

**Joyce Cary's Onomastic "Orchestration":  
Name, Symbol, and Theme in *The Horse's Mouth***

**Ramona Kelley Stamm**

Like many of his literary contemporaries, Joyce Cary maintains a more than superficial interest in the power of the word. Many modernist writers share with him an ambivalent attitude toward the word. To some degree, they hold the belief that words are worn out, obsolete, or otherwise inadequate to express the concerns of the twentieth century. On one hand, they are dissatisfied with the word, but on the other, they are forced to contend with the word as the only means of expression they have, yet many of them eventually come to see the word as still being capable of working transformations on both individuals and the world. Cary, too, recognizes and deplors the predicament of the literary artist who is compelled to use inadequate and vague language, and he expresses interest in his fellow artists' literary experiments.<sup>1</sup> He wants his readers to enter into the fictive world as completely as possible, but he realizes that the very form of his craft works against this. He believes that all writers feel the limitations of language when they are "struggling to express an intuition of life which transcends any possible symbolic form" (*Art and Reality* 152). Many of his contemporaries attempt to change the world by changing the language and by engaging in radical and experimental forms, but Cary uses a more conventional artistic expression. He attempts to recharge, to revitalize words, but he insists that the continuity of the reader's experience should not be hampered by the artist's method of presentation. In order to accomplish his artistic goals, Cary employs names as symbols in *The Horse's Mouth*.

In making comparisons between his technique and that of James Joyce, Cary draws certain distinctions illustrative of his thematic purposes. In *Art and Reality*, he explains that Joyce invented a new language to fulfill his intentions in *Finnegan's Wake*, but then Joyce found that "he had no public ready trained to understand it" (*Art and Reality* 152). Elsewhere, again speaking of Joyce's work, he observes:

Feelings that should be simultaneous in a reader have to be invoked in succession, and therefore become ineffective or false. Joyce's attempt to pack the effect of three or four different symbols into one word often has a brilliant success but, if it should fail, fails disastrously: I mean, it breaks the spell for the reader and jolts him out of pure experience into bewilderment or anxious inquiry (*Selected Essays* 120).

Cary, above all else, wants his fiction to be accessible to the reader. Sometimes he uses many of the same techniques as James Joyce — notably the "serious use of the pun" (*Art and Reality* 152) and the many-layered symbol. In using such techniques, however, he continually strives to make them a natural outgrowth of characterization. Cary uses the term "orchestration" to refer to words as symbols, as though he has a musical reference in mind (*Art and Reality* 120–1). He believes that literary works possess a "general emotional meaning" and that the novel, like the symphony, builds to a "total experience

in meaning" (*Art and Reality* 103). Certainly this analogy suits his work, for many of his fictions are fuguelike variations on the theme of freedom in its broadest sense.

In fact, Cary labels his theme the "Comedy of Freedom." In a 1951 letter to critic Mark Schorer, Cary explicitly writes of the theme and intent of his fiction. Schorer had recently reviewed Cary's *Mister Johnson* for the *New York Times Book Review*, and he had a few years earlier published his study of Blake, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (1946). Blake had been an influence on Cary since his early days at Trinity College, so the Blake–Schorer connection provided Cary with some common ground from which to try to convey his serious intent to the American critic. For up to that time, most of the reviews of his work had treated him primarily as a popular storyteller; by cuing Schorer in, Cary hoped to reach a more discerning public. The letter begins:

I wanted to thank you for a very kind and interesting review and also I want to put a problem to you as a critic. My novels are all about one world – as much so as Blake's poetry is about his world which might be described as that of *freedom*.

By freedom I don't mean the figment that politicians talk about – but *real* freedom – the active creative freedom which maintains the world in being – the activity which is most nearly described by theologians – the source of moral responsibility and of good and evil; but for me also of injustice and love, of a special comedy and a special tragic dilemma which can never be solved.

He goes on to state that his theme includes "aesthetic and political freedom, the whole problem of the created symbol."

Contrasting his method with Blake's, Cary stresses the importance he places on the accessibility of a literary work:

And like others (like Blake again) obsessed with a view of the world which seems to me so obvious, but to other people apparently so dark, I am very anxious to make my world understood and felt. That is why, unlike Blake who invented his own mythology, to avoid the cliché of worn-out definition, I use a quite different method of approach. I do not want to frighten people at the beginning by difficulties or by the idea of instruction. I do not want to start by saying "this novel is a metaphysical construction based on a comprehensive idea of life" or they will stop entering into my character's [sic] lives and instead treat the book, if they tackle it at all, as a kind of crossword-puzzle, asking what does this character stand for, – or that, – they will imagine an allegory. And I detest allegory – for my people are real people in a real world or they are nothing.

Cary closes the letter with the doubt that "perhaps such words as creation, freedom are so utterly worn out...that they no longer carry any of their tremendous meaning" (Letter to Mark Schorer 449–51).

Differing then from Joyce and Blake, both of whom he admired, Cary does not want to force readers to try to understand the world of his fiction through entering the writer's own mind and *puzzling out* what is there; rather, he wishes readers to enter into the characters' lives by feeling the nature and truth of their existence. Certainly there can be some question as to whether this was not Joyce's intent also, but Cary at least believes that Joyce's work possessed too much of the "crossword–puzzle" technique.

Using proper names as symbols gives Cary the artistic maneuverability he needs in order to explore metaphysical themes while keeping his novels on the level of a good yarn. Since names can be accepted as part of a character without placing undue importance on them, their presence does not interfere with a reader's sense of immediacy. Readers are free to accept the names as mere labels or to recognize some deeper symbolic meaning if they so choose.

Proper names appear to have fascinated Cary. As might be expected, his earliest interest began with a study of his own family names. As a young writer, Cary placed much significance on his Irish heritage. He was particularly interested in the Joyce family history and pseudonymously began his career under the name of his Celtic ancestor, Thomas Joyce. We know of Cary's continued interest in the symbolism and etymology of proper names from his plans to write a novel about a professor of etymology and from the annotations he made in his personal copy of *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*.<sup>2</sup>

The work of Charlotte Yonge may have been another influence. Cary knew her writings and believed that they best revealed the Victorian period. Acknowledging that Yonge was not a great novelist, he nevertheless maintained that she was a good period novelist, one who captured in "its fullest intensity" the feelings of her generation (*Selected Essays* 176–7). Considering Cary's interest and familiarity with Yonge's writings, it seems reasonable to assume that he was familiar with her study of etymology, *A History of Christian Names*. In the Preface to her study, Yonge asks her readers to remember that "it is the popular belief, not the fact, that spreads the use of a name," and that although the etymology she gives may be faulty, it has become part of the popular use of the name (viii). Her idea that meaning belongs to the popular imagination would certainly appeal to Cary and suit his artistic purposes, for it suggests that names contain a symbolism rooted in reality.

Cary's onomastic orchestration, his symbolic use of names, becomes an extension of characterization and an embellishment of his theme of freedom, especially in *The Horse's Mouth*, where Gully Jimson is portrayed as a Blakean artist who is always "getting stuck." Society restricts him both figuratively and literally, and he seeks his release through work, in the form of imaginative, creative energy. Gully is an outcast, an iconoclast, and at times a bombaster, but he also partakes of the heroic stature of the visionary artist because of his identification with William Blake, and this identification contributes significantly toward enabling Gully to obtain his freedom.

Gulley sees himself as the artistic and spiritual descendant of William Blake, for, like Blake, he is misunderstood by and at odds with his society. If certain details of Blake's and Gulley's respective lives are examined, the case for descent is greatly strengthened. Gulley spouts anti-establishment doctrine to his friend Nosy Barbon; Blake was tried for sedition. Gulley is dictating his memoirs to his secretary, who works at the cheese counter; Blake often spoke of his poems as "dictated" and of himself as their "secretary" (Frye 38). Because Gulley's genius is unrecognized and unrewarded, he is destitute and uses makeshift materials and creates his "visions" on whatever blank surfaces he can find; Blake suffered domestic and commercial setbacks and often printed his work on the versos of work he was commissioned to do. Gulley ambitiously plans works that he seldom completes; Blake frequently indicated that his poems were intended as parts of much larger works, yet no evidence remains of such texts (Blake 806-7, 816-18). Throughout the course of the novel, Gulley works on paintings with such titles as **The Fall**, **The Raising of Lazarus**, and **The Creation**; Blake in his career produced engravings entitled **The Fall of Man**, **The Raising of Lazarus**, and **The Creation**.<sup>3</sup> Gulley, on his way to the hospital after having suffered a stroke, assures the nursing sister that laughter and prayer are the same; Blake, one of his biographers maintains, was smiling and singing on his death bed as he worked, coloring one of the copies of **The Creation**.<sup>4</sup> All of these parallels could be seen as superficial if it were not for the further thematic unification existing between these two artists through the symbolic links provided by their names.

According to Yonge, *Gulley* is from the Danish *Gulleiv* and means "divine relic" (286). This derivation suits Cary's purpose of presenting Gulley as an artist sharing Blake's concept of the creative imagination. *Jimson* derives from *James*, coming from *Jacob* meaning "the supplanter" (16-17). If we consider Gulley's more iconoclastic traits, we can possibly see him as a supplanter. However, a more immediate possibility exists for associating *Jimson* with Blake. If we think of the jimson weed, rank and coarse, we are reminded of the class of men Blake characterized as the reprobate. Both Gulley Jimson and William Blake manifest characteristics of the reprobate. A reader familiar with Blake's writings, as Cary certainly was, might be reminded of the passage from **The Four Zoas** where the strong, rank weeds are described in all their glory:

There is the Nettle that stings with soft  
down & there  
The indignant Thistle whose bitterness is  
bred in his milk  
And who lives on the contempt of his  
neighbour there all the idle weeds  
That creep about the obscure places shew  
their various limbs  
Naked in all their beauty dancing round the  
Wine Presses (Blake 404-5).

Thus the reprobate is often glorified according to Blake's mythos. Furthermore, in terms of the satiric inversion of his **Marriage of Heaven and Hell**, to belong to the devil's party is a good thing. And at one time, the jimson weed was believed to be of the

devil's party (Spencer 226). Gulley's very name, then, provides a symbolic and thematic link to Blake.

Gulley's nickname for Blake creates yet another tie between the two men. Gulley always refers to Blake as "Ole' Billy Boy," "Billy Blake," or, most significantly, as "Randipole Billy." Gulley does not see Blake as the exclusive, exalted, distant William Blake, Esq., Engraver and Prophetic Bard; rather, Gulley sees him in much the same way he sees himself, as the reprobate and revolutionist. In calling Blake "Randipole Billy," Gulley asserts his identification with the Romantic poet–artist. For *randipole* is a variant of *rantypole* from *rant* and has the meaning of "wild, rakish, jovial, and disorderly"; it is quite possibly a combined form of *rant* and *frampoled* (Farmer and Henley 372). *Frampoled* once described a fiery, mettlesome, spirited horse (OED). Certainly the connection with horse is strikingly appropriate in this particular novel. *Randy's* more obvious meaning of "sexually lecherous" combined with the sexual word play between *randy* and *pole* further unites these two artists who share ideas about sexual freedom and who speak openly of sexual matters. While readers need not have knowledge of the etymology of *randipole* or be familiar with the characteristics and folklore of the jimson weed to understand Gulley's feelings toward Blake, a knowledge of the words' histories does add credence to Cary's belief that words contain a living symbolism, or that they are "at once concept and experience" (*Art and Reality* 174).

Part of Cary's orchestrative technique is his "serious use of the pun," and of course his general word play. Word play is especially effective in the scene in the Beeders' flat when Gulley gives his critique of the various schools of art that make up the Beeders' display. As Gulley sees it, it is the "usual modern collection." And he names the various schools: "Wilson Steer, water in watercolour; Matthew Smith, victim of the crime in slaughtercolour; Utrillo, whitewashed walls in mortacolour" (*The Horse's Mouth* 164). Similarly, he names his would-be biographer a "biografter," a "biograbber," and a "biogrubber." One of the more telling uses of word play, in terms of thematic purposes, occurs when Gulley telephones Hickson, the art collector, and tries to perpetrate a hoax. The battle of wits that ensues is one of long standing, and both Hickson and Jimson take particular delight in trying to outmaneuver one another. Later, when Jimson learns of Hickson's death, he is genuinely moved, for he will miss the altercations they have shared. Exploring the symbolism attached to their names helps to explain Jimson and Hickson's combative camaraderie.

Cary seems to be playing with the etymology of Hickson's name. *Hickson* is derived from *Isaacson* from *Isaac* meaning "God may laugh" (Yonge 13–14). Isaac was the son of the Biblical Sara who laughed at his birth. Cary may intend for his readers to remember that Sara Monday in *Herself Surprised* thinks of Hickson as childlike (38, 66). The sign hanging above the junk shop that Gulley tries to rob suggests even more onomastic play. The shop's name, "Isaacson and Waller," hints at not only Hickson but also Gulley, a waller of sorts, who is always on the lookout for walls to paint and even thanks God for them at the end of his book.<sup>5</sup> These onomastic "orchestrations" merely serve to enhance a reader's understanding of Gulley's delight in attempting to cheat the shop's proprietors or in playing the telephone pranks on Hickson.

Cary's use of proper names as "charged symbols" gives him the means to achieve the "logic of the subconscious" (**Art and Reality** 174–5). He recognizes the power of the word as symbol, as delineator of reality, and as a force to change reality. Much of his art's significance lies in his "orchestration" of words. However, his methods are not as overtly experimental as those of his contemporaries. Cary's subtle onomastic play never "breaks the spell for the reader," never forces the reader out of the realm of "experience" into "anxious inquiry." Certainly his novels are good yarns, but Cary believed that his symbolism of proper names would enable his novels to work fully on the reader's subconscious and with each re-reading to divulge deeper meanings.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Cary's discussion of the artist's dilemma in his **Art and Reality: Ways of the Creative Process** (New York: Harper, 1958) 16.

<sup>2</sup> For these observations, I am indebted to Barbara Fisher's discussion of her study of the Cary manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. See for instance, Joyce Cary: **The Writer and His Theme** (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980) 102–03, 376.

<sup>3</sup> Plate three from the **Book of Urizen** should more accurately be called the **Ancient of Days**. The title **Creation** is a misnomer of early Blake studies.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Wright, **Life of William Blake**, 2 vols. (London: C. J. Farncombe & Sons, 1929) 2:118. While the tale is probably apocryphal, it depicts a characteristically Blakean behavior and is an account that Cary may well have read.

<sup>5</sup> Fisher points out the onomastic play on Hickson–Isaacson–Waller, 213.

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The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park

