



# Recurrent Theme of Primitive Reality in the Novels of Joyce Cary

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## Abstract

The novels of Joyce Arthur Lunel Cary are microcosms of different realities. They reflect the time as well as society in which reality finds its reflection in a unique manner and distinctive forms. A perusal of Joyce Cary's novels persuade us to go through the novels to find out the various forms of reality scattered here and there which influence the readers about what they feel the intensity of the reality. There are four types of realities which have found great delineation in the novels of Joyce Cary. They are: Primitive, Imaginative, Human and Dogmatic. And, the sense of these realities has been the consistent themes of the novels. The novels written by Joyce Cary; especially the mature works of his, not only describe, rather portray the sensible as well as grotesque realities just like pictures appear scene by scene. Hence, "the primitive reality" in the various novels of Joyce Cary is the topic of discussion here.

**Keywords:** Primitivism, reality, reflection, practice, tradition, civilization

## 1. Introduction & Discussion

"You will not write a good novel unless you possess a sense of reality" (1)

The above quoted statement of Henry James speaks volumes about the significance of reality in his novels. Undoubtedly, the element of reality is the creation of good works of art. Reality is supposed to be the life-blood of any great pieces of work. Novel, which is the most modern of all kinds of literature, has been the source of revelation and awakening. The ennobling factors of reality throughout the novels uplift the sense of readers who find themselves into a world of their own utopia which satisfy their inner beings so much so that they carry on reading the novels.

No doubt, without the element of reality, the creation of any good and great pieces of art can't be deemed, for reality is the life-blood of any work of art. Novel, being the most modern of all kinds of literature, is the source of revelation and also a means to bring about awakening. And, Joyce Cary tries to bring about awakening through showing primitivism of African society in Nigeria.

Joyce Cary appears to be, by and large, traditionalist exactly in the same way as "Fielding, Defoe, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thackeray, as well as Thomas Hardy". In him the readers do find the zest of Defoe, the generosity of Fielding, the deliberate haphazard construction of Sterne, and the sturdy professionalism of Trollope. He is found creating characters marked by individuality as well as of grotesqueness. However, the characters are full of vitality. He is an entertainer, a philosopher as well as a moralist just like the Victorian novelists and he appears to be all in one.

By the time of Joyce Cary, we find a shift from social comedy to personal tragedy. The novels of manners gave place to the novels of alienation. Old social conventions are found to be crumbled down. A new world order is seen to be taking place and a new social system takes a new shape. As a result of all these, novels of the time also take and accept a new turn. While society, no doubt, forms the background, the new milieu, the heroes are seen to be at odds with the new environment. For example, other than the Joyce Cary's novels which are going to take all these accounts into expressions later, Thomas Hardy's heroes are found to be in a conflict consistently with the society. The individual's mind started engaging the attention of the novelists. As a result, the centre of drama or the story of human life gets a change and it shifts from society to the individual. Joyce Cary's novels, as a result of the changes of far reaching consequences started moving. The move in the novels is seen from intuition to concept. A physical shape of new change is found to be taking place. The characters of Joyce Cary live in a private world of their own belief. They are their own individuals. The concept of diverse realities finds a unity though quite subjective in nature. The artist in Cary cuts deep through the encrustations of facts and life. The encrustations get at heart of the truth. He quite often ruminated on Reality, Art and the Artist and embodied his views under the title, "Art and Reality: 1958."

The novels of Joyce Cary are usually found turning the intuition into concept which obviously touches the various aspects of reality of human life. The novels are primarily sociological in nature. Joyce Cary writes: "All great artists are preoccupied ... with reality. They assume from the beginning; it is their task to reveal a truth about some permanent and fundamental real". (2)

The African novels of Joyce Cary demonstrate the theme of reality throughout the novels which are embedded with the spirit of primitive nature. J Cary says, “ the novelist must develop a reality which is only there made actual, complete and purposeful to our experience”. (3) Joyce Cary undoubtedly develops the themes of his novels along with the lines of reality and injects into them a spirit of reality. His four African novels (Aissa Saved, An American Visitor, An African Witch, and Mister Johnson) and his novels of the last period present different kinds reality revealing the complexities of the modern age.

A reflection of the life-style of the tribal races living in Africa is evident when the readers go through the novels of Joyce Cary. The characters are also found in conflict with the western civilization preaching them Christianity. They love to live instinctively. They are found to be full of dark passions such as suspicions and hatred. They are out and out superstitious people. They live at their pre-conscious level. They don't live as individual; rather they live within groups and classes of their own origin and nature. They follow the rules and laws of their limited social structure which are mainly tribal in nature. They are hampered with the tribal norms. They have their own gods; and their own rituals of their own forms of worship. They are very much primitive in nature and they live accordingly. They find Christian onslaught very much offensive and humiliating. Hence, if anyone embraces new tradition and moves away from the traditional worship and ways of life, he finds himself into trouble. He is considered an alien into his own primitive culture, no matter how civilized and cultured western style may be. The person meets destruction. He finds himself in the state of disillusion. That is very disastrous for him. Consequently, he tries to return to his old passions and practices. He tries to persuade his people for reconciliation, but, in vain. He faces death. It has always been a fact throughout the novels of JC that the old practices or the tribes or the group ultimately wins, and the new values, Christianity, or modernity of life can't enter their lives. They don't want to progress, development and new lights of happiness in their lives, in the ways of life and their thoughts. They are found away from the modern education, new skills of thoughts and way of life.

The whites are found engaged actively in changing their ways of life, their attitude and the ways of seeing things in a new perspective. They feel the new prospects of life ahead. They are seen trying their preeminent to dispel the ignorance of knowledge and the darkness of education from their lives to fetch new dreams in their lives. They yearn to bring progress to realize their dreams of happiness. They are ready to welcome any new changes in their lives. They are ready for a new blitz which can lead to their happiness. Now, the new ways of life is seen creeping into their lives. The first attack, blitz, is on the primitive consciousness of the tribes is felt. Now the light of Christianity gets a hold of them to bring forth a new change into their lives and their life-style. Therefore, African novels of Joyce Cary incorporate with the tribal patterns of life, the old pagan world of faith. This pagan world explodes against Christianity and new faith of Christian world. Joyce Cary tries to gaze at both with breezy intellectual objectivity and tries to see if the two can even be at peace together. The problem seems unresolved. The endurance of the natives has been more than enough and which required sufficient as well as generous training before they can comprehend the complexity of the new development where a cultivation of new culture is underway. The old pagans are not psychologically or intellectually ready for a sophisticated, classy and refined ways of life in and around them. Stylish outlook is seen dangerous. Therefore, this fact gives rise to the dramatic conflict between the old orders and the heading new ways of outlook. Throughout the African novels of Joyce Cary, a chaos in the world of the Africans is evident because the new outlook of the Christianity is too complicated and full of twists and turns to fit into the old pagan world and its society. Joyce Cary tries to analyze the problems. He analyses the problem of religion and its implications which fall flat on the natives who are going to accept a system which lies deep into that civilization. Thus, a never-ending conflict in the earlier novels of Joyce Cary is found expression.

“Aissa Saved”, the first African novel of Joyce Cary, published in 1932, establishes the problem at a group level. Its setting is Nigeria. Characters have been shown into two groups and further subdivided into other factions. Firstly, the Africans are classified into the natives and the Christianized pagans. Secondly, there are European characters representing the religious levels and the official levels. The Carrs represent the European religious group and the Bradgates represent the official levels. It's event that these two groups, the Carrs and the Bradgates, are not on good terms. The Carrs don't like the interference of the Bradgates in terms of religious affairs. They resent deeply. Whereas, the Bradgates, being a religious agnostic, poke their noses in the religious affairs of the Carrs as they think it their official responsibility to check every tactics of the Carrs. The uninterrupted disagreement of the conflict between the two African groups brings to light a big psychological crack between the groups. The crack is big and gets bigger as time passes onwards.

The Pagans are taught to denounce their own pagan-cult. They don't know the reasons as to why they feel superior for being Christians. The pagans, who haven't gone deep into the true meaning of their religion, Christianity, and go on fighting among themselves for the reasons which are baseless and ridiculous.. They are never ready to accept any explanations for the drought and price-rise. The justification given by the judge doesn't satisfy their religious ego at all. Their primitive bent-of-mind isn't trained enough to accept the scientific reasons, laws and logic. They don't even apply their common sense and logic to know the facts around them. They just attribute the sudden calamities to the wrath of their supernatural agency and fear the ferocity of the anger which has to be propitiated. Therefore, it is evident without any doubts that their lives and their daily existence in this world are governed by the existed superstitious cults.

The Carrs, dogmatically religious in the affairs try to mend and restore their ways of living. They try to fix themselves in the matters of religion. And, they appear to be very much philanthropic in their attitude. They want to render them great services by establishing clinics as well as hospitals there. Bradgates are equally helpful, and are going to construct a bridge to bring forth a lot of good. But, the emotional plane is very much evident here. And, the failure of the

Europeans, the Carrs as well as the Bradgates, to communicate with them on the said emotional plane is expressive and responsible for the unresponsiveness of the natives. They rationalize, but in excessive manner. Hence, they fail to fathom the very impulsive and inner feelings of the natives. Their sermons as well as instructs fall flat on them. Therefore, they ignore their teachings and link up the drought and its calamities with some sorts of curse of their superstitious supernatural beings. They find no alternative left, but to sell their children to propitiate the supernatural agency causing the curse. The reformist, too, try to dissuade them from selling the children for it is unlawful and very much illegal. They try to assure them that none would starve; yet such assurance and promises go in vain and the assurance goes unheard: "the people listened with blank faces, expressing nothing. They knew that it wasn't at all that rain would fall." (3)

Aissa, the pagan beautiful Nigerian woman, later a Christian convert, is the central character in the novel. She is seen swings between her pagan instincts and Christian faith. Her personality gains the shape under the persistent impulsive drives of fear and joy. She enjoys the powers of her own imagination. When her imagination is in abeyance, she is at one with the native crowd and then she breaks into hysteria exactly the same way they do: "She leapt before Gajare three feet into the air, rocked before him on her haunches, beat herself against him and nearly threw him down; she felt that she could dance better and jump higher than anyone ..... she screeched obscenities which seemed to her so amazingly and unexpectedly witty that she laughed until choked". (4)

Aissa is without complex motives that constitute an individual personality. Her imagination is more active and creative than that of the crowd of which she is herself a member. She is driven to the sacrifice of her child under the unconscious creative urge. She is ever ready for her self-mutilation in pursuance of both the Christians and pagans for rains. She is ready to put herself into the nest of the ants. Joyce Cary describes: "she rolled on them, thrashed them with her forearms, crushing them by hundreds. But, they were soldier-ants, born and bred for self-sacrifice." (5) However, the reality of life and its pain is evident here. She called out for help when she feels the biting like fire. She shrieks and she is heard shrieking, but none dares to go into the woods. Hers is a sacrifice based on primitive faith.

This lady who comes out here in an embodiment of primitivism dies an abnormal death. No doubt 'Aissa Saved' exemplifies the paradox of the primitive reality quite powerfully.

Andrew Wright rightly remarks "there will always be plenty of luck and bad luck in human affairs, there will always be suffering and disaster. If you have freedom, you have got to love evil in the world you can't get away from it." (6)

Now it is very much obvious that the characters in the novels of Joyce Cary have to follow and face the very existing realities of life. The novel, "Aissa Saved" is full of conflicting ideas like good and bad, moral immoral, evil and virtuous. However, a primitive spirit also exists in their character which finds the ultimate end, as it happens with the leading lady in the novel, "Aissa Saved".

Joyce Cary presents a colonial world which is placed against the changing reality of primitive culture in his another novel, "An American Visitor". The colonialism has been seen oscillating between materialism and idealism. It's a fantastic manifestation by Joyce Cary. The hero of the novel, Bewsher, has been a character of reformist zeal. He is actuated with this feature. His ultimate aim of life is to weave the Birri tribe into a fabric of unity. He arouses a sense of responsibility as well as sentiments of nationalism among the tribesmen. He sticks to his idealism which is far from materialism. He is never seen swayed by the feelings of materialistic gains. He tries his utmost best to keep the natives safe from foreign taints. He is well-determined not to allow any of the missionaries to have much influence on the people of the Birri tribesmen. Therefore, Dobson, the missionary objects to Bewsher's sympathy for the Birri tribesmen. Dobson's opinion about the tribesmen are that they are quite unethical as well as their religion is steeped into paganism. But, Bewsher is found to be very much adamant and isn't deterred by the overtures of the missionaries. He continues fighting for the cause of the Birri tribesmen.

But, unobvious tragedy takes place and sets quite paradoxical manifestation that the same Birri tribesmen who once idolizes Bewsher turn against him. His efforts to uplift the natives' cultural as well as religious conditions ironically lead to his death at the hands of the Birri tribesmen.

The American character, Marie Hasluck, gives force to the idealism of Bewsher. However, she doesn't succeed, because her idealism never takes any concrete shape. She appears to be drunk with her hopes of a golden age among the Birri. She starts flirting with Gore for some time and then comes under the influential charm of Bewsher. She is quite hopeful that their combined efforts would bring good days for the natives. But her own personality gets ruptured and she becomes a split personality which takes her into a dark pessimism. Her idealism remains a fantasy. Therefore, she changes her concept of the noble Birri after her bitter experiences after the death of Bewsher. Now, a sentimental idealist, Marie, changes into a practical idealist. However, she realizes that suffering and sacrifice are parts of human life. And, this self-realization is significant because she is pushed by circumstances in her life.

Joyce Cary's philosophy of life, herein, emphatically shows that in the very act of creation lies the seed of destruction. The creation moves through the various characters' lives like; Bester, Gore, the Dobson, Cottee, Marie Hasluck, the American, after whom the novel is named. A variety of attitudes have been shown through these characters and a crisscross of actions has been interwoven to emphasize the drama of conflicts. The circumstances of Bewsher's death reminds us of Frederick's thoughts of Catherine in, "A Farewell to Arms", a very famous novel composed by Earnest Hemingway. Hemingway says in the novel, "If people bring so much courage to this world, she has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them". (7)

Undoubtedly, a strain in the novel is found expression in the novel, *An American Visitor*. Joyce Cary tries to focus the native reality which very much primitive in nature. The reality has been an area of darkness in the novel which later swallows up the intruders.

The third novel of Joyce Cary appears to be the most comprehensive. This is also African novel. This is "African Witch". This novel was published in 1936. The novel positions a problem of recreating primitive life. And, this presentation of recreating of primitive life gets a description of a dusky line of history. It is so significant that its manifestations of the primitive life appear to be nightmarish which is steeped into witchcrafts, magic, superstitions. There is a significant narration of psychosis of fear in the present novel. The certain example of this is that the natives of Rimi Tribes in Nigeria still live within a tribal prototype which dates back to more than a thousand years in human life's history. From savagery to civilization in Nigeria, magic precedes religion. And, the two, magic and religion, gets fused into one which appears to be an inseparable entity. The very primitive religion of Ju-Ju in the novel, "The African Witch", has been perfectly delineated by Joyce Cary through one of the characters, "Elizabeth Aladai", as "the religion of the blood, the race, the old crocodile" (8) Elizabeth Aladai is the Ju-Ju priestess who really dominates the novel. It's her character which casts a sinister spell over the inconsiderate masses in Nigeria. Joyce Cary tries to explain the role played by Elizabeth Aladai, the priestess and a magician, in the native life: "she knew not only all the village-gossips, but the characters of almost everyone connected with the victim and the family". (9)

Elizabeth is very much famous for, and skilled in identifying the witch responsible for the death of a child is a very mystifying character in her performance. The people are very naïve and try to lay blame on Ibu of being a witch she is not a fact. Joyce Cary being an omniscient novelist in the early novels comments on the tragic consequences of this false accusation by which intelligence is defeated by the forces of paralyzed mind: "Ibu, though stupid with terror, confusion of mind, misery, cold, and hunger, was an intelligent child. This quality had probably been the cause of her ruin. All intelligent, good-looking persons are exposed to jealousy, and jealousy is the subconscious source of the hatred which produces injuries – from injuries, fear: and from fear an accusation of witch craft. In this way Africa has destroyed every year for some millions of years, a large proportion of it is more intelligent and handsome children." (10)

The core of truth is that the primitive mind in the grip of Ju-Ju spirit comes in contact with the dark passions as well as dark realities of life wherein there is a reign of hatred, fear, rage, cruelty. Excitement of different kinds finds expression here and Joyce Cary tries to show that all inseparable part of human existence: ignorance and illiteracy have been the hallmark of the life which controls the primitive mind. The readers got shocked by this.

Against the background of Ju-Ju practices which control the primitive mind, Aladai's insistence on the education raises an important issue. The readers get shocked by his lack of mental self-assurance when, after his confrontation with Rackham, he slowly develops a kind of bitterness as well as harsh animosity against the whites. The readers see that Aladai, the civilized African, sinking into his primitive-self again. And, that's different, that's thematic. He is seen even hating his European dresses. He goes further and incites anger into the heart of the natives and instigates them to the rebellion by saying, "war has come to us. It can't be avoided, except by cowards." (11)

He doesn't think as stated by Joyce Cary, "that education would abolish barbarity and violence." (12)

In the fourth African novel, "Mister Johnson", Joyce Cary deals with primitive reality again. This primitive reality continues despite the growing impact of the English civilization in Nigeria. Therefore, the setting of the novel, "Mister Johnson", is Fadda, a village town in Nigeria. Johnson is a character of the novel after whom the novel itself has been named. He is a very young man, obsessed and intoxicated with European civilization, marries Bamu, a bush girl, and has an intense longing to turn her into a civilized, sophisticated lady like. Keeping this in mind, he brings a set of white lady's dress for her. But, she appears to be indifferent to this. This was utter disappointment for him. Furthermore, she feels attracted towards the stories of her friend, Falla, about demons and ghosts. But, she isn't a lonely case. In fact, the whole native tribe of the Fadda is seen trapped into cultural stagnation. The Fadda tribe knows nothing about development and civilization. They are so naïve that they can't understand the commercial benefits of the construction of the roads which will link the bush-town with the outside world. Even this great idea failed to kindle and enliven their blunt imagination.

Johnson appears to be a ridiculous character when he is seen with the hatred for native tradition and his false pretensions to his civilized status. This makes him really a ridiculous character. He dislikes the stories of Falla and Sozy. Sozy is the old woman who narrates the stories of devil and demons. Listening to their stories, he reacts: "You damned women, always telling stories- I think you have got nothing in your heads but all that nonsense about witches and devils, and spells and corpse washer and twins." (13)

Disgusted with this tradition, he tries to emancipate himself from the tribal inhibitions. But, he is too primitive to grasp the subtle and complicated processes of civilized life. He lives in an atmosphere where the possibility of developing individual contacts and widening the mental horizon is conspicuously bleak. Bamu is the other character who is also bleak in nature and presentation. She is the one who, for the most part under the domination of her brother in her relations with Johnson, is not scheming, rather ill-intentioned. Contrasted with Bamu is Waziri, a native corrupt official. Waziri gets hold of the confidential reports by bribing the none-too-clever clerks like Mr. Johnson. In this act of Waziri can safely be seen the paralyzed creative abilities of the natives quite unable to think beyond the immediate material needs.

Therefore, in this novel, *Mister Johnson*”, again, we find the civilized whites lacking in sympathetic understanding and emotional involvement with the problems of the natives. They suffer from the administrative lapses and are found lacking in bringing any imaginative freshness to the problems which are just round the corner of the natives. They are well engaged in breaking up the old native tribal civilization without making effort to provide any new one. That’s why we find that *Blore* hates *Johnson*.

*Johnson*’s hopefulness of improvement gets a severe jolt and dangerous jerk when *Gollup*, an ex-English soldier, loses his sanity when he drinks wine and comes under the effect of it and beats his wife, *Matumbi*, mercilessly in the same way as the uncivilized natives do. *Joyce Cary*, herein, tries to present two types of characters showing two characteristics of the reality of existence. *Johnson* moves from primitivism to civilization, whereas *Gollup* falls from civilization to primitivism.

*Joyce Cary* attempts to give a human dimension to the schizophrenic character of *Gollup* by reconciling the civilized with the brute in his inherent character.

Thus, *Joyce Cary* appears as an original artist of novel writing and not an imitator in any case. In his novels, story-telling and character building have been given exceptionally distinctive importance. As *Kenneth Richardson* goes on saying:

“... his (*Cary*’s) books displays a gift for story-telling and an ability to create a great diversity of characters.” (14)

## 2. Conclusion

In setting down the society and delineating the various but individual characters, *Joyce Cary* knows well to project through imagination. He tries to portray the primitive pictures of the Africans’ real lives. These pictures representing the primitive characteristics of the society appear so real which carry the readers to a land where they can see them visually, and feel them. They feel the real pain of the grotesqueness of the lives of the uncivilized people of Africa. They feel the seriousness of the modernity of the characters of the upper society, too. However, they don’t feel hatred or gloom while reading the novels which demonstrate the primitive life-style and bizarre, rather they find *Joyce Cary* portraying a society which is corruption-ridden, murky and miserable, but not disgusting. The novels and their characters never create shock like that of *Swift*. Like *W B Yeats* and *Conrad*, *Joyce Cary* doesn’t lament the passing of the old European traditions of a rigid hierarchical order system of values. *Joyce Cary* as an artist presenting primitive problems of wider ramifications justifies the ideals as well as convictional notions of the society. He succeeds to a considerable extent in presenting the reality of the primitive instances. This primitive reality has been outlined in the novels in the fashion and manner which projects the society in its core level without any ramification. Here, *Cary* appears to be a thoughtful write as well as philosophical novelist who believes in the efficacy of novel as an art and an efficacy of the characters which not only pleases us rather enables us to have a better understanding of the society, people and the world as well as human nature. His stories absorb our interests, and take us to a new world, away from our routine work where we feel, experience and enjoy. We get convinced that there happened to be primitive life-style which seemed so harsh, tragic and doomed, yet full of life-blood. *Joyce Cary*, no doubt, believes in tragedy, primitive-reality of life. Yet he never appears to be a pessimist. He appears to be keeping faith in the imperishability of life. He, no doubt, sends a message of hope to the world which becomes crystal clear in the following words of his: “... if all the life on the earth should be overwhelmed in an afternoon, the womb of ocean would still hold the teeming seed and in its own time .....bring forth another race of man, other cultures.” (15)

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