CHAPTER I

"CHANGE ITSELF IS MY COUNTRY"

When Joyce Cary began to write the prefaces for the Carfax edition (1951–52) of his novels, he considered writing a general preface to the whole series under the title, "Comedy of Freedom." In looking back on his novels, he saw a thematic pattern: "My novels," he wrote in a letter, "are all about one world—as much so as Blake's poetry is about his world and I want, like him, to make people feel that world which might be described as that of freedom." He sought to create "a homogeneous picture of the world as it is, as [the] perpetual creation of the free soul with all its complex results in art and religion and its politics, its special tragedy and special morality." ¹ Cary eventually abandoned the idea of a general preface, but certainly all of his novels are about the world of freedom, a world of perpetual change. "Change itself is my country," Cary wrote in another letter, and it is the idea of change as freedom that is the underlying theme of his novels. Thus the free soul stands before all possibilities, creating his own special world in art, religion, and politics. The comedy of freedom is the joy of creation itself, but the very act of freedom brings with it responsibility for its consequences whether for good or evil. Paradoxically, the tragedy of freedom—injustice in the world—is an inevitable corollary of the comedy of freedom, for the free act may create evil as well as good.

In a more special sense the theme of freedom is the unifying concept of Cary's early approach to the multiple novel form in the African novels and in the projected Castle Corner series. The multiple novel as a literary form
is a series of interrelated novels having a unifying theme and a structural unity. It may use a single narrator throughout the series to give it unity (C. P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* and Anthony Powell's *The Music of Time*), or it may use more than one point of view to give a multiple view of reality (Cary's two trilogies and Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*). It may use the history of a family to give an interlocking unity (Zola's *Rougon-Macquart*, Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, and Cary's *Castle Corner* series). It may have a unifying concept to give structural unity: Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine* is a comprehensive commentary on all aspects of French society and life, and Cary's African novels are a complex exploration of different aspects of the war between religions and cultures in Africa.

Joyce Cary wrote in the multiple novel form throughout his literary career and contributed significantly to its development as a literary genre and to its theory as a literary form. The James Osborn Collection of Joyce Cary manuscripts in the Bodleian Library reveals Cary's intention of developing the African novels as a series. In a draft of a letter to the publisher of his first novel, *Aissa Saved*, Cary wrote:

I have written several books with this theme [the "war of cultures or religions"] or parts of it, for a general background or atmosphere. . . . All these plots are what might be called old fashioned or dramatic, and they are worked out in action, not only because such plots suit my purpose by shewing nature in contrast but because what I want to portray and convey is not to be grasped, any more than any other kind of reality, by the brain alone, in contemplation, but only by a combination [of] thought and feeling. I meant at one time to call this series of books of which several are in construction "There's a war on," as a general title; or something of that kind, since they all deal with this theme of war between incompatible ideals.2

The African novels form a series in which the underlying theme of a "war between incompatible ideals" in
relation to the setting remains constant. Each novel contributes its exploration of an aspect of this war so that the whole series is a complex, interrelated examination of the revolution that took place in the early part of the twentieth century (and is taking place today) in Africa. Though the main characters change from novel to novel—Bradgate (Aissa Saved) and Bewsher (An American Visitor) are mentioned in The African Witch, but they do not appear as characters—the colonial officials can be viewed as representing the various attitudes of the colonial mind related to the exploration of the several aspects of the general theme. Similarly, the main African characters can be viewed as representing different facets of the African mind. Thus, these novels are interrelated by the part each character contributes to the over-all theme of the series, the war of ideas.

The Osborn Collection also contains Cary's notes and trial scenes for the incomplete and unfinished volumes of the Castle Corner series: Over the Top and Green Jerusalem. Castle Corner, as originally planned, was to be the first novel in a three- or four-novel series, but after the unfavorable critical reception of this first novel, Cary abandoned the project. It is evident that Cary intended this series to be a family chronicle tracing the history of the Anglo-Irish Corner family from the 1890's to the 1930's. Though the setting is mainly England and Ireland (there are some African scenes in Castle Corner, however), the underlying theme of freedom as perpetual creation or change and the war between incompatible ideals is the same as in the African novel series. The continuity of the family itself with its symbolic "castle" was to provide the unifying focus so that the seeming anarchy of events and warring ideas would be given order and form.

Cary's early approach to the multiple novel form seems to recapitulate the development of this literary genre. Though on a much more limited scale, the African novel series is similar to Balzac's La Comèdie Humaine with its
detailed exploration of all facets of a society and its use of an impersonal, detached narrator to achieve objectivity. The Castle Corner series is similar to Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga, using historical chronology and family history for continuity, and third-person narration for historical objectivity. These early attempts in the multiple novel constitute Cary's continuing search for a multiple view of reality. This search culminated in the development of the trilogy in which Cary realized a multiple view of reality through the interaction of narrator and form.

The Osborn Collection reveals that Cary originally conceived of the first trilogy as resembling a triptych with the middle "panel," To Be a Pilgrim, the major thematic focus of the whole. The three "voices" were to be a commentary on the others as well as themselves so that the whole would fold back on itself like a triptych. Cary had to modify this original plan because of the essential character of Sara, as he explains in the preface to Herself Surprised. He found he had to cut out some of the material on Sara in the other two novels because "there wasn't room for her." Though Cary modified the triptych idea in practice, the first trilogy is artistically successful as a multiple novel. It gives a truly multiple view of reality through the three distinct narrators; the style of each novel is distinct; and Cary develops an interlocking structure through theme and character so that the full meaning of any one of the novels is dependent on the other two.

Cary's first trilogy is artistically successful, and it is also a new development in the multiple novel: the three separate narrators, each with his own view of reality and his relationship with the other two narrators, represent a unique approach to the problem of form in the multiple novel. Arnold Bennett in his Clayhanger trilogy devoted the pattern of each novel to the development of one of the main characters, but the use of the omniscient third-person point of view results in a totally different perspec-
tive: instead of a multiple view of reality, we receive a single, over-all viewpoint. Cary's conception of human character in relation to reality was entirely different: "We are alone in our own worlds. . . . 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." 9 Conrad made use of multiple narrators in a single novel, Chance, but the closest any multiple novel comes to Cary's narrative technique in the trilogies is Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet, with its use of multiple points of view and its multiple view of reality.

Cary's second trilogy more nearly resembles a triptych folding back on itself. The characters' lives are more closely bound together than in the first trilogy, and Nina Nimmo is a much more articulate "voice" than is Sara Monday; Nina's commentaries on Chester Nimmo and Jim Latter and on politics and history are more complex and sophisticated. The third "panel" of the triptych, Not Honour More, depends much more on its relationship to the first two novels than does The Horse's Mouth. Even so, Except the Lord, Nimmo's own story, is a modification of the triptych idea because it is concerned largely with Nimmo's early life, in which Nina played very little part and Jim Latter none at all. Nonetheless, Except the Lord, like To Be a Pilgrim, as the middle "panel" is the focus of the religious theme of the trilogy.

The Osborn Collection also reveals that Cary began to write another trilogy between the two published trilogies, experimenting with both first-person and third-person versions. One of the versions of this unpublished trilogy, which was to have the general title The Captive and the Free (a title Cary used for his last novel, though there is no similarity in material), is closely related to the Nimmo trilogy because the central situation involving Major Gye, his wife Kate, and Lord Drummer resembles the Nimmo-Nina-Latter triangle, and Major Gye is a prototype for Jim Latter in Not Honour More. Cary abandoned this trilogy, which is far from complete, to work on the
Chester Nimmo trilogy. It is evident that Cary used some of the material in the second trilogy from this in-completed trilogy. *Easy Money*, like *Prisoner of Grace*, is a defense of Lord Drummer from the point of view of a woman (Doatie Pilcher, his secretary and then wife); and *The Captive and the Free* volume, like *Not Honour More*, is a self-defense by Major Gye of his violent jeal-ousy of Lord Drummer. However, probably because he wished to do a trilogy with politics at its center, Cary set aside *The Captive and the Free* to write the Nimmo trilogy.

Cary wanted to write a trilogy on each of what he felt to be the major creative activities of man—art, politics, and religion—and even before the completion of the second trilogy, he had a third one in mind. However, when in 1955 his fatal illness was diagnosed as muscular atrophy, he had to give up any plan to write the third trilogy. He used the remaining time of his life to work on the single novel *The Captive and the Free*, which was published posthumously in 1959. Though Cary was un-able to fulfill his ambition to complete three trilogies, he did write on all three of man’s creative activities, for *The Captive and the Free* treats of the artist of the soul, the religious spellbinder.

The form of the multiple novel used by Cary in the two trilogies is at the opposite extreme of narrative technique from the traditional omniscient point of view. It is important to realize that Cary (like Durrell) was not attempting to achieve a total view of reality simply by multiplying the points of view so that these different views would constitute the whole of reality. On the con-trary, though each life touches on the others in interlock-ing relationships, what is ultimately suggested is that the human mind must be content with partial views of real-ity. Barbara Hardy suggests that Cary’s plan for the first trilogy fails because when the main character of one novel becomes a minor character in the next, “he becomes an entirely different character.” Yet this is exactly Cary’s
intention: Sara as viewed by Gulley Jimson is quite a different person from Wilcher's Sara and from Sara's own view of herself, for paradoxically Sara in reality is all three Saras, different and contradictory, not just one of them, nor a single, transcendent synthesis of the three.

Other multiple novelists, such as Proust, C. P. Snow, and Anthony Powell, have avoided the metaphysical complexity of multiple narration by using the same narrator throughout their series. Cary and Durrell have sacrificed the values of continuity and control possible through a single point of view in order to achieve multiplicity. However, Durrell's notes appended to Clea, the last volume of the quartet, are not a confession of failure, but constitute a rationale for the multiple view of reality. Cary's modifications of the triptych theory are a recognition of the limitations imposed on him by the logic of his narrative material and method and not a denial of the multiple view of reality.