

Captive and Free: An Interpretation of Human Reality in the Novels of Joyce Cary

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Abstract

The novelist, Joyce Cary, appears to accept human being as free, who is apparently captive, his footing on which his art of novel writing is constructed. It is his one of the inspirations and his source of creation. He projects society as the background of his novels. Protagonists and other characters find themselves at odds with the society. A consistency between free and captive has been very much schematic throughout the novels presenting his point of view. Consequences start moving from intuition to concept. His characters are flat as well as round ones. Moreover, they are free as well as captive. They are peopled with two types of human beings who may be termed as the captive and the free. However, they are real. They are humane. The wholeness of objectivity is very much schematic. The artist in Cary tries to cut deep through the encrustations of facts and life to get at the heart of the truth and reality. However, reality, human reality, appears to be perceptive. Hence, this research paper tries to investigate the purpose of the reality of society in general and reality of human beings in particular. It aims at finding out what reality is for the novelist in question. How the novelist perceives it. In addition, how the different characters of his novels do experience the reality of life?

Keywords: free, captive, human reality, society, humanity, perceptive

1. Introduction

The remarkable feature of Cary's novels is the vision that he gives the readers through his novels. He is a thoughtful writer, a philosopher novelist, who believes that the novels should enable the world "to contemplate and understand itself". His tales do absorb the interests of the readers, taking them out of the routine of the work. What is found most satisfying and unusual in his fictions, is Cary's belief that the malignant fate cannot crush man, and that no adversity can get the better of man. He thinks that life is tragic, but it is worth living. Moreover, it is this urge to create that drives man on in the face of tragedy, injustice, destruction and loneliness. He believes in the tragedy of life; but he is not a pessimist because he has faith in the imperishability of life. He, no doubt, gives his readers a message of hope and optimism very much like Browning and makes his novels memorable and worth reading.

Cary had an integrated idea of the world, that is, he believes that the creative freedom of the imagination is the ultimate reality of human life. However, his vision is too vast. He is forcefully and clearly in an artistic manner. Cary has no doubt built the structure of all his sixteen novels on the solid foundation of the theme of the creativity, which rests on the idea of captive and free. His novels as Andrew Wright states reflect almost all aspects of the complex life of the complex twentieth century; the hope and lament, the wisdom and folly, the strength and fragility, the pits and cruelty, joy, crisis, disaster, fulfilment and tragedy. A perusal of his novels does convince us about the presence of human reality.

2. Discussions

"The novelist must develop a reality which is ... actual, complete and purposeful to our experience." (Cary, 1958)

Joyce Cary, no doubt, appears to develop the theme of his novels along with the above quotation. In addition, it has been experienced that the novelist tries to infuse into the characters of his novels a spirit of reality. Almost all his novels exhibit reality revealing the complexities of the modern life. There is hardly any ground to deny Cary's status as a traditionalist in the sphere of novel writing. Like the old masters of novel writing, he accepts society as the basis of the novelist's art and a source of his creation. A novelist in no case can ignore human reality. For

every word he writes is for human beings. Therefore, human reality is the true reality with which the novelist is found to be more concerned.

A glance at some of the novels of Joyce Cary convinces us that his novels have a humanistic approach. All of them contain great stories of human reality revealing the complexities of human life. In the novels of Forster, we encounter two types of human beings; ordinary and extra-ordinary. Those who are extra-ordinarily gifted are the same kind of flesh and blood as are the ordinary human beings, but it is the uniqueness of their actions which makes them extra-ordinary. In Cary's novels, too, we find two kinds of people moving, talking and acting. They are real human characters. Some of them try to do extra-ordinary deeds and thereby achieve the status of round characters, whereas the second type of characters, who do not undergo any changes, are called flat. And, they are boring.

Cary's political treatise, "*Power in Men*," does incorporate in the following words, "everywhere in the world you find certain kinds of people who believe in lots of laws, and stopping things by law. And, you have also, of course, the people who believe in liberty, who trust in liberty, and want as much of it as possible. There are two kinds of people and most of politics in any state in the world is a fight between these two kinds of people." (Forster, 1968) The above quoted lines make it crystal clear that Cary's novels are peopled with two types of human beings who may be termed as the captive and the free. These two kinds of people manifest themselves not only in the sphere of politics but also in those of art and religion. If we go through Cary's first novel, "*Aissa Saved*," we find that the dominant character is a woman whose name is Aissa. She is not free despite being a great sacrifice. However, we encounter some freemen as the missionary, the Carrs, the district officer, Bradgate and the son of a local Waziri, Ali. Bradgate undertakes the task of building a bridge, and thereby, heralds Mr. Johnson and Rudbeck, the two characters of *Mister Johnson*. They are all actuated by humanistic zeal. They want to do something good for their people. Even Ali foreshadows Aladai, the hero of the novel, "*The African Witch*."

In Cary's another novel, "*An American Visitor*," the free man has a more important part to play. Here the creative mind is not an African, rather a British. He is Bewsher who has undertaken the task of doing something good to the African. He wants to do something for the welfare of the Birri. He wants to open a market for the traders coming from outside for the betterment of the natives. Despite all his good efforts, he fails winning the hearts of the natives. They are prejudiced against the British. Therefore, his message of love and friendship falls flat on them. They consider him a big rascal. At last, the prejudice of the natives against Bewsher turns into a revolt and in the rebellion, Bewsher is killed. In this respect, the words of G. L. Larsen are quite accurate who makes a proper evaluation of Bewsher's personality in the following words: "His (Bewsher) aspiration was to unify the Birri tribes and to give them a body as well as a soul. His strength lays in a realistic understanding of sympathy with the strength and limitation of the African themselves, and the power of action, borne out of faith in his idea." (Larsen, 1965) Larsen, no doubt, considers him a "non-conformist", yet calls him a "benevolent dictator".

"*The African Witch*", the third African novel by Joyce Cary, presents, for the first time, a free man as a protagonist. This free man is Louis Aladai. He is a 24 years old African. He happens to be an Oxford return. His character appears to be an improvement upon that of Bewsher. He is obsessed with the idea of enlightenment of the natives. He is a patriot who has seen the European civilization. He feels troubled to see the African plunged into ignorance and given to Juju worship. In the beginning, he believes in non-violence. He is positive that he would succeed in convincing the officials upon the legitimate causes of the natives. Several times, he tries to pacify his people and twice he prevents them from launching wars. At last, he is convinced that in this corrupt and treacherous world, no man can attain his legitimate ends without fight. Therefore, he joins the violent struggle initiated by his sister, Elizabeth, and in this rebellion, he sacrifices his life for his own people.

Again, in "*Mister Johnson*", another novel by Cary, "*Mister Johnson*" is a free man. He plays the hero. He is the protagonist of the novel. Mr. Johnson is a young Anglicized Negro clerk. He "Loves", as O'Connor rightly remarks "everything that is estranged, unusual, and unique." (O'Connor W.V.: "*Joyce Cary*"), Cary portrays him as "a poet who creates himself a glorious destiny." (Cary, 1961) Like Gulley Jimson, he lives by his impulse and is always indifferent to consequences. The way he expresses his love for Bamu is quite unconventional and laughable. Even in his suffering, he is magnificent. He feels his misery more acutely than he does his pleasure. However, he loves Rudbeck much and several times turns down the Waziri's proposal to show him his secret official papers. However, he is forced by the circumstances to succumb to Waziri. For the sake of Bamu's love, he becomes a paid spy for Waziri. His interest in road building shows his interest in creation. He embezzles money for providing beer to the laborers in order to make them work hard for the completion of his assignment of road building. The British official fails to understand his motive and so he is sacked for fraud and embezzlement. He is further forced to commit a murder, for which he is taken to task. Nevertheless, here he is not so much concerned with his own defense as he is wary of hurting the feelings of Rudbeck. Despite

Rudbeck's best efforts, he is given capital punishment, despite of his rightful claim of young age and nervous instability. Rudbeck's recommendation for reprieve is not granted and his death-sentence is confirmed. Rudbeck quite helplessly fulfils his last wish by shooting him to death and not hanging him alive.

Charley is the other famous character of Cary's novel, "*Charley is My Darling*". He, too, is a representative of free man. Charley, a delinquent child, revels in committing various kinds of mischiefs. He tries to prove his superiority over his fellow children. Like Mr. Johnson, he is also gifted with a pure instinct of love for Lizzi. As Johnson values his friendship with Rudbeck more than anything else in this world, exactly in the same way Charley also decides to forgo all his adventures for the sake of his love. The thought of arrest troubles him much. He aspires for a happy conjugal life with his beloved, Lizzi. However, the law of the land does not allow them to enjoy a happy conjugal life despite the fact that they have attained puberty as well as maturity. So, when the parting is forced on Lizzi, she faints. The novel ends on a note of pathos. While winding up his discussion on Joyce Cary, O'Connor rightly observes, "For Cary, life flowed turbulently & abundantly...He needs a broad canvas, and perhaps this way the two trilogies may prove to be his best work." (O'Connor, 1966)

Johnson is, no doubt, a freeman. "He is a creator". He is the one who loves beauty and enjoys it even in the gloomy situation...His life is given to painting and he makes every effort legal or illegal, to get along with both his works. The unjust world denies him freedom to paint. He is denied even access to his own paintings. Because of these injustices, he becomes a revolutionary, an outlaw and an eccentric. He commits crime after crime. He even murders his love, Sara, just because she refuses to give him his painting of herself, which might have brought him money. Even at the age of sixty-eight, he raises his banner of revolt against injustices running rampant in the world. He may be unjust to anything or anybody but not to his art. He is a great fighter. He does not fight only with the conservatives in the society, but he also fights the conservatives within himself. His artistic pilgrimage shows the problem of the artist who struggles hard to cope with the change in social and artistic spheres.

Reed brings out this dramatic fight between Jimson, the man and Jimson, the artist. He proves that "Gulley, the painter, becomes immobilized by Gulley, the man." (Reed, 1970) However, the fact is that Gulley's commitment to art finally frees him from his attachment to his patron, Hickson, beloved Sara, and all the things of the past. He has to struggle hard to shake off the shackles of the past. His is not a static character. His is a growing character who wants to grow, to advance, to expand to fulfill itself by the free exercise of what Cary called "the creative imagination". (Reed, 1970) This "free man" inside Jimson is struggling. However, there is the "conservative man" within Jimson who wants to withdraw, or find security by holding back to life. It seeks to avoid commitment to new, possibly dangerous ventures and painful adjustments, implicit in growth.

Chester Nimmo, who happens to be a child, is the protagonist of the second trilogy of Cary. The three novels about Chester Nimmo, present him a thoroughly round character, which undergoes metamorphosis at several stages of his life. From the position of an agitator, he rose to the position of a preacher. Hence, for the realization of his ambition to establish an egalitarian society, he becomes a politician. Nevertheless, he has to face a great many problems in his life. He resists a poverty-stricken existence. His father's income being too meager, his sister, Georgina, has to work hard and, ultimately dies. His mother succumbs to tuberculosis for want of medicines. His father's evangelic outlook prevents him, sometimes, from revolting against the injustice of the society. He considers theatres to be "temple of lies". (Cary, 1953) But, he fails to prevent his son from visiting theatre. Nimmo's whole approach to life gets changed under the impact of a play entitled "Maria Marten". The Injustices of the world cause him uneasiness. He becomes a socialist to set things right. However, he experiences disillusionment. After serving people for forty years, he finds them turning against him and wishing for his death.

Preedy and Syson are the representatives of the freemen of Joyce Cary who figure them in his last novel titled, "The Captive and Free". Syson has been presented as an Anglican clergyman who tries to expose Preedy as a fraud but in doing so he himself is disillusioned. These free spirits are dictated by the call of their own inner beings. They believe in the existence of a divine beneficent spirit who should be worshipped. The other characters of the novel, except Alice, are captives. In Cary's opinion those who are traditional, prefer the past, the stability and the prevalent standard of the society to revolution, anarchy and new experiments. Both their souls and minds are imprisoned in the hands of society. Cary's sympathy is with the free who are largely actuated by reformists' zeal. Some characters of Cary like Nimmo of "*Except the Lord*" are torn between two diametrically opposite pulls; conservative ideals and needs for revolutionary changes. Andrew Wright rightly lays emphasis on this aspect:

"...these contrasting characters are not opposite at every point. Even the most rooted of Cary's conservatives

must do battle in their own souls with the impulse to create and some of these characters actually do create, within certain limits.” (Wright, 1959)

Cary’s heart bleeds for the freeman who wishes to do something for the betterment of the society, but he does not seem to be happy with the conservatives like Gore of “*An American Visitor*” who wants to maintain status quo in Africa. He also makes Rakhm, the conservative police commissioner, the butt of his laughter, for he is jealous of Aladai and does not want the Africans to be educated. He is as hostile to Aladai as is Jim Latter to Nimmo in the second trilogy. He flings Aladai overboard in the river because he hates blackmen. For this, he is rebuked and recalled to England for better training. Andrew Wright rightly observes, “in the best of the novel, in “*Mister Johnson*” and the two trilogies, the conservative character plays a prominent role.” (Wright, 1959) Character like Blore, Rudbeck, Tring and Gollup who figure in the novel are all conservatives. They appear to be quite apathetic towards the problems of the natives. However, some tinge of humanitarian zeal is seen in some of them.

Tom Wilcher, the seventy one year old narrator of Cary’s novel, “*To Be a Pilgrim*”, who has been a lawyer, has inherited conservatism from his father who was a soldier and an administrator of justice. The old Wilcher could not tolerate his wife’s deviation from the Victorian code of conduct and would administer beating to his daughter, Lucy, for what he thought a blasphemous conduct. Similarly, Tom Wilcher is also a slave in the hands of tradition. His extreme devotion to duty makes him a great traditionalist. His own words prove that:

“The only thing we can rely on in a tight corner is our duty. That is the only way out. Duty, duty, that is the salvation of poor humanity. Do your duty and then if, everything goes to the devil, you won’t have to plan yourself for your own misery which is the worst misery of all”. (Cary, 1959)

He is so much obsessed with the sense of duty that despite his unwillingness, he could not help sending Sara to jail when her theft is detected. So, he is, no doubt, a captive in the hands of rigorous idealism. However, his son John, unlike his father, has an impulse for freedom, which always impels him to break the rules. He loves Sara and is quite hopeful that after her release from Jail, he would be able to marry her as a freeman. In the words of Cary himself, he is “like many Englishmen, liberal by conviction, but conservative in heart.” (Larsen, 1965)

The narrator of “*Except the Lord*” is Jim Latter who is a soldier and a traditionalist knocked out of sense by the growing influence of anarchists like Nimmo whom he describes as “a cancer spreading poison everywhere through clean flesh; that’s why I say you must be cut out like a cancer. It is the only way to stop infection spreading.” (Cary, 1960b) This proves that the microbe of change cannot easily be removed. Once a man is affected by it, it is most likely that he would remain under its influence forever. He may try to remain at his old place as long as possible but the seed of change is bound to take him to a new direction eventually. Jim’s comparison of Nimmo to “a cancer spreading poison” reminds us of a character in G. B. Shaw’s “*Saint Joan*”, who thinks that heresy, like cancer, infects the whole body and if that part of the body affected by it is not eliminated, it may prove fatal to the whole body. His wife’s illicit relationship with Nimmo infuriates him so much that he kills his beloved wife in a fit of frenzy. Later, he shakes himself off his conservatism.

Towards the end of the novel, Nimmo has been portrayed as one who has eschewed anarchism and politics for religion. But this does not mean that he becomes a traditionalist and is ready to accept the prescribed code of conduct without any justification. What he is ready to accept is the voice of his soul. In addition, what David Cecil, one of the finest critics, says of the author himself; “he had to carve out his creed by himself and for himself” (Cecil, 1959) seems to be true to Nimmo. And, as Cary cannot be said to be conservative, so Nimmo cannot be labeled as a captive. He enjoys the realization of the truth, as did the Lord Buddha.

“And instantly among the turmoil of my senses, a darkness fell away, great presence were revealed, things absolutely known and never again to be obscured, grief that I knew for love, love that I knew for life, joy that I knew for the joy of the Lord.” (Cary, 1960b)

In the first three novels of Joyce Cary, female characters appear to be the most vital characters. In, “*Aissa Saved*”, it is Aissa, who is the dominating spirit. She has been depicted as a young convert battling with the pagans for the sake of Christianity. Jesus is almost husband-like to her. Therefore, ultimately she prefers Jesus to her worldly lover. She takes her parting from the world for a grace of God. She feels as if “Jesus had taken away in his arms.” (Cary, 1960a) She is, no doubt, a conservative and a traditionalist. However, she is endowed with the strength and impulsiveness hardly found among the people of her type. It is her innocence, which keeps her from being a free person. Her fanatical belief in religion makes her sacrifice her baby to prove the superiority of Christianity. This episode reminds us of another female character of “*An American visitor*” whose name is Marie Hasluck who hides her husband’s pistol under the influence of Christianity while her husband is besieged by the rebellious natives. In Aissa’s impulse to sacrifice, certain ingredients of a free person are no double perceptible.

In the third novel of Cary entitled “*The African Witch*”, we see Elizabeth Aladai, the sister of the protagonist of the novel who not only dominates but also domesticates the men and women around her. She is a pagan priestess and her principal concern is to keep the Juju worshipping institution away from the infections of Christianity and that of Islam. It is with this aim in her mind that she enters politics. She hates Mohammedans as much as she hates the Christians. Sale, a Muslim leader tries his best to win her favor but fails. She launches the unforgettable women’s war in support of her brother, Louis Aladai, and almost baffles the officials of the opposite camp by the ingenious strategy. They feel forced to call for more troops for quelling the rebellion. She strives hard to eradicate superstition from Africa. That is her personal vision. She behaves like a free woman. However, the character of Bamu, wife of Mr. Johnson of “*Mister Johnson*” is too naïve as well as unsophisticated. She is unable to undergo any kinds of change. Consequently, she appears to be, undoubtedly, a captive of the tradition. Hers is too traditional to accept or embrace any new fashions or neo ideas.

No doubt, the character of Sara, who happens to be the heroine of the first Trilogy consisting of “*Herself Surprised*”, “*To Be a Pilgrim*” and “*The Horse’s Mouth*” appears to be one of the most impulsive and lively one. Sara, in the words of G. L. Larsen “.....does embody attributes, perhaps narrow in scope but nevertheless profound in depth, that are pregnant with creative possibilities; devotion to service genuine sympathy, respect for life.” (Larsen, 1965) She has taken cooking for the whole of her life but while discharging the duty of hers rather devotedly, she establishes amorous relationship with Matt Monday, Gulley Jimson and Wilcher. She has often been compared with Defoe’s Moll Flanders. But unlike Moll Flanders, she is not a cheat. She is inspired not by love for money, but a propensity to love men. She, like a primitive woman, is completely apathetic towards politics, religion and economics, As Lizzi commits crimes to please Charley, so does Sara. She commits theft to support her poor lover, Gulley Jimson. She is capable of making sacrifices in love making. In “*The Horse’s Mouth*” when Jimson, in a fit of eccentricity knocks her to death, she, in her dying statement, twists her statement in such a way that he should be absolved of the charge of her murder. She is, no doubt, a round character, which is really lively and impulsive. However, she does not undergo much transformation. So is the case with Nina, the heroine of the second trilogy, consisting of “*Prisoner of Grace*”, “*Except the Lord*” and “*Not Honour More*”, who is a generous woman torn between the love of two persons. Her cousin, who she cannot marry, impregnates her. So she is forced to marry Nimmo. However, after thirty years of good conjugal life, she divorces him and marries Jim Latter. She acts like a free woman but is the prisoner of her grace and so her grace forbids her from saying ‘no’ even to Nimmo’s lascivious demands. She acts like a mediator between captive Latter and free Nimmo. Therefore, she is free as well as captive simultaneously.

3. Conclusion

If we make a careful survey of Cary’s characters, it becomes crystal clear that his characters, though often falling in groups, are not incapable of development as Ben Johnson’s and Dickens’ characters are. Most of them undergo visual transformations in their lives. Such characters are, no doubt, saturated with humanistic zeal. They are harbingers of change. They work for the uplift of the humanity. However, there are characters who are flat and don’t contribute much for the betterment of the lot of humanity. In our day-to-day experience of life, we encounter both types of people. This itself is a reality of life. However, making every character idealistic or extra-ordinarily gifted, Cary would not have justified his stand as a novelist depicting human reality of various kinds. We feel like agreeing with E.M. Forster’s principle of novel writing as laid down in his “*Aspects of the Novel*” where he says that “a novel that is at all complex, often requires flat people as well as round and the outcome of their collisions parallels life more accurately ...” (Forster, 1963)

Being an extrovert writer, Cary appears to be Shakespeare-like about whom S. T. Coleridge aptly remarks that he (Cary)” becomes all things, yet ever remaining himself.” (Allen, 1965) We see him passing into the skins of Aladai, Johnson, Charley, Evelyn, Chester Nimmo, Nina, Sara, Freddy, Wilcher, Gulley, Jimson, & Jim Latter. He identifies himself with two contradictory types of characters. However, while doing so he maintains complete objectivity. No doubt, the majority of characters he impersonates are free, and just a few are captive. Nevertheless, they are human beings deeply rooted in the reality of life, for they depict the complexities of human life no doubt.

Thus, it is concluded with the words of Henry James who says, “You will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality.” (James, 1962) Moreover, the novels of Joyce Cary are full of different kinds of realities. However, human reality has been primarily used objectively.

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