup eternally by the select tea-table of literature in company with Becky Sharp, Natasha, Mrs. Proudie, and very few other perfect ladies. And Nina and Sara are only the most monumental of Cary's women. There are a dozen others, any one of whom is a triumph of characterization sufficient to insure the reputation of another writer: Tabitha Baskett and Nancy Bonser in *A Fearful Joy*; Rose, Ella, and Amanda Venn in *The Moonlight*; the women, both white and black, who throng his early novels of Africa; the women of *Castle Corner* and the girls of that miraculous idyll of his own boyhood, *A House Of Children*; and, indeed, a host of women memorably created with the stays and dish-rags, joys and griefs, petticoats, powder, and aching feet of life.

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It is particularly accurate to call Cary's vision of human power a *vision*—in the precise and ocular meaning of the term. It is a *seeing*, as a painter sees the world. For Cary's early training in art directly conditioned not only the coloration of his radiant and startlingly accurate prose, a verbal spectrum whose specific and sustained imagery adapts itself unerringly and miraculously to the very spirit and structure of the mind of the narrating character, but it conditioned his very concept of the novel itself.

In the aftermath of World War I the novel—in fumbling and afflicted hands, many of us are coming to think—had lost its Victorian innocence and Edwardian vigor and, in common with society itself, had lost its form and sought another. Lenin and Mussolini in the world—Joyce and Kafka in the word. The question now before every serious novelist was: What, really, *is* a novel?

For Joyce Cary the answer, I think, came in its form almost unconsciously, like pigment carried unaware beneath the nails of his writing hand, from his studies in painting. As the art of the age revolted against Victorian academic realism in whose very sentimentality might be discerned the misty oncoming of future subjectivism, art became less the objective *copy* of things and more the illustration of the *feeling* things gave. From this atmosphere of heightened subjectivity, a nervous romanticism permeating European culture, arose the great Impressionist School of painting, in which the artist was a lyric poet and his painting an *experience* rather than a *scene*. And Impressionism captured the allegiance of young Joyce Cary.

Having from early youth this view of art-organized experience, when he came to the novel he must have come to it with a preconceived esthetic. The novel, then, was simply a different medium, as the woodcut or sculpture is different from painting, for the recording, in its own plastic terms, of a subjective vision of the world. And at the heart of Cary's idea of the novel, thus, is the necessity of a consistent point of view. "For it is only from one point of view," he says, "that experience, like landscape, can be ranged in any kind of order."

A comprehensive point of view—a set of ideas—such as Cary is referring to is nothing less and never more than a *philosophy*. Perhaps he got the term, "point of view," from Henry James, but in Cary's usage it means something altogether different. And it is upon this insight, this liberating awareness that art must be based upon an ordered vision of reality, that Cary's posthumously published, richly discursive, profoundly suggestive inquiry, *Art and Reality*, ultimately depends.

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When Cary came to the novel some writers answered the question of the novel in terms of its function or mission. The realer realists and the social-signifiers thought that by redirecting this they were finding

new forms. But these were only new uses for old ones. Others found the answer in technique. For some the technical problem was directed at linguistic innovations, as in Stein and Hemingway. And for some, like Joyce and Woolf, the problem was essentially an epistemological one, a question of inherent structure and limitations resident, actually, in the writer himself.

But Cary was the only one who went beyond the epistemological problem—how one knows reality, and what knowledge can be trusted, which once it gets into a novelist's curly head is more damaging than toothache and tumors—to the metaphysical problem, not the problem of whether reality can be *known*, but how it is constituted, and how it may be re-created. The one problem is as answerable as an inquiry into the square root of a sandstorm; but the other, at least, can be considered in discourse.

Cary avoided the knowledge-problem. It was as a painter that he looked at the world. And visual art is a metaphysical inquiry. However they may abstract from the world of sense, painters, whose bread is light and color and form, do not doubt the taste of reality; their concern is its nature and rendition.

If in this era of ideology a man must have a philosophy to write fiction, it may well be that Joyce Cary will, in the long run, prove to be a major influence on the shape and substance of novels to come. For Cary's philosophy of freedom substantiates and fortifies that instinct for individual character which is the bottom land of the novel.

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Yet, Cary's metaphysical notions did involve him in real technical difficulties and actually caused the abandonment of his first truly major literary project. This was a massive work planned to encompass in four volumes the history of the Corner family, an Anglo-Irish family like Cary's own, through half a century, and to show also the cycle of history during that time.

He published only volume one, *Castle Corner*, though most of the rest was finished and exists in manuscript.

What he wanted to do was to expound his general ideas about life, not in the form of obtrusive intervention into his story but in the shape of individual personal histories which would evoke from the reader, as an independent conclusion, the philosophical viewpoint of the author. But he found that the more richly he individualized specific characters, alas, the less they were able to serve as models for the general. So, finding the enterprise too complexly elusive, he turned to *Mister Johnson* as an exercise in simplicity.

That this book should come when it did reveals much about the internal development of Cary's art. The headlong tale of a young African clerk caught between cultures is told in the present tense throughout, communicating a sense of immediacy and spontaneity impossible through conventional narration. Nor would first-personal narration have been credible for Johnson, the essence of unreflective action. *Mister Johnson* signalizes the inception of Cary's search for new techniques and marks, also, a logical intermediate step between the technical failure (as he saw it) of *Castle Corner* and, comparatively, the tremendous success of the trilogy commencing with *Herself Surprised*.

The technique of *Mister Johnson* was inappropriate to the complicated and interwoven stories of Sara Monday and the two most important men in her life—little Guley Jimson, artist extraordinary, cock-a-doodle-doo incarnate, Sara's lover, trial, passion, broken nose, downfall, and delight, the essence of the private man at war with authority; and lawyer Thomas Wilcher, her elderly bachelor employer and nervous lover, whose heart was in the values of tradition and their embodiment in his ancestral estate, who was grave with the knowledge of responsibility and the hope of heaven. Cary still had, he felt more than ever, a point of view to get across. But he believed that a work of art is an emotional

experience for the reader and, hence, limited as a means of intellectual argument. The problem could be resolved in only one way—first personal narration in which the whole action is seen through a point of view and is, at the same time, the illustration of that view. In other words, from the dreary didacticism of a Pope or Milton he turned to the dramatic soliloquy of Shakespeare, which is glorious because in its very expression of ideas it is most the revelation of individual character. And the author, behind the billowing arras of talk, is at a second remove.

And the nature of the means Cary chose solved another problem which must have occupied him. It is the question of the truth about any particular person.

An individual, of course, is two things—as others see him (his effect on the world) and as he sees himself (the world's effect on him). A man both *is* and *does*, and he, himself, is only one, though the closest, of his own observers. This sense of the complexity involved in telling about any person must have bothered Cary. He could no longer use the traditional method of the omniscient observer. Yet, in going to first-personal narration he would be abandoning his own keen awareness of the gorgeous ramifications of human character—the many-viewed sculpture of three-dimensional beings. So, quite naturally and beautifully, he attempted a most remarkable feat, the depiction of the same events and people through the eyes of each of the people most vitally concerned, each representing not only a different personality but a different way of life and outlook. Each being true, and together making a panorama of truth. The technique has been used before, but never this way and never for these compelling reasons. And never so brilliantly.

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Joyce Cary inhabits a moral universe. It is derived from what is fundamentally an evangelical Protestant view of life. This is to say that it finally depends on or as-

serts the necessity of faith. This is evident from the first in the chronology of Cary's fiction, and never more evident than at the last, in his final, imperfectly completed novel, *The Captive and the Free*, which deals directly with faith and religion in the modern world.

For, if the world is a place of infinite variety, if life is an irrepressible and adventurous surge through sudden terrors and blinding joys, a pilgrimage to distant goals through unknown marvels, if life is full of accident and surprise, then nothing metaphysically certain can be known. This is surely the deepest intuition of British empiricism, standing aghast at the multiplicity and richness of experience and resolutely, therefore, apprehensive of saying more about things than what meets the doubting and the doubtful eye. The nominalism of William of Occam is the abiding tradition of British thought, reflected in British state policy as well as in British science, religion, and in the concrete and matchless imagery of British verse. Dwellers on a foggy isle, men who ply the unknown and hazardous seas, live in a world more uncertain than the plains of Normandy or the valley of the Rhine. Men so imbued may live by proven custom, made lawful by common experience, but they tend to doubt authority which purports to certain knowledge of truth. And when the mind provides no sure direction it is rescued by faith, but faith which is more enthusiasm than doctrine, faith that life has a goal, that the world is planned, whatever the evidence to the contrary. Such a faith, being esthetic rather than doctrinal, is the more unshakable because the less arguable.

A work of art, even when it is an act of defiance, cannot fail to be an act of faith—if not in a known or unknown God at least in the possibility and worth of order in the universe, even if it is a tragic order. And a career such as Cary's—serene and silent apprenticeship over so many years, self-imposed discipline unique in modern letters, then magnificent volume after volume each launched like an arrow

against the prevailing winds—was in itself a proof of resolute and passionate conviction. If the elucidation of freedom is Cary's major theme, surely the nature of allegiance, the forms which faith—religious, social, artistic, and even animal—takes with shifting generations and different individuals, the things men believe in, faith in practice—surely this is his subject matter.

We have seen what Cary means by freedom. And faith is the individual expression of this freedom, the individual ideals and attitudes to which a man or woman is born or educated or self-committed or converted, by which he chooses or justifies a way of life. Faith, in this sense, is not a body of dogma or a creed to which one formally adheres. It is, rather, to put it as generally as possible, what one does *willfully*, hence *purposely*, hence *freely*. *It is justified action.*

And for Cary all human action is, at the point of action, *individual* human action. To explore faith is to explore character. Thus, the idea of private faith working individually toward its own particular salvation is at the vital heart of Cary's anatomy of human striving.

Faith working is faith transforming itself, changing, altering with rival forces and the years. It is frequently inconsistent, doubling back on its trail or shying from phantoms or misjudging precipices, like a pinto fed on loco weed; or sometimes, as in the fairy tale, it changes in a twinkling from a stallion to a mouse to a puff of smoke. In other words, men change with age. And no novelist has ever surpassed Cary in the delicate and perceptive rendition of individual *careers*. Thomas Wilcher, Chester Nimmo, Sara Monday, Tabitha Baskett, Lucy Wilcher, Jim Latter, Mr. Johnson, even the heroically inflexible Gulley Jimson, all go through life as naturally and changeably as rivers to the sea, altering their paths, being blocked in one direction and taking another, narrowing, widening, turning back on themselves, circling what cannot be passed and cutting through when they are stronger, because

the landscape of life enjoins these courses on them. But they do not dry up, they flow to the end, and this is their integrity.

This would be a commonplace if it were not for the prevalent view of the novel, previously discussed, which is at inherent odds with this dynamic view of life. A man seen as the end product of social forces cannot have a career in the true meaning of that term. Fate rather than faith conditions his existence. He is formed on the production line of society. In the contemporary novel, one notes with a strange shock of realization, the individual does not evolve as a man does in life, sometimes erratically, often unpredictably, usually imperceptibly through many stages. No, he remains substantially as he is in the first chapter, growing older in the flesh (sexual problems arise, and the passages of sexplcit detail commence almost automatically somewhere around page 110 and subside after page 200 in the usual novel), but spiritually remaining a graven image (and the adolescent attitude toward sex persists in the spiritual stance). He remains so in current fiction or, alternatively, his life changes in an explosive flash—he experiences that phenomenon borrowed from the bull ring of psychoanalysis or fashionable revival religiosity known as the “moment of truth,” during which he is cast into the crucible of sudden self-knowledge and re-formed or destroyed.

This cheap dramatic effect, so rarely occurring save by accident in the resilient play of life, is necessary in the movies and detective-thriller fiction for technical reasons, as in melodrama of all kinds. It is interesting to note how the influence of these media has insidiously corrupted the novelist in the last generation or so.

But life is not turned round so suddenly save by accident; and in current fiction, conceived under the sacrament of social determinism, chance or accident is bad taste when it is not mortal sin. The moment of truth is fated, man marches toward it as to doom, there is nothing chancy about a fish in a trap. The moment is a moment



of conscious perception, it is a sudden realization, but the occasion is foreordained. Like an execution by law, it is no accident.

Here again the free world of Joyce Cary denies this rigid scheme. For Cary has a proper understanding of chance—the accidental or coincidental which is the stuff of life—non-dramatic because it is implausible or illogical or outwardly trivial—but the way things happen in life, like automobile accidents, or a wrong word said, or a bad night's sleep changing a man's life, or like Rozzie Balmforth's pimples, which blotched her destiny. Cary knows about luck, both good and bad. This is a wisdom possible only to maturity which understands the limitations and uses of formulae. He had to know it before he could write the first book satisfactory enough to himself to be published. "I had waked up to the fact that all evil is not the result of an evil will; that the innocent may suffer the utmost misery; that there is such a thing as bad luck. That is to say, I had realized the fundamental injustice of the world. It had 'come home' to me. And once a fact of that size 'comes home' it never goes away again. It is a permanent resident of the largest size and the most insistent voice. You can't 'get over' it." Only Hardy, before Joyce Cary, had so clear an insight into this aspect of existence, and in Hardy it was derived from philosophic pessimism. But Cary is not a pessimist. He had faith in life. It is just that he was prepared for anything.

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The nature and problems of allegiance are truly Cary's subject matter. In his early novels (which were set in Africa) the problem is seen primarily as one of cultural conflict, which he portrays with increasing refinement and artistry until in *Mister Johnson* he summed up the entire problem of modern Africa in the person of the glittering and exuberantly immortal government clerk midway between cultures, who represents both the tragedy and hope

of the African native. Cary's profoundest observations emerge in the form of astounding character portrayals; his art works from the abstract to the concrete, and in concreteness he achieves universality.

In his novels of British life the undercurrent of British evangelical feeling is present in a hundred ways, motivating and coloring the lives of his characters as it does British life in so many respects. You see it in the darkly moving picture of the boyhood and youth of Chester Nimmo, in his lay preacher father and his adventist followers, and in Chester Nimmo's growth as a spellbinder and politician caught between the compulsions of political necessity and the stern demands of conscience; and in Nina Latter, who marries Nimmo out of necessity and cleaves to him even after she has left him, because he needs her and it would not be right for her to consider her own happiness alone; and in Jim Latter, who was Nina's lover before Nimmo and finally her husband, and his devotion to honor, rectitude, and a decent social order, as he saw them. You see it in Thomas Wilcher, the elderly bachelor caught between possessions and tradition and the knowledge of their vanity and transience; and in his sister, Lucy, who out of contempt for ease and softness, and in a passionate urge to give moral content and significance to her life, marries Matthew Brown, leader of an obscure sect called the Benjamites. You see it in Rose Venn, trying to do her duty to her sisters and getting no thanks for it. Indeed, in almost every one of Cary's major character conceptions you find, if not the mature development of this moral impulse, at least its embryo or germ. And even when the issue is monstrous or disastrous it is a moral issue at its pulsing heart.

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In his African novels Cary was concerned with primitive faith, African *juju* worship, in its meeting with Christianity and western culture. He plunged deeply into the essential drive of primitive religion

—religion as power; and his illumination of the tragedy that occurs when innocent missionaries graft the simpler forms of Christianity on to the undisturbed and wildly logical roots of savagery constitutes one of the deepest and most convincing safaris into primitive religious psychology on record.

And faith is always a necessary ingredient of life to Cary; it is never a delusion ironically opposed to a universe deemed inherently indifferent to man. Perhaps the most significant words of all about Joyce Cary are three words he *did not* write at the end of *Aissa Saved*, his first novel.

This is a powerful and bloody story of primitive religious convulsions in back-country Nigeria around 1921. There is a drought and native farmers are desperate. Compounding the ferment of hunger and a bad price situation caused by the post-war depression is religious conflict, heightened by the emotions of bad times, and caused by the activities of Christian missionaries impinging on traditional paganism.

Factions form and fight and one could, if one wished, see much of religious history symbolized and, as it were, recapitulated in this obscure savagery in the bush. But Cary does not press such identification.

Aissa is a lively, imaginative, unrestrained native girl who, suffering misfortunes, has been taken in by a mission and brought back to health. She becomes a fervent though occasionally backsliding Christian. But she is outspoken and obstreperous, and the pagans persecute her as a witch. In a vision she sees Jesus, who commands her to make war on the infidels. Under her inspiration the native Christians wage a "holy war" on the pagans, burning the *juju* hut, slaying the *juju* priests and offering Christianity or the sword. (Such religious wars are a matter of record in Africa.) But the Christian movement disintegrates and finally a frenziedly repentant Aissa, to show her love for Jesus, and to intercede for rain, ritually sacrifices her own beloved child just as, earlier, the *juju* priestess had made a similar sacrifice.

Primitive reality transcends the Christian forms so flimsily erected by the huts of grass. But no rain comes. And finally Aissa dies, tied for her blasphemies by the pagans to an anthill. She dies in an ecstatic bliss, with a vision of her child and heaven. Jesus has taken her.

Almost any author who had contrived such a harrowing and tragic tale would have pressed on to the final irony. After all the useless death, after all the sorrow and religious mania, almost any modern author, passionate in his dispassion, avid in his cool despair, would have appended in terse, ultimate comment: "The rains came."

But Joyce Cary did not write these words. And this is a clue to his moral vision, a vision only suggested in his first novel, but a vision upon which it and all his work depends. For, if he had said that afterwards the rains came, he would have been saying that the universe is inhospitable to man, indifferent to his fate, that man is a stranger and alone.

But he does not say this at all. The vision of grace which wretched Aissa is vouchsafed at the end is a real vision. And the struggle for grace and joy, though waged cruelly, ignorantly, at great waste and human cost, is the source of human freedom and the root of human action. To accept the fact that bad luck, injustice, and evil sometimes win is not to reject life; it is to accept life in its entirety. It is to be undaunted, to have courage, to commit an act of faith, to participate, to gaze with neither smoked nor rose-colored glasses at the Joseph's robe of life.

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What is Joyce Cary's ultimate place in the history of the novel? Judgments of literary worth, at the end, are always personal responses. On my shelves Cary stands with Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy as one of the great masters and enrichers of the art of fiction. He was a mountain in a time of low-lying clouds. When the sun shines again, his stature will be seen.