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Anna Cichoń

The Realm of Personality and History

A Study of J. G. Farrell's Fiction

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Introduction

James Gordon Farrell (1935–1979) established his reputation as one of Britain's major post-war novelists with his historical fiction. *Troubles* won the Faber Memorial Prize in 1970 and two years later he was awarded the Booker Prize for *The Siege of Krishnapur*. The widely acclaimed final part of the Empire Trilogy, *The Singapore Grip* (1979), became a popular best-seller. Farrell's early works, the three novels with contemporary settings—*A Man From Elsewhere* (1963), *The Lung* (1965), *A Girl in the Head* (1967) and a short story ("The Pussycat Who Fell in Love with the Suitcase")—have not gained such high esteem. Yet, these also are valuable because they show the writer's artistic potential and the development of his creative imagination.

J. G. Farrell was born in Liverpool on 23 January 1935 and lived there with his parents and two brothers until 1939, when the family moved to Southport, to a huge Victorian house the family had inherited.[1] During the war the house was inhabited by several elderly homeless relatives and friends. War memories find numerous reflections in Farrell's fiction. The name of the family estate—Boscobel—is given by him to the lodging of Boris Slattery, the hero of a *A Girl in the Head*. The Majestic Hotel in *Troubles*, envisaged as a huge Victorian residence, is inhabited by eccentric elderly people. The idea of being besieged, central for *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *The Singapore Grip*, originates in his experience of observing the besieged community in the house. In *Troubles* the characters are not so much besieged in the military sense of the word but isolated. In 1941 a bomb damaged Boscobel, and Farrell commemorates this catastrophe in *Troubles*, where the Sinn Feiners blow up Queen Victoria's monument, in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, where buildings fall to pieces and people are constantly threatened by explosions and, finally, in *The Singapore Grip*, where the city suffers from the Japanese air raids and the characters witness horrifying explosions. From 1945 the Farrells lived in Ireland, but when James was twelve, he was sent to a boarding school in Lancashire. We can guess that being left alone was a traumatic experience, since Farrell used the separation of children from their parents as a theme in all of his first three novels.

After graduating from school and teaching for a year in a Dublin school, Farrell went to Canada and the USA. He spent several months there and

[1] Bibliographical information about Farrell can be found in: Binns 1986; Dean in HS:192–205; Drabble 1983; Spurling 1981, 1982; Winnifrith 1983; Mahon 1979. Besides, few interviews bring some details from Farrell's life: Brock 1978; Dean 1978:11.

worked in the Canadian Arctic as a fireman. This experience helped Farrell to depict the work of the Voluntary Fire Brigades so convincingly in *The Singapore Grip*. There are passages in the novel where the hypnotized characters watch fire with admiration and fear, because, fascinated with its power, they cannot move—a frequent experience for Farrell, as he admitted in interview (Brock 1978).

In 1956 Farrell started reading Law at Brasenose College, Oxford. After a few months of studying he contracted polio and spent half a year in hospital in an iron lung. In that period he underwent several deep depressions, given literary expression in *The Lung*. This novel, a reflection of his illness, bears several autobiographical traces, in that the hero is a graduate from Oxford, an ex-teacher of languages who had travelled widely in his youth, including a stay in Canada. After his illness, crippled, Farrell returned to his college to study Modern Languages. His academic career was undistinguished and in 1960 he graduated with degree in French and Spanish.

For the next three years Farrell went to France as a language teacher and there wrote his first novel, *A Man From Elsewhere* (1963). It is his only book not to have been re-issued. Farrell "disinherited" it as being below his standard and did not list it with his other works on the title verso of *The Singapore Grip*. Back in London, making a living as a teacher of English and a reviewer for Hutchinson, Farrell wrote *The Lung* (1965) and *A Girl in the Head* (1967). By this time the novelist lived in a small flat in Notting Hill Gate that he used to call a "greenhouse." It reappeared as such in *A Girl in the Head* as the lodging of Boris Slattery during his first days in Maidenhair. It is the only early novel of which the author himself approved, considering this book by far his best.[2]

The Arts Council Prize and a Harkness Fellowship gave him the chance to visit the United States. In New York he started research on his first historical novel, *Troubles* (1971). Farrell's reason for turning to history was at least twofold. First of all, he believed that it was easier to talk about the past than the present because "as a rule, people have already made up their minds what they think about the present. About the past they are more susceptible to clarity of vision."[3] Farrell wanted to create a world to which he could attach a new meaning and thus direct and control the reactions of his readers. He claimed that history leaves so much out that only the novelist who recreates the everyday life of an epoch can tell what it actually felt like to be there. Secondly, Farrell was of the opinion that the fall of the British Empire was the only really interesting thing that had happened

[2] J. G. Farrell, extract from a letter published in HS:161.

[3] "J. G. Farrell," [in:] *Contemporary Novelists*, ed. by J. Vinson, London, 1972, p. 400.

during his lifetime. When he was a child, the Empire still existed, however, it totally collapsed during his adulthood.

Troubles was published in 1971, and even though the novel dealt with a now distant period of Irish history, "the troubles" started again in Northern Ireland that same year, giving the novel an unintended topicality. The novelist said in an interview that when he was finishing research for *Troubles* that included reading the *Irish Times* for the twenties, he would come across reports of "exactly the same things, sometimes even in the same streets in Belfast"[4] in contemporary newspapers. After the success of *Troubles*, which won the Faber Memorial Prize, Farrell started research on what was originally aimed as a sequel to this book—a novel set in India during the Mutiny of 1857. In fact India was not an alien country for the author; his parents had lived there for some years before World War II, and the novel is dedicated to Farrell's father. The original title of this book was *Difficulties*, which suggested that the novelist saw it as linked to *Troubles*: as a further contemplation of the nature and behavior of the British middle class colonials (Spurling 1981).

When in 1971 he had finished his library research on the Mutiny, Farrell went to India for the first time. During that visit he started the "Indian Diary," which was published as an appendix to his last novel. Like *The Hill Station*, the forty-page-long diary was reconstructed on the basis of notes Farrell had left. He probably did not mean to publish the diary, but rather kept it as notes from his journey to the Far East.[5] The text shares some similarities with his fiction—it shows Farrell's love of detail, so significant in his works because it leads the novelist towards the novel of manners. The tone of the diary, too, resembles the comic and ironic tone Farrell uses so often in his novels. These distancing techniques allow him to comment on a chosen situation without sounding patronizing or being overtly moralizing. Many scenes described in the notes seem to have influenced *The Siege of Krishnapur*. He saw a naked holy man in Lucknow and this encounter probably inspired the scene with the devotee of Siva in Krishnapur. There is also Farrell's visit to the Maharajah's palace: the architectural details and artistic objects of the place were probably transformed into fiction. Though Farrell did not go to Simla during his stay in India, he visited another mountain spa, Mussoorie, which helped him to reconstruct the atmosphere of a smart Indian resort, so central for *The Hill Station*. Besides, the train jour-

[4] J. G. Farrell, in an interview with G. Brock (1978).

[5] Spurling claims (HS:9) that the diary is published in the same volume as *The Hill Station* not because it had a direct bearing on this novel but because it gives an account of Farrell's "immediate reactions to India" and because he felt that the diary should be available to readers.

neys described frequently in the diary and funeral rites find their reflection in the unfinished novel. The writer was fascinated with the cities full of people, traffic, street scenes. During the first few days in India he was terrified by the careless driving, which reappears in a scene where Matthew Webb, who is in a Far Eastern city for the first time, is car-sick during a drive around Singapore.

India intrigued and puzzled Farrell. He realized that it was beyond the comprehension of a European. He wrote in the diary that "one sees and registers so much but it's hard to make it stick" (HS:249) and "I see things without understanding them" (HS:211). His fictional characters experience the same sensation. No matter how hard they try to understand India, it escapes simple interpretations.

Farrell's emotional response to India was complex. On the one hand, he felt uncomfortable with the social and racial divisions that still existed there. This sense of guilt reappears in his Empire Trilogy and is expressed most directly by Matthew Webb in *The Singapore Grip* when he is tormented by moral doubts: "Could you own something like the Mayfair and still consider yourself a just man?" (SG:389). Yet, on the other hand, Farrell understood the ambivalent attitudes of the British in India because he himself felt indifference towards the natives. This sensation made him even more uneasy. In the diary he stresses several times that the poverty and injustice, so striking at the beginning, impress themselves less forcibly after a longer stay in India. He is surprised with "how quickly one shuts off areas of vision. Even the children now hardly engage my attention as they play in the dust. It's an acceptance that this is the way things are" (HS:215). He also admits that he is frequently annoyed with crowds of people who beg in the streets. Later he adds: "It's amazing, or not amazing, how quickly one comes to accept the omnipresent servants in India and to accept all sorts of minor jobs to be done for one" (HS:220). Perhaps these discoveries allowed Farrell to portray the colonizers so convincingly. Though they do not care about the natives, and treat privileges as by natural right, the novelist does not show them as ruthless tyrants, but as ordinary people who are not so much individually guilty, but rather share in the collective guilt of colonization.

Shortly after the publication of *The Siege of Krishnapur* in 1973 Farrell was awarded his second important literary prize—the Booker Prize. In his acceptance speech, he accused Booker McConnell Ltd of colonial exploitation of their West Indian workers. The speech turned into a small literary scandal since, after all, Farrell did accept the money. In 1975 Farrell went to Singapore, the Far East and Saigon. Two years later his final part of the trilogy, *The Singapore Grip*, was published. This time the novelist chose to show British Imperialism also from an economic point of view. The book

exposes past British exploitation of Malay and Chinese labourers on the rubber estates. In fact, Farrell's interest in the economic fabric of Empire is also present in the two earlier novels, but is not shown in such a direct and factual manner.

After having finished the trilogy, Farrell left London and bought a farm in Ireland's County Cork. This was where he planned to finish his next Indian book, a sequel to *The Siege of Krishnapur*, set in the Hill Station of Simla. But on 11 April 1979, while fishing, he slipped from the cliff and drowned, overwhelmed by a freak wave. Farrell left an unfinished novel. Its title, *The Hill Station*, was supplied by the editor, John Spurling, who published it posthumously in 1981. In the light of the author's hostile comments on the publication of other unfinished works, the appearance of *The Hill Station* in book form seems quite ironic. In a review of Malcolm Lowry's *Dark as the Grave* and *October Ferry to Gabriola*, Farrell criticized posthumous editing of fiction, which, to him, awakened "gravest doubts, even if published by the closest of relatives."[6]

It is rather difficult to treat *The Hill Station* in the same way as his other books. The unfinished manuscript is only an incomplete, first version of the novel, nineteen chapters and rough notes totalling fifty thousand words of an intended eighty to a hundred thousand. Farrell used to rewrite his texts several times, first making a draft in typescript and then revising it. He also worked on the language of his narratives until the last version. The editor, John Spurling, admits in the Foreword to omitting marginal additions because Farrell had not indicated where exactly they were to be placed. In addition, many quotes from source materials were omitted because Farrell had not decided how to use them. The editor also had to make a few corrections "of clumsy grammar," but generally "worked on the principle of leaving anything rough that could be left without baldly jolting the reader" (HS:8). Thus, when one reads *The Hill Station*, one cannot resist the feeling that the novel was written by a different author—the chapters seem incomplete and hectic. They lack the precision and unforgettable atmosphere of the earlier works. Even on the plane of language there are striking differences. The sentences are rough, short and lacking in sophistication when compared with the rich metaphorical style of *Troubles* or the abundant ironic understatements of *The Siege of Krishnapur*.

Beside his novels, Farrell also wrote one short story, and book reviews for different newspapers and periodicals. His interest in fiction was varied, and ranged from Victorian to modern, from novels with historical themes to those depicting the hippie avant-guard protest movement. His evaluation of the situation of the novel in Britain and of contemporary historical writers

[6] J. G. Farrell, "Late Lowry," *New Statesman*, 19 July, 1974, p. 89.

was rather unfavorable.[7] Farrell's non-fiction writing shows the novelist's critical assumptions, his literary taste and various fields of interest. In particular, as his critical papers reveal, Farrell was a great admirer of Malcolm Lowry. This may explain why Farrell's early characters, Sands and Slattery, should remind one of Lowry's Consul. In an interview with Malcolm Dean, Farrell admitted that he was strongly influenced by the author of *Under The Volcano*.

Critical assessment of Farrell is not abundant, though it has been growing. In the eighties, especially, there was a noticeable revival of interest in his work which, despite increased appreciation for the writer, could also have been stimulated by the growing popularity of imperial themes and myths, both in literature and in the mass media (Rushdie 1984:125; Stevenson 1993:126–127). So far there has been published one monograph of Farrell by Ronald Binns. The very fact that it appeared in the Contemporary Writers Series, a series exploring the works of major post-war writers with an international reputation, placed Farrell among the best novelists (Bellow, Doctorov, Drabble, Fowles, Grass, Lessing, Lowry, Murdoch, Robbe-Grillet, Vonnegut, Patrick White) and raised his status in the literary scene.

From the start of his career, critics appreciated Farrell's talent and traced his achievements with great interest in the development of this promising writer. David Holloway discovered Farrell's artistic potential and predicted his career: "I believe that the Anglo-Irish author of *A Man From Elsewhere* will be someone about whom a great deal will be heard in the future" (Binns 1986:24). Other critics followed Holloway in appreciating Farrell's output which, despite its rather limited quantity, justified the highest praise. He was called "one of the two or three best English novelists of his generation" (Spurling 1981) because he contributed to the revival of the English historical novel. Farrell was seen as "the most talented member of an otherwise disappointing generation of British novelists" (Palliser 1979). Highest praise came from A. N. Wilson who commented, in noticing Farrell's artistic achievement, that: "His published oeuvre shows him to have been one of the outstanding novelists of his generation. There were not many decent novelists who made their debut in the sixties. But Farrell would have stood up in any decade" (1981). Critics have paid attention to the novelist's interesting treatment of the imperial theme, his mastery characterization, atmosphere

[7] Farrell frequently complained that even good novels had serious weaknesses. E.g. , he appreciated Mary Renault, but had no belief in her portraits, and claimed that the only good historical portrait of a real personage was created by Richard Hughes in *The Fox in the Attic*. Though Paul Scott's tetralogy *The Jewel in the Crown* disillusioned him, the novelist appreciated Scott's "powerful evocation of British India." He reviewed some Irish writers, including Julia O'Faolian, whom he believed to be one of the best Irish novelists. For a list of Farrell's reviews see Bibliography: Selected Non-fiction.

and imagery which, together with Farrell's many varieties of style, make for aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction (Binns 1986; Drabble and Spurling in HS; Bergonzi 1980).

Research on Farrell's early works is scarce, and is limited to short summaries of the novels, with a stress on the influences of other writers. The three early books are seen as "not particularly ambitious and a little too reminiscent of other novels. *A Girl in the Head*, though very funny and sharply written, reminds one very strongly of *Lolita*" (Hynes 1981:126). Ronald Binns remarks that the hero, Boris Slattery, is "another brooding semi-Lowryesque hero, trapped into an absurd and painful existence" (1979b:22–23). He adds that technically this novel is Farrell's most experimental work, but "it does not quite come off: one senses a variety of undigested influences—Camus, Beckett and Lowry." In the same essay Binns notices that *The Lung* "seems saturated in Lowreysque narrative strategies. Martin Sands, the hero, fortyish, unemployed, and a bit of a drunk is a clearly recognizable resurrection of the Consul" (*l.c.*). Also *A Man From Elsewhere* is under the influence of Camus, Sartre and Existentialism. The critics agree that the value of *A Man From Elsewhere*, *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* lies mainly in Farrell's interest in large questions of history and politics, and the author's "readiness to appropriate other codes into his fiction, including the dominant influence of French cinema" (Bergonzi 1980:57). Binns distinguishes recurring motifs, such as the theme of the lonesome hero struggling with hostile surroundings, a melancholy view of male-female relationships, the inertia of characters and the theme of bodily decay (1986:36,38).

Farrell's historical fiction has gained broadest critical attention and highest evaluation. L. Bristow-Smith states that Farrell's vision of history and the view of civilization as "something dissolving into chaos is almost Websterian" (1983:47). Other critics claim that his works have an almost "Tolstoyan objectivity" (Palliser 1979) because Farrell has a talent for capturing the ambiency of vanished eras and treats history both as a process and as a concrete precondition of the present. The Empire Trilogy is frequently referred to as a political work, where the author's "attitude is neither as detached nor as neutral as it may at first glance appear. All the distancing is directed towards one end—the revelation of the absurdity and injustice of things as they are, and the need for radical change" (Drabble 1981:191). A. N. Wilson is even of the opinion that "Farrell's novels throw more light on the Harold [Wilson] years than they do on the history of the Empire" (1981). In "Down to the Bone" the reviewer praises *The Siege of Krishnapur*, noticing that Farrell "uses India, unabashedly, as a backcloth against which to view the British and 1857 as a mirror to 1957" (Anonymous 1973).

It has been noticed that Farrell gives a remarkable evidence of the possibility of a conscious realism and the use of history in fiction. "He shows himself adroit at the manipulation of multiple fictional codes. He writes with faultless precision and delicacy, and a remarkable command over a wide range of registers, from evocative metaphorical description to humorous dialogue" (Bergonzi 1980:63).

Farrell's narratives are full of imagery and symbolism. Being a master of language, he combines his unique metaphorical style with humor. His talent for irony and black comedy fascinates the readers and critics alike (Shrimpton 1981:19; O'Toole 1972:400; Hynes 1981:126; Mo 1978:338). While discussing the similarities of his works, critics notice that all parts of the trilogy are based on a similar situation of a siege, endurance and ultimate defeat. Throughout, the novelist takes as his starting point "the British myth of themselves as gallant failures" (Bayley 1987:20; Bristow-Smith 1983:45). A British community is first endangered and then destroyed by an external threat from another community of different political, ideological and religious beliefs.

The historical novels, like his early works, frequently remind critics of other books, and it is often claimed that Farrell was influenced by numerous writers. So it is variously stated that he wrote with "the converging styles of expatriate fiction (Conrad, Forster, Orwell, Lowry) and historical fiction" (Binns 1979a:70), that he borrowed Stendhal's view of history, that he adopted Mann's attention to detail and that he took from Richard Hughes "some tricks of storytelling" (King 1979:14) or his methods of characterization from Dickens.

Farrell's novels have evoked interest not only in Great Britain but also abroad. In Poland, his trilogy has already been translated and he has received critical attention from B. Bałutowa, who introduced the writer in her survey of the twentieth century English novelists (1983:15–21).

Neither it is surprising that Farrell is well known in India. *The Siege of Krishnapur* is appreciated both for its art and for its ideology—that is, an objective view on the Indian Mutiny with the rights and wrongs on both sides of the conflict. It is juxtaposed to other novels about the Mutiny where the Indian fight for independence is seen in terms of a rebellion. Yet, even this well-received novel is not free from the charge of unfairness towards the natives. In *The Siege of Krishnapur* Farrell does not allow the natives to present their point of view, because he does not draw any substantial portraits of the Hindus. He makes up for it in *The Singapore Grip* when bringing the Chinese and Malay characters to the fore, a fact which was favorably noticed (Singh 1979:23–24).

In the USA Farrell is relatively less well known. James Hynes attributes

this neglect to the different expectations of American readers: "In America, with the exception of a curiosity like *Ragtime* or a potboiler like *Sophie's Choice*, historical novels are usually lumped with genre fiction [...] It could be that the lack of American interest has to do with our relative lack of history" (1981:126).

Farrell's early psychological novels, which deal with escapism, loneliness of the characters and the impossibility of communicating with other people, have affinity with the literature of isolation represented, among others, by Conrad, Graham Greene, Joyce, Woolf, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Lowry, Murdoch. The theme of the absurdity of human condition, the inevitable devaluation of ideas, the unromantic view of man as reduced to a machine, is also the theme of the work of the Theatre of the Absurd and such dramatists as Beckett, Genet, Pinter or Ionesco (Esslin 1980:24), Kafka, and Witkacy. Besides, Farrell's early novels are largely shaped by Existentialism and have a great deal in common with the books of Sartre and Camus. In fact, the Existential view of man, of his loneliness and the absurdity of his existence, is characteristic also of Farrell's mature novels.

The trilogy, in turn, belongs to the broad category of the historical novel. This label, however, gives rise to more questions than answers. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to describe Farrell's model of the historical novel. Avrom Fleishman teasingly begins his study of the genre by stating that "everybody knows what a historical novel is; perhaps this is why few have volunteered to define it in print" (1971:3). And, indeed, there exists a general "pattern" of the genre which corresponds to the readers' expectations (Turner 1979:334; Trzynadlowski 1986:7; Nelson 1973:38–39). Novels in which the characters, setting and events, both private and public, are drawn from the past, which utilize history to present an imaginative reconstruction of the bygone periods, are labelled as historical (Dictionaries 1970, 1987).

Nevertheless, this definition poses several theoretical problems, which have gained a huge critical response in recent years (Turner 1979; Hutcheon 1988:87–113). It is difficult to define this genre because history plays a number of distinctly different roles and there are various kinds of historical novels: some works invent a past, others disguise or recreate a documented past. Besides, this kind of fiction is delineated not by the formal properties but by the content. Thus the historical novel may apply and subordinate to its purpose various techniques, structures and genre conventions, ranging from psychological, philosophical and political novels to the novel of manners, the novel of ideas, romance and adventure (Trzynadlowski 1986:15). Finally, in order to define the historical novel one needs a conception of history and fiction, while neither of these terms is a stable, universally agreed upon concept (Turner 1979).

The last few decades have witnessed widespread, radical questioning of both narrative history and realistic fiction. Rejecting realistic imitation as inadequate (Lodge 1971:33; Weiman 1982:9–10), contemporary novelists have turned towards "fantasy and fabulation, towards documentary, such as the 'non-fiction' novel of Truman Capote or the 'new journalism' of Tom Wolfe; or towards the alienated, the problematical and the self-aware" (Bergonzi 1980:56; Higdon 1984:3–15). Moreover, the steady infiltration of structuralism and new methodologies resulted in a growing scepticism towards history. History, philosophy and all forms of human discourse are only fictions, or 'texts' because "human experience is grounded in language as an institution" (Bergonzi 1980:43). From this concept it follows that histories resemble novels in their formal organization and are incapable of depicting reality since our reality, being itself a fiction, is unknowable. According to such theories, the past is a creation of the present and entirely depends on our reconstructions of it. And consequently, viewed from this vantage point, one could celebrate the 'death' of historical narrative (McEwan 1987:17; Fleishman 1971:256).

However, the literary scene today is complex and leaves room for both experimental and traditional works. Realistic historical fictions are still being written (Lodge 1971:33; McEwan 1987:3). The authors are aware of the conventionality of fiction and, while preserving the traditional decorum of the novel, use the insights of problematical fiction (Bergonzi 1980:57). J. G. Farrell and such novelists as Richard Hughes, Olivia Manning, Joyce Cary, William Golding, John Fowles, Timothy Mo, are truthful both to the time in which the story is set and to the time of writing (McEwan 1987:3). Farrell was not influenced by the views which treat history as a "verbal construct," a treatment not artistically attractive to the novelist unless rewritten in a comic or apocalyptic mode (Bergonzi 1980:45). Though conscious of the growing scepticism towards the writing of history, he treated the past with respect, convinced that many ideas can be conveyed without undermining the status of this discipline.

The historical aspects of Farrell's fiction are here analyzed primarily in the light of George Lukács' theory as presented in *The Historical Novel*. Since Farrell's understanding of the thematic concerns of this genre is more traditional than experimental, in the sense that Farrell does not question the notion of "the historical past," it seems justifiable to apply this classic of genre theory to the Empire Trilogy. Lukács claims that the historical novel must be set in a period recognizably "historical" in relation to the time of writing. The plot should include historical events in the public sphere which mingle with and affect the personal fortunes of the protagonists, who start to perceive their own lives as something historically conditioned. The

characters' individuality must derive from the historical peculiarity of the age, because in their psychology and destiny the heroes are to represent social trends and historical forces. The delineation of manners and a broad presentation of the everyday life of people are used to portray the past as it actually occurred. The bygone periods must appear both "humanly authentic and re-livable by a reader of a later age" (Lukács 1982:40). A historical novel should also include "real" personages and the fictitious heroes should live in the same world as historical persons. The world presented in a historical novel may be confined to a microcosm which generalizes and "encapsulates" the essence of the period. For Lukács historical authenticity can be achieved when the quality of inner life and morality of the characters derives directly from a given age. The task of a historical novelist is to bring the past close to the readers, to demonstrate "by artistic means that the historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way" (*l.c.*:43). Besides, space in historical fiction must be allotted to the contemplation of history, by examining the nature of the relationship between past and present and by offering an interpretation of facts, sources and mechanisms.

The aim of the present study is to examine J. G. Farrell's treatment of characters and history in his novels—two aspects which are essential for his fiction. The strongest emphasis is placed on the interpretation of themes explored in these books, while form will receive critical attention only in so far as it seems indispensable in explaining the originality of Farrell's work. The discussion covers six complete novels. *The Hill Station* has not been analyzed here, because the narrative is unfinished and can only partly be said to reflect the artistic assumptions of the writer. The thematic differences between Farrell's early and mature works have determined the shape of the present study and its division into two parts which are, nevertheless, very closely interrelated. The first chapter is devoted to the analyses of the early three novels, with the stress put on the inner, psychological determinants that shape the characters. The following two sections deal with the external determinants and the historical events which inform the trilogy. In the Conclusion an attempt has been made to link all Farrell's novels, in order to show the continuity and development of his works.

Chapter I

Characters in the Early Novels: the Psyche and Reality

J. G. Farrell's early works, in particular *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head*, are devoted to psychological studies of characters. In these novels the protagonists are strongly determined by numerous factors. They are restricted in their choices since, in Farrell's view, human life is shaped by numerous internal and external forces, their range varying from imprisonment by one's own bodily and emotional experiences, through the enslavement by immediate environment, to subordination to society, politics and history. Since there are so many determinants which have an impact upon the characters, they perceive their existence as absurd, meaningless and futile. The view of the absurdity of human life is the principle dominating the construction of characters and characterization in the early novels.

In the first three novels Farrell presents his characters from an unromantic point of view. Human beings are seen as "slightly absurd creatures with identities determined and limited by the functioning of their bodies" (Binns 1986:39). The dependence on their bodies, which constantly reminds the characters about their physicality, manifests itself in the fact that the protagonists permanently must face illnesses, growing old and death. Farrell depicts the physical decay of his protagonists with an almost naturalistic precision. Their bodies are animated by emotions and intellect, since human existence relies on a symbiosis of the physical and the emotional/intellectual elements. Neither of them takes advantage of the other, both being equally important. Between these two there is a strong correlation and when one is missing, man cannot function properly.

When the characters fall ill or become threatened by deteriorating health, they almost automatically give up hope of achieving anything significant in life. The hero of *The Lung* states that "What is left of him after distillation in the lung is called Martin Sands. That is not much. Like a cucumber he was ninety percent water" (L:142–143). He is no longer able to view life with any optimism. This is why, when placed in the iron lung, he thinks that he "must abandon the future and remain always in the present" (L:56). The hero of *A Girl in the Head* shares a similar experience. During his illness, Boris Slattery suddenly comes to the conclusion that all his efforts to live a decent life have been futile. From the perspective of a sick person, he believes that no human effort, whether intellectual or physical, is worth undertaking. Thus an illness both limits one's material existence and moulds one's way of thinking. Weak and exhausted, Martin notices that

his "shoulders hang" and his mind "travels blankly like a vacuum cleaner" (GH:9). Also Regan, dying of cancer, discovers with bitter surprise and disillusionment that he is incapable of creating anything since he suffers physical pain. Even his face loses its wise expression: "The lines on his face which had seemed so significant when illuminated by his burning eyes now held nothing but the rigidity of a mask" (ME:98). When Regan wonders how Sayer could perceive him, despite the irony characteristic of him, he is convinced that Sayer would see his conservative views as a result of sclerosis:

> [...] the inevitable evolution from conservatism measured ineluctably by the hardening of the arteries. And he [Sayer] would have been right, for not only had the man himself changed but also the truth had changed, as it will for aging men (ME:105).

For Farrell's protagonists illness functions as a *memento mori*. When their lives are threatened, they realize that despite all successes and achievements, their existence is empty and meaningless. As soon as they cannot live as they used to, they fall into depressions and instantly separate themselves from the world. The characters believe that they are worthy only when they are healthy and have strength to fight (Spurling 1982:173),[1] to create, to defend their standpoints. They believe that they are what they do. When they lose fuller control of themselves, they think they are reduced to mere matter. Coming to this conclusion, Sayer states: "The things I believe in are my whole life... they're me. I'm nothing without them" (ME:153–154). Regan reaches a similar awareness when towards the end of his life, under the pressure of time, he cannot write books: "his creative life over, he was now merely a passive animal being led down several dark streets to the abattoir. He might as well be dead" (ME:106).

Only healthy and physically well-functioning people are treated like human beings. Crippled or physically inefficient, an individual is only a "lump of matter." When Martin Sands is transported to a hospital, he perceives himself as an object: "He let himself be carried away, horizontally sandwiched between two vertical uniforms, his heart lightened by resignation" (L:38). Similarly, Boris Sands is also seen in grotesque terms, when he suffers a heart attack while carrying a parcel of potatoes:

> Then he became unconscious for a moment or two. Subsequently he was discovered, a stretcher was summoned and he was conveyed to a nearby hospital. Meanwhile someone had collected up the potatoes and arranged them on the stretcher around his recumbent body, rather as if he had been a side of beef on its way to the oven (GH:7–8).

Despite their ambitious plans to live sublime and sophisticated lives, the characters cannot overcome their physicality; they cannot liberate them-

[1] Spurling claims that competition is the essence of existence for Farrell's characters.

selves from the prison of their bodies, which determines their spiritual state. The most radical view of human existence is expressed by one of the characters in *A Girl in the Head*. According to Dr. Cohen, man is not a noble being, but an ordinary and deceptive mechanism. For Dr. Cohen "the heart is only a muscle" and "the story of life is a story of chemicals" (GH:46), and a doctor's job is that of a mechanic who must repair broken equipment.

For Farrell's characters, being alive means wearing out one's energy. The processes of aging, to which everybody is subject, are relentless and inexorable. This can be seen best in the presentation of elderly people who are biologically exhausted and therefore physically ugly or even repulsive. Their bodies are deformed and damaged. When Sayer travels by train, he observes several old peasants and notices that their faces are ravaged by toil, skin tanned to leathery brown, dirt ingrained in their skin, and "fingers twisted and knotted as if they had been suddenly frozen in a moment of agony" (ME:40). Boris Slattery recollects his grandmother without any sentimentality but indeed with the irony characteristic of him. When he looks at her old photographs, he concludes that:

> There could be no possible connection between the attractive girl in the picture and that stooped, baggy-skinned creature with a sweet tooth who used to decorate my childhood with despair. The looseness of her skin. Did some essence of Grandmother shrink inside it to leave all that unoccupied space? (GH:24).

Boris is equally impenetrable when he looks at Granny Dongeon crying. He coldly notices that "a small tear appeared in one of Granny's rheumy eyes and lost itself to irrigate the deep wrinkles of her sagging cheeks" (GH:77). Boris is not malicious in his observations, though he clearly lacks sympathy towards the elderly. He takes it for granted that they must die soon. When he thinks about the approaching winter, the following ideas cross his mind:

> Time passing. How quickly it fled. [...] The long winter in Boscobel. Granny Dongeon would be sure to die this time. She had only just made it through the last one. That would mean tears and long faces and everyone dressed in black. They would say he was heartless if he went out for a drink or showed any sign of enjoying himself. [...] snowbound in Boscobel with Granny Dongeon's corpse (GH:54).

In Farrell's early fiction old age manifests itself not only in the physical decay of a human body. What is perhaps even more terrifying, is mental, intellectual deterioration. With their obsessions and stereotypes old people are horribly grotesque. They isolate themselves from reality and live in hermetic worlds of their past recollections and faultily-perceived present events. The elderly are perceived as worn out and exhausted old people, whose mental and physical state is regrettable.[2]

[2] Old people were to reappear in *Troubles* though in that novel they are presented with more warmth and understanding of their weaknesses. As Spurling noticed (1982:162), in the Majestic the two Dongeon grannies "have multiplied into any number of half-deaf and ailing old permanent residents."

Almost all the characters in Farrell's three early novels contemplate the problems of passing away and dying, which are also treated in naturalistic terms: dying, like aging, is simply using up energy. At some point the mechanism of the human body stops functioning. Therefore, death can be reduced to its mere physical dimension. The protagonists realize that the border between life and death is a delicate and fragile barrier. Sayer gains this awareness when he looks at Regan enfeebled by cancer. The writer's yellowish skin is stretched tightly over his face:

> with the transparent quality of thin china. A palpitating gray vein wormed over his temple and disappeared into the brush of gray hair. As Sayer approached he thought how fragile this skull looked. He felt that he would be able to put his finger through it as easily as through an eggshell (ME:171).

In *A Man From Elsewhere* death, an inseparable element of human existence, is devoid of mystery. From a remote perspective it is "not only inevitable but eternal, not only tragic but right" (ME:124). The protagonists of the two following novels have slightly different considerations on dying. If it is understood in other terms in *A Man From Elsewhere*, this is because death has a different role in this book than in *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head*. In the first novel the problem of dying is considered not only from a philosophical, moral or biological point of view, though such ideas remain important. It also functions as a device to dramatize the ideological conflicts of the characters, and show that even when they face ultimate matters, they remain faithful to their ideas.

In *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* the death that threatens individuals predisposes them to reflect deeply on transience. In the hospital Martin Sands comes to the conclusion that living is only waiting for a tragedy to happen, and tells a nurse:

> 'It doesn't make any real difference whether this tragedy happens tomorrow or in twenty year's time since there's no avoiding it... everything we do, absolutely everything, whether it's playing marbles or being the Prime Minister, is just a way of passing the time till it happens... even the things we enjoy like going to the cinema or making love...'
> 'Don't be dirty.'
> 'I just thought I'd mention it in passing' (L:64).

Boris in *A Girl in the Head* perceives the whole world in terms of passing away and dying. He makes a projection of his thoughts on everything he notices: on people, objects, situations, nature. Thus when he looks at things, his thoughts are connected with death: "The leaves are dead because death is a built-in characteristic of all living things" (GH:46). Even when he recollects the past, he also tends to color it with his present depression. He

remembers his arrival at Maidenhair and recalls that what he noticed the very first day was "a shrub dying slowly," "skeletons of bicycles," "a dirty cement platform" and "amputated ends of cobbled streets" (GH:13). When, in retrospect, Boris tries to evaluate his decision to stay in this seaside resort, "a cemetery of all initiative" (GH:15), the only comment he can think of is the following: "And so I toiled bitterly up the descending escalator of my life" (GH:107). Moreover, when he recalls the relationship with his wife, he claims now that years ago they understood each other much better because they had the same awareness. Flower, like Boris, "knew there was nothing but darkness and death" (GH:120) and shared with him the "unbearable knowledge of how everything must end" (GH:121). Obviously, all these thoughts are only Boris's interpretations of his spiritual state. He becomes obsessed with death and dying. He comes to the conclusion that human attempts at a satisfying life make no sense because everybody is "undergoing the same sort of evolution [...] moving inevitably through a cycle of impersonal changes" (GH:167). Under the influence of melancholy thoughts he wonders what will remain of people, since everything is temporary: people, nature, all orders, change cyclically. Boris calls these changes "the torture of life" (GH:56) and concludes that everything will be smothered away by the wind of time. More and more frequently, Boris notices that he's "bored to death"; he is sure that other people, just like him, feel "the descent from youth and strength, the descent from early dreams" (GH:157).

Another important factor that determines and shapes Farrell's early characters is their past recollections and experiences. They frequently rethink their past, attach new meaning to it and, when they confront it either with a past actuality or a present reality, they notice a huge discrepancy and therefore feel deceived and hurt. It seems that one of the most painful experiences of most protagonists is separation from their parents in early childhood. Gretchen, in *A Man From Elsewhere*, feels she is worthless because she has never experienced parental love. Her mother died when she was a small girl, and her stepfather, Regan, was incapable of assuring her love and warmth. Gretchen craves for love partly because she has never been loved. Most of her actions are directed towards gaining Regan's affection.

Sayer has painful recollections from childhood, too. He was sent to a boarding school at the age of fourteen. By that time his mother was seriously ill and he was not to see her again. Thus he was walked to the station by his father, who did not find his son's departure heartbreaking. On the contrary, he did not wait until the train left, but hurried to his office. Even now, when he is a grown-up person, Sayer remembers the taste of sandwiches his mother prepared for the journey, and the terror of the farewell scene. For Sayer this experience has still another meaning. He

associates his childhood with loneliness, lack of parental affection, and also with a sense of guilt that he was better off than other people. Therefore childhood memories influence his ideological motivation in adulthood.

> He remained uneasy of mind, disturbed by the memories from his childhood and of his mother's death. It was strange that his feelings for her should still be alive after so many years and disagreeable to think that whenever these feeling re-emerged in his mind he became once more the adolescent son of a bourgeois family, living in ignorance in a gracious suburb of an English town (ME:43).

In *The Lung* Martin also was separated from home and sent to a boarding school. He remembers being "a lonely boy, cloistered in a boarding school throughout his adolescence" (L:39). This memory is not as painful as it was for Sayer, and Sands does not exaggerate its consequences. Yet it started a series of unsuccessful emotional relations in Martin's life. Boris Slattery, in turn, believes that his enforced separation from his mother was the most dramatic early experience. He remembers himself as "a small lump of agony in short trousers" (GH:43) and "the weeping object on the other end of her [the governess'] hand" (GH:44).[3] These characters, having been wounded in childhood, yearn for love but are scared of it at the same time. The burden of childhood experience overlaps with the later conscious decisions of the characters which, in turn, prevent them from achieving happiness in their personal lives, either in marriage or in other relationships.

Love is full of contradictions in Farrell's world. This view is expressed metaphorically in the scenes between Boris and his dog. Bonzo loves Boris devotedly, he is "a bundle of love," always tender and affectionate towards his master. But Boris has to restrain Bonzo because otherwise the dog would dirty the room:

> As he opened the door he was welcomed with furious excitement by Bonzo, who left his basket and advanced cringing and wagging not only his tail but his entire hindquarters. Boris aimed a kick at the animal because it had a weak bladder which it tended to relax when shown affection. [...] Bonzo retired to his basket and followed Boris's movements with eyes full of reproach and devotion, uttering an occasional groan (GH:34).

This scene indirectly suggests that people want to love and to be loved but at the same time are incapable of loving or letting others love them. Surprised, Martin Sands realizes that the strongest emotion he "had ever experienced came from the refusal of love [...] the sensation of hurting and being hurt" (L:59). Sayer, too, still feels guilty because "he had made no special effort of love—to make his mother feel his love for her" (ME:42). Moreover, love, like everything else, yields to time and is doomed to annihilation because, in Martin's words, it is only "a moment here and there"

[3] Drabble notices (1981:163) that in Farrell's works people are frequently reduced to objects.

(L:146). When Boris wonders about what happened to his love for his wife, he comes to the conclusion that it did not vanish but only

> remained there, perfectly visible, but we were unable to use it. It was rather like a wedding present of expensive china destined to be kept in a glass cabinet because it is too good to be used (GH:145).

Martin Sands' and Boris Slattery's family lives are very similar: their marriages, happy to begin with, turn into disasters with the flow of time. Martin is divorced, Boris still dwells in his unhappy union. Both of them perceive their homes not as places of safety, peace, love and honesty, but rather as a trap and a prison. While still married, Martin always felt threatened and beset by his wife. In his opinion, marriage is an institution which kills love and forces one to make unrewarded sacrifices. Martin ironically notices that his love "lay slaughtered on the dirty streets" (L:23). Boris and Flower's marriage, once based on love, sympathy and understanding, is now deprived of all these values. Flower is terrified by her husband's aggressive and eccentric behavior. She cannot communicate with Boris and notices that all her attempts to help him turn him against her. In consequence, she withdraws from his life, avoids him and simply tries not to make things worse. What is most tragic in their relationship is the fact that Boris expects something totally different from what the petrified Flower can offer him. He craves for close emotional ties, but his strange behavior stops her from showing affection. As a result, Boris falls into frustration while Flower feels more and more suppressed. When, at the end of the novel, Boris gives up his eccentric behavior, Flower is still uncertain about her position because she does not believe that her husband has changed. Through intuition she sees the truth: Boris has not changed, but has given up all hope for a decent and successful life.

In the three early novels, background characters also fail in their family lives. In *A Girl in the Head* the Swedish girl the Dongeons are awaiting comes from a split family; in *A Man From Elsewhere* Luc and Mado undergo a crisis in their relationship. They do not understand each other and cannot communicate, since they have different expectations from each other. In consequence, Luc runs away from Mado and hopes to lead a more satisfying life on his own. But his expectations turn to failure and Luc returns home. However, like Boris's, his choice is a negative one—it is a return to everyday routine which the character detests.

In *A Man From Elsewhere* the relationships between people are subordinated to politics, but even though this aspect dominates in the novel, Farrell shows the emotional lives of his protagonists. Sayer treats women as objects. When he plans to defame Regan and learn the truth about the writer's past, he decides to make friends with Gretchen or, if necessary, seduce her in order to use her as his informer. Sayer takes advantage of the girl; he courts her with the intention of learning everything about Regan. But, to his astonishment, he himself falls in love with Gretchen. Unfortunately, this relationship based on selfish and insincere assumptions cannot be successful. His mean attitudes turn against him and Sayer is caught in his own trap. On the level of emotions, Regan is a character comparable to Sayer. In contrast with his humanitarian ideology, he did a lot of harm to his relatives. He was incapable of devoting himself to his family; he could not even show tenderness or affection. By his frigidity he pushed his wife into the arms of another man. After this affair their marriage became totally fictitious and Regan's wife fell into a depression. Regan also separates himself from his stepdaughter, Gretchen. She loves him desperately, while he remains cool and remote. The girl tries various tricks to manifest her presence—she offends Regan, shocks him, behaves in the least expected ways, but all in vain. The writer remains inexorable, refuses to share his life with Gretchen and gradually isolates her from his problems. When Regan pushes Gretchen away from his death-bed, she cannot stand it any more and attempts suicide. Thus, due to his egoism, selfcentredness and ideological commitment, Regan damages his family life. It is ironic, if not tragic, that Regan, with his idealism and declared regard for people, ruins those who care for him. Regan's humanitarian philosophy remains in the sphere of ideas but he does not inculcate it into his life.

The unsuccessful family life of the characters results not only from the fact that love cannot last in Farrell's world, or from the obsessive or neurotic personalities of men. Relationships are also doomed to failure due to women, who are seen as "trouble-makers," as burdens, as down-to-earth persons who cannot understand men and who only try to fit them into their models (Binns 1986:39). Men are often convinced that their partners want to take advantage of them. With disgust Luc notices that whenever he is kind to Mado she always takes his good humor as "an invitation to delve into his affairs" (ME:28). Sands, with malice, makes a generalization about women and claims that "they always believed themselves to have rights over you even when, in strictly logical justice, they had long ceased to have anything of the kind" (L:16). Thus, women constitute a threat to men's freedom. By their different expectations and unpredictable behaviour they make men feel uncertain and frightened.[4] In fact, in Farrell's early works there are no favorable portraits of women—they are dull, materialistically oriented, dependent and destructive at the same time.

In *The Lung* Martin wonders what it is that brings men and women

[4] Drabble observes (1981:184) that the protagonists find themselves at the risk in marriages imposed on them by women.

together and, without hesitation, points to sex: "He shuffled off thinking that if men and women weren't manacled together by desire it was difficult to see what they would have in common" (L:29). Also in *A Man From Elsewhere* the characters are seen as people "harnessed to physical desire" (ME:37). Yet, in Farrell's fiction sex is deprived of any positive values: it is rather grotesque, if not ridiculous. Already in *A Man From Elsewhere* Gretchen had established a satirical definition of the absurdity of human physical relations as "a sort of eight-limbed Australian crawl" (ME:59). Imagining how a passing seagull might interpret the sight of Sayer and herself lying below Gretchen thinks:

> She was looking at two animals of the species known as human beings lying prostrate on the sand. One was male and the other was female, both in the prime of life. They were lying on the stuff that one mixed with cement. [...] They were occupied in changing a mixture of oxygen, nitrogen, and one or two other gases she could not remember offhand into carbon dioxide and water vapor. This worthy pastime seemed to occupy them exclusively, although they may have been combining it with one or two sordid digestive functions hidden from the casual observer. One of the animals had uttered a certain number of sounds [...] which had been deciphered by the other (ME:129–130).

Martin Sands in *The Lung*, half paralyzed, attempts to make love to Marigold. Very weak, incapable of undertaking any effort, he approaches her "armed with scissors" but soon regrets that he did not bring wirecutters, which would cut her clothes faster. This scene, like other love scenes in the hospital, shown from Martin's point of view, reveals that he treats sex as a test of his physical condition. When he is released from the iron lung: "Through boredom rather than lust Sands was looking forward to the prospect of nocturnal conversations with Marigold. He decided that something must be done to improve his physical appearance" (L:118). Equally incongruous is the scene in *A Girl in the Head* when Boris makes love to a girl in a hired boat-house. With astonishment, he stares at the girl "peeling off her tight jeans" (GH:94), then defends himself against her tenderness and, finally, dispassionately watches her terror when she discovers marks of varnish on her body and that her underclothes have stuck to her skin. Boris can only give her an absurd piece of advice: "'Perhaps you could steam them off?' he suggested, 'get a kettle and...' His voice trailed off" (GH:98). Sex, like love, is in Farrell's novels presented from an unromantic perspective. The most extreme view of it is uttered by Dr. Cohen in *A Girl in the Head* when he states that it is "nothing more but the automatic coupling of two machines" (GH:31).

Farrell's characters fail to adapt not only to family life and relationships but also to society. Disappointed with what society offers, they reject the existing world. In *A Man From Elsewhere* Regan and Sayer rebel against the orders they once belonged to or chose. Thus Sayer rejects the values of

the middle class to which he belongs and turns to Communism. Regan, on the other hand, gives up Communist ideology for the sake of a rigid individualism. Within these newly-discovered territories the characters redefine themselves and find satisfying values. They create for themselves coherent ideological systems or mythologies, and freely move in these realms. These worlds are internally coherent and logical, yet they do not allow any interferences from the external, real world. When they are forced to confront their views with reality, their worlds fall into pieces.

The heroes of *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* also reject the existing world. Yet their rebellion derives from different motives than those in *A Man From Elsewhere*. They are disappointed with their lives and crave change. Thus they violate commonly-respected norms in order to bring to light the falsehood, corruption and senselessness of empty personal and social relationships. Their rebellion is more than a negation—it is a quest for positive values.

Martin's quest is dramatically stopped by his illness: he is transplanted to another community which, at least at first, he detests even more. With the flow of time, he notices that the roles that are imposed in hospital are much healthier than in ordinary society. The hospital community is divided into patients and staff, that is, those who must submit and those who hold sway. There is no need there to unmask reality, because the division is all too obvious. Under the pressure of circumstances, Martin is slowly drawn into the life of the hospital and discovers values worth living for. These are his love for Marigold, his friendship with a young patient, Monica, and loyalty to other patients. For a while Martin feels needed again, and finds consolation, even satisfaction, in the new world of love, friendship and loyalty. Unfortunately, these values are delusive and cannot last: Marigold does not love Martin but rather feels pity for him; Monica is seriously ill with leukemia and has only a few weeks to live; finally, the patients are not loyal to each other—Exmoore's jokes and unintended cruelty lead Wilson to suicide. Thus, after a short moment of acceptance, when it seems to him that he has discovered positive values and has overcome his loneliness, he undergoes bitter disillusionment once again. Deprived of hope, he leaves the hospital a broken person who has "exhausted interest in himself" (L:113).

Boris undergoes similar vicissitudes: he needs to wrench himself free from the unbearable trap the consumer society sets. He feels like an outsider and, like Martin, undergoes a phase of rebellion against the values which evoke his disgust. Yet, the means he chooses—shocking and hurting others and eccentric behavior, are not successful. His attempts to shake society and attach some meaning to life miss the target and evoke general revulsion. His

last surge of hope resides in Inez, who is for Boris a personification of art, beauty and all the values which life has denied him. Even before her arrival he had built her image in his mind and, in a sense, expected her to fill the emptiness he found himself in. When he thinks about her name, it comes to his mind that: "if she's Portuguese she pronounces her name i'neige... like the French for 'it is snowing'" (GH:19). From then on Boris imagines Inez as a pure and innocent girl. Always dressed in white clothes, delicate and pretty, Inez becomes an artifact for Boris. He states that: "she was already perfect. She was in fact finished" (GH:44). Boris does not see the actual person in her but rather his own projection. Disillusionment comes when Boris sees Maurice with Inez on the beach. His idealized world image falls to pieces because Inez is desecrated. At that moment Boris loses the motivation to fight for higher values and gives up hope for anything better in life. His resignation is depicted in the last scenes of the novel. First, he cuts the sycamore tree with which he has always identified himself and then tells his wife the story about an ex-friend of his, an alcoholic, who could not be cured and whom Boris bid good-bye with the following words: "All right then—die you bastard... and see if I care" (GH:221).

Thus, even though Farrell's characters undertake an effort to break the isolation they find themselves in and try to find positive values in life, their quest is doomed to failure. They are unsuccessful in all possible fields of activities and after a period of struggle, give up and succumb to resignation.

Farrell's characters, unsuccessful and unhappy, blame their surroundings for their failures. They hardly ever admit their own weaknesses and prefer to deceive themselves and others by finding excuses for their behavior. The split between their self-evaluation and their real face is presented best by the symbolism of mirrors. The characters idealize themselves, see themselves in a better light and when they compare their mirror reflection with the imaginary image, are shocked and disappointed—the mirror reflection being always below their expectations. They usually consult a looking glass when they want to find the strength to fight, when they need new resources of energy or a confirmation of their deeds.

When Gretchen is exhausted by Regan's illness and has no energy to face this problem, she examines her mirror reflection as if expecting to discover a remedy in herself. But instead, mirrors can reflect "no more than another shadow, without age or race or features... a silhouette merely, almost without sex" (ME:35). Also Sands examines his mirror reflection in hospital and is petrified to see a wasted man. The image is much more terrifying than his worst expectations:

> He had known, of course, that his body was wasted, but even so he had failed to recognize himself at first. The man who looked back at him with startled, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks and wildly matted hair might have stepped out of a concentration camp the moment before (L:116).

Boris is another character who frequently looks in mirrors. He always expects to find an attractive and interesting face and each time is disappointed with what he sees; he simply does not identify himself with his reflection. Only when after his long and unsuccessful quest he loses hope for better life, he finally accepts his poor reflection as a true one. This reflection corresponds to his emotional state: "For an instant he seemed to be looking at his double, a person constructed of gray metal plates from which stared a human face, ruined and mad" (GH:217).

In order to distance themselves from events, Farrell's characters choose an ironic tone. It is not very well developed in the first novel, but already in *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* it dominates. Sands and Boris choose irony in order to separate themselves from other characters and society, to diminish their own weaknesses and mistakes. Beside the characters' irony, the narrator's irony plays an important function in Farrell's early novels. The characters are shown from an ironic perspective because the narrator reveals their mischief, little lies, and attempts to diminish their guilt and to blame others. Narration is especially interesting in *A Girl in the Head*, where the distance between the protagonist and the world is implanted into the narrative structure of the text. The story is told by a narrator who has insight into the character's thoughts, and by Boris. However, in both cases most frequently Boris is the focalizing agent. As a result, the narrative, shifting from the third to the first persons, from the purely diegetic to the mimetic, reflects the confusion and personal problems of the protagonist. The use of free indirect discourse brings a plurality of attitudes and evaluations and successfully contributes to the density of the text. The fact that Boris speaks of ('sees') himself in the first and the third persons shows his attempt to understand himself, to look at himself from different points of view so as to build a full and complete image. He assumes the third person in order to be objective, but when he starts talking about his most personal experiences, he falls into despair, breaks the distance and speaks in the first person. The narrative seems to be Boris's confession, a plea for sympathy and understanding as well as his attempt to cleanse and explain himself.

The characters in Farrell's early novels fail on all possible planes: private, social and historical, and cannot difect and shape their destiny because there are too many determinants manipulating them. Thus, no hero manages to complete his ambitious plans and control his own life. These failures take different forms. For Sayer and Regan self-knowledge turns out to be destructive: they realize that they have deceived themselves, that they have allowed their lives to be governed by abstract ideals, which

brought destruction on themselves and their relatives. Sayer's orderly and perfectly-controlled world falls to pieces or rather changes into a maze in which he cannot move. Martin Sands and Boris Slattery also put on masks in order to achieve contact; yet, just because this contact stems from deception, it is bound to fail. Their obstinate quests for love, art and beauty lead nowhere, or rather to disillusionment. Since the characters cannot fulfil their dreams and desires, they enclose themselves in imaginary worlds and behave in generally inadmissible ways. Then they feel their isolation even more painfully. Eventually, disillusioned and defeated, they fall into frustration and resignation.

Farrell's early novels, though apparently remote in their subject matter, take as their general theme considerations of disintegration, collapse and ruin. In *A Man From Elsewhere* the failure of the protagonists results from the tasks they try to fulfil[5] ; in *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* this theme is developed in the psychological problems of the characters who in the course of the action become disoriented and find out how inconsistent they are. Their personalities disintegrate, leaving nothing to fill this vacuum.

In *A Man From Elsewhere* there is yet another crucial factor that determines and shapes the characters. The protagonists are painfully aware that, despite all other determinants, they depend on the period they live in and realize that these circumstances delimit the spheres of their activities. This work is a political novel[6] whose action is set in France in the 1960s and deals with the mission of a communist journalist, Sayer, to defame a famous writer who rejected this ideology. The novel has a contemporary setting firmly grounded in the political situation, but Farrell offers the reader numerous insights into events from contemporary and recent history, such as the political situation in France and Europe, the Spanish Civil War, World War II and the Warsaw Uprising. Farrell presents the sociology and politics of the past and the present in a chaotic manner. Events are shown as random pieces of information fed to the reader at the same rate as to the characters. Issues emerge in the form of discussions, radio reports, quotations

[5] Spurling claims (1982:157) that the greatest weakness in the delineation of the characters in *A Man From Elsewhere* is the fact that the heroes become too clear a reflection of their stand-points and, instead of being individualized, are sometimes limited to the function of carrying certain ideological issues. Thus Sayer is reduced to the type of an imperceptive Communist, while Regan remains an "existentialist model." For this reason the conflict between the two protagonists lacks a real basis and too frequently exemplifies a theoretical discussion.

[6] Howe (1967:19) defines the political novel as "a novel in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting. Yet, it must also absorb into its stream of movement the hard and perhaps insoluble pellets of modern ideology."

from the press, and diaries. These techniques are characteristic also of his future writing, in particular of *Troubles* and *The Singapore Grip*, where the novelist quotes from newspapers, speeches of politicians, scientific reports and history books. In *A Man From Elsewhere* the background is signaled rather than shown at length. Nevertheless, it is sufficiently representative to mirror the broadest problems of its period.

In a manner characteristic of his later writing, Farrell makes several comments on the relationship between individuals and their times. He claims that individuals cannot separate themselves from external reality, that independently of their attitudes and interests they will always be influenced, if not victimized, by their times: their way of thinking, views and behavior are determined by the general situation, their individual experience coincides with and reflects the problems and atmosphere of the age. Regan is aware that the books he writes "express his own confusion and the confusion of his times" (ME:10).

Besides, in *A Man From Elsewhere* Farrell makes clear his view that reality can be perceived only in a subjective way, that it is easy to be misled. And even when one already understands the broad political processes, a human being is, in fact, helpless, when confronted with them. The scepticism about the possibility of finding simple answers and understanding the world brings Farrell to a modernist sense of confusion and doubt. The idea communicated by *A Man From Elsewhere* is distinctly pessimistic: man can easily be manipulated, but his dreams of creativity can hardly come true in the long run. For this reason the majority of Farrell's characters "undergo" reality instead of actively shaping it.

One of the themes of *A Man From Elsewhere* concerns the problem of communication and interpretation of facts, events and theories. The majority of events, though apparently simple, are in reality very complicated and slip out of rational control. The conflict between Regan and Sayer shows most clearly that it is impossible to find consistent evaluations and solutions for complex political problems. The two seemingly different characters are more alike than anyone could have expected. Sayer's communism and Regan's individualism are equally ruthless ideologies and, though in different ways, bring about similar catastrophes.

At the mercy of processes out of their control, the characters do not understand what is happening around them, even when they finally learn the truth. After having fulfilled his mission Sayer is more confused than at the beginning of the novel. The truth, instead of illuminating him, makes everything more difficult. At the end of *A Man From Elsewhere* Sayer realizes that the world is but a "shining maze" (ME:190). Thus the difficulties of evaluating and making objective observations are also reflected in the char-

acters' state of confusion. This confusion and sense of loss is characteristic also of Farrell's trilogy (Binns 1986:37).

The protagonists of *A Man From Elsewhere* are historically conscious. So is Boris in *A Girl in the Head*, who has a kind of historical consciousness, though it is not the broad, social understanding of history. To him history (individual history) is just a record of the passage of time perceived by an individual from a subjective point of view. Boris is aware that both serious and banal events are registered by the mind with the same solemnity. Only a retrospective glance or a look 'from above' sharpens the perspective and very often proves that human actions and explosions of passions lead nowhere, and are, in the end, insignificant, because history subjects everybody to the "same sort of evolution" (GH:167) and moves people "with steady inevitability through a cycle of impersonal change" (GH:167). It is this sense of helplessness in the face of reality felt by the majority of the protagonists, that best expresses Farrell's grave view of the human condition as depicted in the early novels.

Chapter II
Characters in the Empire Trilogy: the Increased Importance of External Factors

Troubles, *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *The Singapore Grip*, as historical novels, subordinate psychological considerations to the study of the workings of history. For this reason the characters are viewed from a different perspective than in the early narratives, and the stress is put on other determinants which shape the fate and personality of the protagonists. While in *A Man From Elsewhere*, *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* Farrell concentrates on the inner lives of the characters and only later broadens the perspective to include the external determinants, here he assumes an opposite approach and shows how much the protagonists depend on the historical and social reality in which they live. The internal factors, such as the protagonists' physicality and personal experiences remain important, but their grotesque dimension gives way to other modes, thus opening new implications. The shift of perspective, partly forced by the genre conventions of the historical novel, leads Farrell to a more complex view of the human condition, where perception of life as absurd is replaced by humanist philosophy. This evolution of ideas requires that the characters in the historical novels should be discussed separately from the early works. In this chapter the analyses focus on the construction of the protagonists and their role as carriers of philosophical views of man. In the following chapter the discussion of characters will occur only in relation to their function in reconstructing and interpreting history.

The dependence of the characters on the reality they live in is reflected in their personal fate and psyche. They are not free in their choices since pure coincidence may compel them to adopt unexpected and often undesired roles (Bristow-Smith 1983:51). History draws people into its course, which they realize only when it is too late for them to withdraw (Hynes 1981:127). Major Archer goes to Ireland with the sole objective of meeting his fiancée and to clarify their relationship. He does not expect to be entangled in historical processes, but is rather looking forward to this trip because it should give him some peace and quiet after the dramatic experience in France. Yet, his plans are thwarted by the violent events. Neither do the elderly ladies who inhabit the Majestic ever wish to be drawn into the crisis, but the difficult times force them to assume and reveal their attitude. In Krishnapur, too, the Mutiny surprises the characters and, before they can make any decisions, they are besieged and thus deprived of the chance to escape. The Mutiny is a spiteful trap, especially for the newcomers to India

like Fleury and Miriam who arrive with expectations: Miriam needs to recover and achieve an emotional equilibrium after her husband's death, while her brother hopes to experience exotic adventures. They cannot fulfil their plans because they must fight for survival. In *The Singapore Grip* the characters are also at the mercy of history. Vera escapes persecution only to find herself under the Japanese occupation. Moreover, in Singapore she is even more endangered than in Shanghai because she is on the invaders' black list. The Major, tired with the military past, travels around the world to find oblivion, but all in vain—once again he must fight the enemy. Tired and disappointed, Archer thinks: "How wasteful and senseless was the destruction of war! He had hoped to have finished with all that in 1918" (T:214).

In Krishnapur and Singapore history exerts its impact upon the characters most directly and dramatically because during the Mutiny and war everybody is exposed to annihilation. The tragic condition of the protagonists is depicted through distancing techniques—grotesque, irony, and a number of literary and cultural codes. Such a treatment stresses the futility of the characters' effort to liberate themselves. Drawn into historical crises, like puppets, they are manipulated by forces that cannot be controlled. For the besieged death becomes an everyday reality, even "the constant drinking companion" (SG:230). The Blacketts' servant has to deal with various matters including the burying of people. The Major comments on his efficiency in the following way: "To bury someone between breakfast and tiffin was nothing these days to Cheong" (SG:495). During the Mutiny epidemics decimate the characters, too, and so many of them die that the Padre cannot pray individually but must make general supplications for all collectively. There is no room in the graveyard to bury the besieged, so they are "disposed" into a well. Yet it, too, is filled up immediately. Dozens are killed, their death is so violent that it does not evoke pity but rather helplessness and blunt reactions. The absurdity and unreality of these deaths is most terrifying:

> The verandah was littered with dead pensioners, or what looked like bits of pensioners, it was hard to be sure in the gloom. The two Sikhs lolled against each other, stone dead, with what could have been blood but was probably only pan juice trickling from their mouths (SK:151).

Dead corpses "litter" fields, guns "vomit" when they reach their target, men melt "into the ground like wax" (SK:165), dead corpses fill the ground and resemble a carpet, bodies look like "an empty suit of clothes" (SK:151), while blood resembles "pan juice trickling from their mouths." By means of such imagery Farrell shows that during a war the characters are nothing more than cannon fodder (Mahon 1981). His surrealistic descriptions stress

the brutality with which people are entangled in history. His attitude to the absurdity of war reminds one of the English and American tradition of war literature, the works of Mailer, Vonnegut and Heller and their treatment of the theme.

From the sepoy attack on the residency the novelist adopts the convention of Victorian adventure fiction for boys (Bergonzi 1980:62), in which the characters undertake most heroic and fantastic actions in order to defeat the enemy, while scenes change at an enormous rate. They fight in staircases, one man against a dozen, bravely jump at the enemy and lay them flat on the floor. Fleury imagines he is such a fictional character himself:

> Lastly he had picked an immense, fifteen-barreled pistol out of the pile rejected by the Collector. The pistol was so heavy that he could not, of course, stick it in his belt; it was all he could do to lift it with both hands. [...] He already saw fifteen sepoys stretched on the ground and himself standing over them with his weapon smoking in his hand... or rather, in both hands (SK:313/4).

Yet, everything slips out of the characters' control. Fleury cannot use his pistol because it gets stuck. In desperation he tries to swing on the chandelier and kick the sepoy but the lamp "declines to bear his weight and instead of swinging, he merely sat down heavily on the floor in a hail of diamonds and plaster" (SK:323). Another time a sepoy whose "only ambition appeared to be to cut Fleury to pieces" (SK:322) buries his sabre in the brickwork of the window-sill. Such scenes where comedy underpins a dramatic moment are continued till the end of the defense. Farrell has used this convention of suspenseful adventure story several times in his narrative (Bergonzi 1980:59; Clemens 1974) but now it gains new, grotesque meaning because this time the position of the protagonists is truly tragic. Farrell's technique becomes cinematic, and the text sometimes resembles a film script. These conventions show that the protagonists' situation is so dangerous and grave that it appears almost unreal and that the only way of presenting the absurdity of their condition is turning to apparently light comedy. But, obviously, the comedy has a darker intention.

Undoubtedly less dramatic, though also crucial, is the impact of society upon the protagonists. The majority of them act according to the norms imposed by their group or class. In order to be approved of, they follow a code of behavior which can best be seen in the sphere of morality and manners. The characters do not dare criticize the commonly accepted ways and are unwilling to break them, even for logical reasons. And so Fleury endangers his own life to appear chivalrous to Louise; Harry feels that the prejudices against Lucy may be fatal for her, but he does not allow his sister to meet the dishonored woman; the Blacketts take pains to find a suitable husband for their daughter, terrified at the prospect that she might

end up a spinster; the Collector brings up his children in a manner suitable for his position, which means that he frequently sacrifices their comfort to convention.

The norms are so deeply ingrained into the characters, that they treat them as universal laws which must be preserved even under the most difficult circumstances—during a siege or a war. The protagonists constitute a part of their epoch, but at the same time the epoch leaves its impress on their personality. Still, it must be noticed that this insistence on conventions does not lead to tragic consequences. Fleury is neither killed nor wounded when he climbs ramparts; Lucy finds shelter in the residency and even though other women give her the cold shoulder she, nevertheless, achieves her aim and marries the man she loves. Such examples could be multiplied and they suggest that a slavish imitation of cultural codes is perhaps not the wisest solution but, at least, it is less harmful than the other extreme, that is the senseless violation of norms, as in the case of Joan or Ripon. Those characters who challenge society only in order to be different or to gain profit do a lot of harm to the others and to themselves: Sarah wounds both the Major and Edward, but when she elopes with Bolton who leaves her, she is ruined; Ripon is repudiated by his father and finds no consolation in his unhappy union with Maria; Joan manipulates and insults men who love her and in consequence is offended by Matthew and later must accept the only man who still wants her. The lot of these protagonists suggests that in Farrell's world unconventionality for the sake of being original, that is, rebellion devoid of deeper motivation, is more contemptible than mere compliance with rules.

Farrell shows some strong characters who act unconventionally and, in a sense, violate Victorian morality and manners. The Collector, the Magistrate and McNab risk their reputation for a good cause. Mr. Hopkins utters unconventional judgments and orders unpopular steps to prepare the enclave for defense. Dr. McNab keeps a scientific diary where he describes diseases and the effects of cures. Some people think it inhuman to submit one's illness or even death to scientific scrutiny, but the doctor knows that only in this way will he be able to find efficient therapy. It is ironic that even though the community owes them life, they are not entirely approved of—they are rather feared because the slightest sign of nonconformity is understood as a threat. Moreover, still years after the Mutiny it is remembered that these characters challenged the community rather than liberated it.

The oppressive influence of society upon the protagonists is reflected in the treatment of female characters and the position women occupy in their community. In the male-dominated society the status of a woman depends on whether she is married or not. This power relation, ironically, turns

against men, because women, in order to get prestige, must find partners. The delicate creatures become predators whose only objective is entrapping men. This is why the majority of Farrell's male characters find themselves in relationships arranged by women (Drabble 1981:184). And so Sarah seduces the Major and Edward; Lucy knows how to provoke Harry; Joan entraps Nigel Langfield; Vera catches Matthew. These particular affairs are set against the background of the customary plotting of mothers who cannot rest before their daughters are well married. In *The Singapore Grip* Walter Blackett joins this company and performs most nasty tricks to marry off Joan. He forces Matthew to propose to Joan and, when this plan fails, Walter does not hesitate to lie about the stipulation in old Langfield's will concerning the marriage of his son. Due to this forgery Walter finally finds a partner for his daughter.

In the trilogy there is a huge discrepancy between the image of women men possess and the actual ladies they meet. They provoke men and behave promiscuously. The Major does even not remember when he became Angela's fiancé:

> Although he was sure that he had never actually proposed to Angela during the few days of their acquaintance, it was beyond doubt that they were engaged: a certainty fostered by the fact that from the very beginning she had signed her letters 'Your loving fiancée, Angela' (T:9).

When he meets her in Kilnalough she is already enfeebled by illness, but despite it, surprises the Major greatly when she touches him: "she had stretched out a leg under the table and begun a curious exercise with it [...] 'Is she trying to find my foot?' wondered the Major, perplexed" (T:18–19). Matthew Webb, too, is surprised when he learns that the Blacketts plan a wedding party for him and Joan because he has never proposed. Miss O'Neill, a mere teenager, looks at Archer so provocatively that he feels uncomfortable:

> Abruptly the Major noticed that Viola O'Neill, whose long hair was plaited into childish pigtails, who wore some kind of grey tweed school uniform, and who could scarcely have been more than sixteen years of age [...] was looking him straight in the eye in a meaningful way. Embarrassed, he dropped his gaze to the empty plate in front of him (T:21–22).

Sarah Devlin in *Troubles* is the most powerful of Farrell's heroines. She stands in clear contrast with all other female characters in the trilogy who are not so much individuals, as conventional types of heroines from Victorian novels of manners. Sarah is a character of flesh and blood but at the same time she seems to be a personification of all the features men are scared of in women. In fact, she bares resemblance to the archetypal Eve. When the Major meets her for the first time in Edward's orchard, Sarah, with her clear

and gray eyes, appears to him beautiful though "poisonous" (T:29). She introduces herself as a Catholic which, in the situation, strenghtens Biblical associations (Binns 1986:50). Sarah, in her wheelchair, cannot grasp an apple which she "was going to steal" (T:30), so Archer offers his help to "steal it" (T:30). Sarah feels that she has not made the best impression on the Major but her intuition prompts her how to gain the Major's sympathy. She asks Archer to wheel her and, as she has expected, "he did feel a little better as he pushed her up the drive and thought that perhaps she was not as nasty as he had supposed" (T:31). Her very name—Devlin—brings associations with devil or the evil. Contrasted with the pale, weak (angelic?) Angela, Sarah, with her "dark, shining, long" (T:29) hair and temperament, occurs very attractive and soon the Major is in love with her. Sarah behaves unconventionally, seduces and uses all men around her. As if bored with respect and admiration, Sarah elopes with the brutal Captain Bolton—most bold and unscrupulous of them all. But Sarah is not immoral, rather she cannot be tamed. She leaves the Major heartbroken but her irresistible charm prosecutes him for many years. Joan Blackett from *The Singapore Grip*, seemingly similar to Sarah, is yet her reversal. Though unconventional and provocative with men, Joan does everything for mercenary motives. In contrast to Sarah, she is rational and oriented towards her own success (Brooks 1978).

In the trilogy the strongest moral and cultural pressure comes from society, not the family. If family problems occur, they rather reflect the conflicting forces of the epoch than individual discrepancies between its members. The family, as an institution, is also exposed to the pressure of the community and customarily accepts social norms. Ripon, by marrying Maria, violates not so much his father's will but rather the cultural traditions of his class and therefore becomes the black sheep not only of his family, but also of his sphere. When Sarah behaves promiscuously she is condemned by the community but not by her parents who, despite everything, still try to rescue her reputation. Thus, the family has a defensive rather than oppressive influence upon the characters, though it, too, aims at moulding and adjusting its members to life in society. Except for Edward Spencer, who breaks with his son, other families approve of their relatives and do not subject them to absolute obedience.

Farrell's protagonists, in particular male protagonists, try very hard to understand the perplexing world. They think, argue and speculate all the time (Drabble 1981; McEwan 1987:151). This ever-present interest in ideas proves that for Farrell's characters intellectual life is of utmost importance. Matthew Webb: "enjoyed argument and speculation the way other people enjoy a game of tennis" (SG:171). The theories the protagonists create have

great intellectual value for them but are often too detached from reality, and therefore separate the characters from the external world. Many of them are unaware of how false their theories are; instead, they plunge deeper and deeper into these abstractions and alienate themselves from reality. Edward and the Magistrate are "scientific" types. Both of them, with great scrupulousness, pursue absurd observations and experiments. They are so short-sighted and uncritical that they do not realize how senseless their theories are. The Padre, too, is so obsessed with his mechanistic theology that he spends all his time in searching out new absurd proofs of the existence of God. It seems that these characters cannot adapt themselves to reality, which in turn overwhelms them, so that they seek for shelter in imaginary worlds of their own.

Farrell subjects their views to ironic scrutiny and makes the reader aware that many theories are nothing more than a vogue or an imperfect interpretation of facts too difficult to be explained in a particular epoch. He ridicules the high intellectual, cultural and scientific aspirations of the characters and their pretentiousness (Singh 1979:24). The Padre's naive theology, Edward Spencer's biological experiments or the Magistrate's phrenology are as fascinating as they are fallible and inadequate. Dr. Dunstaple's medical knowledge is entirely discredited since it stands the test neither of time nor reality. Matthew Webb has received the most "progressive education" (SG:21) but it has not prepared him to life. Mr. Hopkins believes in science but he is aware that his knowledge of statistics concerning the death rate in Krishnapur will not help him overcome his fear of death. Edward's absurd experiments, which he pursues with great energy, endanger him and the others. The Magistrate's perception is so blinkered that he does not notice when the relief party liberates the enclave. Thus, though the characters turn to the authority of science, they are helpless when confronted with human problems. Their insistence on ideas turns out to be as dangerous as the historical turmoils. It is not pure coincidence that Edward and the Padre go mad, that Dr. Dunstaple dies, that the Magistrate loses motivation and falls into a deep frustration. In their case it is not so much the reality that crushes their lives but rather the characters themselves.

However, not all protagonists in Farrell's novels are so obstinate. Engaged in topical issues, trying hard to understand the world, some heroes do not cling desperately to their ideas, but try to comprehend topical processes and are ready to modify their views whenever they prove inadequate. Among these characters Farrell presents a variety of attitudes. In *Troubles* the Major comes to Ireland without any prejudices and takes pains to understand both the English and the Irish, not only individuals but also the groups with which they identify. He believes that people have the right to

their own convictions, provided they do no harm to other people. Archer is open to information and wants to form relatively objective opinions. His objective point of view, coordination of action and presentation of reality make him similar to Marlowe in *Lord Jim*, Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* or Strether in *The Ambassadors* and the central consciousness in some other novels by Henry James. Yet, after almost two years spent in Kilnalough, he still has no explanation of the Anglo-Irish conflict. He rather comes to the conclusion that it defies clear interpretations and that he is incapable of comprehending a different nation, a different culture. In this way Farrell leaves the reader at the same point as E. M. Forster does in *The Passage to India*, though in a totally different setting.

The Collector's views on the problems that interest him most, that is progress, civilization and imperialism, undergo an evolution when they swerve from reality and thus are unattainable. Unlike the Padre, Mr. Hopkins has not locked himself in the world of abstract theories. This would indeed be convenient, but he is too sensitive and too sensible not to notice the discrepancy between his theories and life. The Collector's development is slow though steady, and is marked by several events and symbols. Perhaps the most meaningful images, which occur several times in the text, are those of a snake and the telescope (Singh 1979:30). The Collector possesses "a cobra floating in a bottle of bluish alcohol" (SK:18). The snake appears in the novel at crucial moments and becomes a symbol of the Collector's ideas and the changes taking place in his mind. Mr. Hopkins is imprisoned in the Victorian world just like the cobra trapped in its glass. At the beginning the Collector is very proud of this exhibit, but with the flow of time, when their situation becomes hopeless, he becomes "conscious of himself gently floating in the blue prism of his daughter's telescope like a snake in a bottle of alcohol" (SK:206). Now Mr. Hopkins realizes that his existence is as artificial as the snake's and that he himself is nothing more than an exhibit that has no right to exist unless changed (Singh 1979:32). The second important image is the telescope. First Mr. Hopkins peers, then he senses that he is being watched. This realization makes him aware that one should look at oneself from a distance, which places reasoning and emotions in a proper perspective. The awareness of a broader sight, the consciousness that people are fallible, do not allow him to make hasty judgments, to condemn people or to believe that only he is right.

Dr. McNab is another humanitarian character. He has strong convictions and views of his own but at the same time is aware that no abstract idea is worth people's suffering. (In fact he incorporates into his life the thesis Regan formulates in *A Man From Elsewhere*.) For him the well-being of his patients is the ultimate good and he is ready to sacrifice himself for

the others. When Dr. Dunstaple attacks his methods in public, McNab is very unwilling to enter the polemic, realizing that his colleague is slightly unbalanced and that quarreling with him might only aggravate Dunstaple's poor health. McNab does not care for cheap popularity, not out of disdain for people, but rather out of respect for them—he lets the others have their own, independent opinions. What the Major, the Collector and McNab have in common is a marked degree of tolerance, respect for other people and a desire to know the truth, no matter how painful or inconvenient it may be. Moreover, though they have their own theories and ideas and though they are complex and sophisticated characters, they do not lock themselves in imaginary worlds. They are humble and learn modesty both towards other people and towards their own lives.

For the protagonists the social, intellectual and spiritual life is most important and they are willing to forget about other, more prosaic aspects of human existence. However, such an approach is false and the characters are constantly reminded about the concrete limitations they are subordinated to. The protagonists are subject to their own organisms, and no matter how hard they try to undermine it, the bodily, material problems influence them to an enormous extent. This dependence on bodies, unlike in the early novels, in the trilogy is more often comic and farcical than tragic. The characters rationally reject, but subconsciously desire good food, safety and comfortable life. It is revealed that despite their great ambitions, they appreciate such down-to-earth matters against their declarations (Binns 1986:70). The Major, Fleury, Matthew cannot concentrate their thoughts when they are hungry. At such moments polite, drawing-room manners become a torture for them. During the first day at the Majestic the Major is starving and finds it hard to restrain himself from taking two sandwiches at the same time. But since it is dark at the Palm Court, he "guiltily wolfed the entire plate of sandwiches" (T:21). The following day, when at breakfast Edward reads numerous prayers, the Major cannot stop thinking about food:

> The Major, who was hungry again (either because the country air was giving him appetite or because he had vomited up the only solid meal he had consumed in the last twenty-four hours) and who had been entertaining disabused thoughts about Edward's prayers, now felt displeased with himself. With his eyes distractedly on a giant silver dish bearing a domed lid surmounted by an ornamental spike (strangely reminiscent of a Boche helmet) beneath which he believed eggs, bacon and kidneys to be cooling, he did his best to reverse his thoughts into a more pious direction (T:40).

Only when he is finally allowed to eat, when "the domed lid was being lifted from the silver dish" (T:42) do the Major's spirits improve. During dinner parties the characters engage in vivid conversations, but their thoughts are frequently diverted from the matter under discussion because they are more

concerned with eating. Thus eating is opposed to the spiritual aspirations of the protagonists, resulting in a comic effect:

None of Matthew's listeners seemed, as it happened, to be on the point of putting that or any other question to him. Monty, breathing heavily through his mouth, seemed completely occupied with masticating fish and chips. [...] 'But...' began Monty. He was silenced immediately, however, by his own right hand which, spotting its opportunity, had raised another forkful of fish and chips and now crammed it into his mouth as soon as it opened to speak (SG:178–179).

Also Fleury, who is a poseur and wants to make the best impression, is so greedy that he can think only about food:

He nodded sagely, frowned, smiled, and stroked his chin thoughtfully at intervals, but he was so hungry that his mind could think of nothing but the dishes which followed each other over the table (SK:53).

Besides, greedy protagonists frequently speak with their mouths full, and the unpleasant impression they make diminishes the value of their words. Sometimes also it is hard to guess what the characters are actually thinking because their reactions can be caused by totally different reasons than those expected (McEwan 1987:157). At a dinner party where Matthew talks about Geneva, Dupingy has a strange expression and his eyes are "rolling in horror" (SG:139). Yet this may equally well be the result of vinegar fumes rising from the fish served at that moment. When, after the defense of Singapore, Matthew Webb is interned in a Chinese camp, he finally realizes how important all the things he had always underestimated are:

In the weeks, then months, then years that followed, first in Changi, later at the Sime Road civilian camp, Matthew found that his world had suddenly shrunk. Accustomed to speculate grandly about the state and fate of nations he now found that his thoughts were limited to the smallest of matters... a glass of water, a pencil, a handful of rice (SG:565).

No matter how sophisticated Matthew and Fleury want to appear, their credibility as intellectuals is also brought into question by fearful natures. The two young gentlemen try to suppress their irrational behavior, but cannot overcome their fear of the unknown, exotic nature of the East. They think and speculate, but are scared that they might be bitten by venomous snakes or insects. Fleury talks to Harry but at the same time wonders if he is safe in his room. Harry explains that the legs of all his pieces of furniture are stood in saucers of water to protect them against ants. But Fleury feels uncomfortable and wonders: "what if snakes come to drink from these saucers while he was asleep in bed?" (SK:50). His fear is the more funny, since he has no idea of the East and is scared more by his sick imagination than by reality. Matthew, too, does not want to risk dangerous encounters with wild nature. At a walk with Joan he is scared of darkness, being:

not yet accustomed to the tropical night. As they sauntered through the potentially

hungry shadows in the direction of the Orchid Garden he tried to recall whether he had once read something about 'flying snakes' or whether it was simply his imagination. And did fruit bats only eat fruit or did they sometimes enjoy a meal of flesh and blood? He was so absorbed in this speculation that when, presently, he felt something slip into his hand he jumped, thinking it might be a 'flying snake' (SG:142).

The body's problems are a constant threat to dignity. When Mr. Simons is to explain to Miriam the process by which opium is refined, she cannot concentrate on what he is saying because she observes his "freckled, peeling skin falling to the ground" (SK:89). The Padre is so enfeebled by hunger that, when he preaches, the Collector notices that:

His face had become very weak since the end of the rains. His face had grown so thin that as he spoke you could plainly see the elaborate machinery of his jaw setting to work with all its strings, sockets and pulleys (SK:312).

Beautiful ladies, so careful about their good looks, lose their freshness with the passage of time. At Fleury's birthday party Louise shares his happiness, though one thing diminishes her pleasure, namely "the knowledge that she had an unsightly red spot on her forehead and another one, perhaps even a boil, coming up on her neck" (SK:208–209). She cannot forget that she does not look well. Towards the end of the siege the Collector is disgusted when he discovers that he is dirty and smells:

'Yes, I'm a simple man. I don't believe in standing on ceremony,' the Collector congratulated himself piously. 'But then, what else could I be when I look like a scarecrow and smell like a fox?' (SK:261).

Also when the relieving force arrives to liberate the enclave, they meet there "an extraordinary collection of scarecrows" (SK:339). Lieutenant Stapleton is very happy to see Louise, but as he approaches, he gets "a really severe shock... for she stank" (SK:340). He is not jealous when Fleury comes to the lady because: "This rude fellow in green jacket had an advantage over Lieutenant Stapleton... he seemed able to get closer to Louise without discomfort [...] because he stank worse than she did" (SK:341).

The motif of disease, so important in the early novels, reappears in the Empire Trilogy, where numerous characters are ill (Binns 1986:69). In *Troubles* and *The Siege of Krishnapur* almost all the characters have problems with their health. Angela wants to lead an ordinary life but leukemia wrecks all her plans. Elderly ladies, inhabitants of the Majestic, suffer from poor health. Some of them expire, only a few having a chance to survive till the following summer (Spurling 1982:162). Mrs. Rappaport, Edward's mother, is blind and mentally handicapped. With deep sclerosis, disjointed memories from her youth and no sense of reality, she is a lamentable and pitiful person. The elderly survivors in Krishnapur are also presented without sentimentality. Mr. Hopkins looks at them and notices that:

> Their joints were swollen with rheumatism, their eyes were dimmed with years, to a man they were short of breath and their hands trembled; one old gentleman believed himself to be again taking part in the French wars, another that he was encamped before Sebastopol. It was that force to which the Collector had to shout the order more than once as their leader, Judge Adams, was rather deaf (SK:326).

Farrell's attitude to the human body, disease and death is devoid of sentimentality. His perspective shifts from the realistic towards the absurd and surrealistic (Catling 1983). When old Mr. Webb falls ill and against everybody's expectations does not die, it is stated several times that he "clings on stubbornly" (SG:82), or "lingers on" (SG:82). His grave condition makes his partner impatient because Walter does not know what plans to make. Before Mr. Webb dies he calls his son, but everybody around misunderstands his words. Vera thinks that the old man mentions a Chinese deity, Sun Yat-sen; the Major bets that he heard 'sun,' while Walter concludes that Webb "just wanted to go and to prune his roses" (SG:93). But later Walter has a grave reflection: "This is how we all end up, mumbling rubbish to people who interpret it as they want" (SG:94).

A mundane attitude to the human body is also revealed in the sphere of sex, which is seen as farcical and ridiculous (Drabble 1981:187). The Major remembers that saying good-bye to Angela was literally a painful experience:

> They had kissed behind a screen of leaves and, reaching out to steady himself, he had put his hand down firmly on a cactus, which had rendered many of his parting words insincere. The strain had been so great that he had been glad to get away from her. Perhaps, however, this suppressed agony had given the wrong impression of his feelings (T:9).

The two young officers from the Black and Tans are equally unskillful when they want to seduce the Twins. Matthew tries to undress drunk Charity. While he is "untying her like a parcel" (T:332), rolling her "backwards and forwards, working her skirt up a few inches at a time" (T:328), she is dreaming that she is shipwrecked "on a rock and some appalling creature is sliding her back into the black water... and now a moist pink tongue was licking her kneecaps and a scratchy moustache was tickling her thighs" (T:332). At the same time Mortimer is in another room with Faith. But here the roles are reversed—while Faith wants to make love to him, the officer is terrified and cannot liberate himself from a horrid, "nauseating experience in a brothel" (T:326). While she tries to encourage him, he becomes more and more hysterical and tells her whatever comes to his mind. At the end Faith is discouraged because the whole thing turns out "to be decidedly odd and a much bigger bore than she had anticipated" (T:329).

A similar scene is repeated in *The Singapore Grip* when Matthew and

Monty go to a hotel. Matthew is embarrassed by the parades of girls offered by the owner of the place and indulges in a discussion of history and politics. His behavior is misunderstood, and the Indian brings an album of photographs with "high-class girls" with "prices pencilled against them, as on a menu" (SG:196). In *The Siege of Krishnapur* the Magistrate notices that Lucy's breasts are "like plump carp" (SK:255), but after the siege they are "more like plaice or Dover sole" (SK:341). He finds Lucy very attractive, though not so much as a woman but rather as a proof of his scientific theories (McEwan 1987:126). For him Lucy is an object which must be investigated and her sex is important for the experiment only. In *The Singapore Grip*, when Joan leans against Matthew in the car, he is most perplexed, and in the heat feels her body "sprawled on his shoulder like a hot compress" (SG:109).

Matthew is the hero of several other embarrassing love scenes. He once notices Vera doing some exercises in the garden. But soon it turns out that he is "not the only spectator to this scene, for an elderly orangutan with elaborate mutton-chop whiskers lay sprawled in a rubber tree on the edge of the glade watching the girl's gymnastics" (SG:253). When they are attracted to each other, Vera invites Matthew to her room. He takes the opportunity to "remove his own clothes and, as he did so, a dense cloud of white dust rose from his loins and hung glimmering in the lamplight. But Matthew hurriedly explained that it was just talcum from his evening bath" (SG:392). This scene develops into a farce because Vera teaches him a course of anatomy with euphuistic Chinese names. The effect is that Matthew understands nothing and only wonders where all these peculiar names come from. At the end he takes an oil-lamp and inspects Vera's body obediently as if she were an exhibit. Even the symbolic scene in *Troubles* when Bolton devours a rose develops unexpectedly. His violence and unscrupulousness suggest that the rose does not stand for his love to Sarah but rather for the consummation of their love. Bolton seduces Sarah as violently as he swallows the rose. These scenes and the imagery by means of which the body is compared to objects reduce sex to its physical dimension (Drabble 1981:185). In Farrell's novels sex is farcical because the characters are either scared of, intimidated or even disgusted by it.

In the Empire Trilogy the protagonists are organically fused with the historical processes of their times: the events subordinate and implicate people into their course, the intellectual and cultural habits and achievements of the age have great impact upon individuals. Society and the relationships they enter also restrain people and force them to accept undesirable functions. Thus the characters are torn between the temptations of thought and the concrete, physical world, including their own body—the biological

organism, programmed impracticably and irrationally, but nevertheless tangibly when compared to the sublime flights of the imagination. As a result of so many forces at work, the characters feel lonely and threatened. Determined by so many uncontrollable factors they, practically speaking, can hardly decide about themselves. Such an evaluation of human life might have tragic consequences and lead to the conclusion that since men cannot decide about their lives, nothing is worth their effort and the only escape is into resignation. In fact, such is the conclusion reached by the protagonists in Farrell's early novels.

In the trilogy, however, Farrell's major characters do not lapse into apathy. Despite the grave evaluation of their condition, most clearly expressed by Ehrendorf in his Second Law, the protagonists find values and reasons for which to live. First of all, they assume responsibility for the whole community and take under their protection those weaker elements who cannot cope with the circumstances. In *Troubles* Major Archer is such a character. When he notices that Edward cannot guarantee safety to the inhabitants of the Majestic and that the hotel is slipping out of his control, the Major takes over Spencer's duties. He protects the elderly ladies and, when Edward's madness increases, looks after him, the unbearable twins and the whole estate. Archer, self-restrained and warm-hearted, accepts the others as they are. John Spurling calls him "a Don Quixote without being a fool, a Galahad without being a prig" (1982:163). He neither moralizes nor judges severely. Archer is modest and intellectually open to various ideas because of the awareness that he himself does not know the answer to all problems.

In Krishnapur it is the Collector who takes responsibility for the whole enclave—he stands in charge of the defense of the residency and the British community. He preserves neither his energy nor his health when protecting those who trust him. Though he has very strong convictions from the very beginning, he does everything not to wound or offend people. He also believes that action is more necessary during a crisis than theoretical considerations. The Collector's openness, tolerance and the potential for growth can be seen in the opening scenes of the novel (Singh 1979:25). Mr. Hopkins is the only person who reads the message hidden in chapatis, who does not ignore the warning, who constantly wonders about his views, who notices the needs of the others. These are the features which make him a reliable and trustworthy character.

It may appear tragic that the Major and the Collector, who have rescued those under their care, meet with repulse on personal grounds. Archer is sentenced to death and tortured by the Sinn Feiners and almost loses his life. Moreover, he leaves Ireland heartbroken because he cannot win the woman he loves. Similarly the Collector, who has bravely defended the residency

till the arrival of relief forces, after the siege loses his optimism and joy of life. The whole experience he has been through in Krishnapur has crushed his enthusiasm and orderly view of the world. It may seem that the Collector and the Major lose on personal grounds but, in fact, they do not—they gain true knowledge about the world and leave Krishnapur and Ireland more experienced and wiser: they are raised to a higher consciousness. With the flow of time they accept the state of affairs with understanding and reconcile themselves with the world. Therefore the defeats of Farrell's characters are only apparent. In reality the protagonists are winners—that is, in the broader, humanitarian sense. They win but cannot rejoice at their victory, because it does not bring an optimistic message. The Major and the Collector develop an understanding of life. Archer feels it only intuitively and is left with the impression that one should not expect too much. The only solution is to take the world as it is. This is why the Major chooses quiet though not bitter resignation or, rather, acceptance. The Collector, who is more intellectually sophisticated than Archer, arrives at a similar conviction. He realizes that man is determined by numerous "impersonal forces" (SK:270) and that it makes no sense to rebel against them. Moreover, people are not perfect and the world they create slips out of their control in an undesirable direction, of which the majority are not conscious. Unfortunately no one can stop this process. This truth is bitter and difficult but perhaps better than its alternative, a lack of understanding.

These characters have understood that in the changing world, in the world of relative and mutable ideas the only true value is a human being. There are basic human decencies and righteousness which give meaning and sense to life—these are the only values worth living for (Drabble 1981:191). At the beginning of the siege Mr. Hopkins undertakes action out of a deeply ingrained sense of duty. He explains to McNab that he has "a duty towards the women and children" (SK:68) and is surprised that the doctor refrains from comment. The Collector understands his mission as a responsibility for others, which derives not so much from his philosophy of life as from an external norm he accepts. He lacks the philosophical comprehension that generosity and self-sacrifice are the only forms of freedom because only these values depend solely on individuals. Everything else is external, a consequence of forces which men cannot tame. And only when he gains experience is he able to appreciate Doctor McNab, whom, after all these years, he calls "the best of us all" (SK:379), a valid assessment, since McNab gained wisdom long ago and has made his peace with the world. McNab devotedly fulfilled all his duties to the community but never tried to reveal his wisdom since he felt that not everyone could accept it and live with it. And that this truth can be destructive is proved by the Magistrate, who is

unable to reconcile himself with the world. The Magistrate, so reliable and helpful during the siege, loses interest in people and life:

> He realized now that his interest in people was no longer alive... he no longer loved the poor as a revolutionary must love them. People were stupid. The poor were as stupid as the rich; he had only contempt of them. His interest in humanity was now stone dead, and probably had been for some time. He no longer believed that it was possible to struggle against the cruel forces of capitalist wealth. Nor did he particularly care. He had given up in despair (SK:285).

From then on everything and everyone arouse his disgust. He laughs at people and their follies, and takes malicious pleasure whenever men behave in a ridiculous or absurd manner. All tokens of intellectual or moral degradation confirm his philistine views, but he accepts them with satisfaction.

In Farrell's world there are only faith and charity; there is no room for hope. This is suggested already in *Troubles* in the names of the twins and the same idea recurs at the end of *The Singapore Grip*. Matthew, in the camp, now limited "to the smallest of matters" loses hope: "Hope had deserted him completely. It came as a surprise to him to realize how much he had depended on it before" (SG:565). But Webb does not lose faith because when Dupigny asks him if all men will "still be brothers one day," Matthew gives him a positive answer. And his faith is rewarded:

> One day in his second year of captivity, while he was out with a working party, a young Chinese brushed up against him and pressed something into his hand. He looked at it surreptitiously: it was a cigarette packet wrapped in a handkerchief. When he opened it he put his head in his hands: it contained a lump of sugar and two cooked white mice (SG:566).

Therefore help, understanding, respect for people, tolerance and even sacrifice for the sake of others are the essence of one's existence. Man must neither lose faith nor despair but pursue his task till the end even though there is little chance of success (Bristow-Smith 1983:45). There is something heroic rather than absurd, as might appear at first glance, in almost all those characters who, despite the circumstances, do not give up (Hynes 1981:128; Drabble 1981:191). Edward prepares the great ball, Blackett awaits his celebrations, Fleury and Louise continue their tea parties even though they can serve only hot water, the Collector does not allow any moral rules to be broken. These characters intuitively feel that as long as they fight, keep discipline and custom, they have a chance to survive. Otherwise, they will be immediately defeated.

It seems that the trilogy is underlined by the idea that a human being is doomed to failure. However, what counts is how one fails. Man, manipulated by numerous external and internal factors, is never free. One can only retain control over oneself, one's own behavior and one's attitude to others. Hence, though human condition is tragic, there are things worth living for.

Chapter III
Historical Aspects of the Empire Trilogy

The aim of this final chapter is to analyze how J. G. Farrell uses his chosen historical material; it sets out to determine in what sense *Troubles*, *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *The Singapore Grip* are historical novels, and to ask what is the author's attitude towards an understanding of history.

The action of *Troubles* is set between 1919 and 1921 in Ireland during the Irish Uprising and Anglo-Irish war, and is concerned with the vicissitudes of Major Brendan Archer during his stay at the Majestic Hotel in Kilnalough in Ireland.[1] The period Farrell chooses for his novel was one of the most dramatic chapters of Irish history. Politicians and civilians, Irish and international organizations and governments several times tried to solve the conflict by peaceful methods. Whenever they failed, military actions between Sinn Fein and the IRA intensified and took horrid dimensions.

Farrell takes historical events as the starting point so as to interpolate his fictional but plausible world. He gives an account of the Irish struggle for independence which includes military action between Sinn Fein and the IRA, on the one hand, and the Royal Irish Constabulary, on the other, partisan fights, reprisals, mass executions and attacks on civilians. These events are set in the context of world history through references to World War I, the peace treaty of Versailles, political crisis in India, riots in South Africa, racial violence in Chicago and internal problems in Russia. Thus Farrell frames his narrative around facts which are ordinarily held to be true in the sense that they are externally verifiable (Lukács 1982:24). In the reconstruction of the background the novelist concentrates on unrest and turmoil as if suggesting that the early twenties were a period of troubles everywhere—of the beginning of the fall and disintegration of civilization. Farrell introduces to his narrative great personages of the age, such as De Valera, Terence Mac Swiney, Parnell, Redmond, and Lloyd George, which completes the image of the period and proves that the experience of the fictional characters is not merely individual. However, the well-known figures are only peripheral and seem to be introduced to strengthen the historical authenticity of the age. In this respect Farrell abandons Walter Scott's model of two plots in the historical novel since there is no public plot in *Troubles* (Hartveit 1983:419[2]).

[1] A more detailed analysis of *Troubles* can be found in A. Cichoń, "History in J. G. Farrell's *Troubles*," *Anglica Wratislaviensia XIX*, Wrocław, 1991.

[2] Hartveit draws parallels between *Troubles* and *Waverley*.

The characters, events and places, whether historical or made up by the novelist, are typical of the period, such typicality creating an impression of historical truthfulness. However, they are not presented with cohesiveness: rather, they resemble a mosaic, being scattered throughout the narrative, interwoven into the plot and lacking a chronological arrangement. The historical background is focalized from the point of view of the protagonists, who thus perceive historical crises from an 'unhistoric' perspective. For this reason history appears in the text as 'particles' and 'random events' and is mixed with human everyday life. In consequence, the reader learns about the past through the experience of those who participated in it. Moreover, one learns about the historical developments from different sources: press comments, reports, gossip, conversations of the protagonists and observation of life. These various materials and interpretations give a very complex image of the age. Thus it seems that the aim of Farrell's novel is not a reconstruction of the bygone period but an interpolation of history with the intention of evoking and bringing closer to the reader the atmosphere and general trends of the past. This subordination of historical facts and personages to the reconstruction of the mood of the past explains why great personages and famous people remain in the background—they only delimit the thematic framework of the novel. Through blending fact and fiction Farrell "encapsulates" the essence of the age. And even though the historical events remain in the background, seemingly overshadowed by the mad and grotesque plot, history and its contemplation constitute the main theme of the novel.

In *The Historical Novel* Lukács claims that "the aim of this genre is to portray the kind of individual experience that can directly and typically express the problems of an epoch" (1983:63) and that the lives of characters should coincide with the "lines of force." In Farrell's novel there is an organic connection between personal fate and historical problems. The period of 1919–1921 is often referred to by historians as that of "the troubles," the source of the book's title. The very word "troubles" appears frequently in the narrative in reference to different ideas. Thus problems occur in politics, in economy, in Ireland itself, and also in human lives—in relationships, health and love. Political complications and uncertainties are mirrored in the individual lives of the characters. As in politics the times are complicated, difficult to understand, and not susceptible to interpretation, so, in like measure, are the characters in the novel (Scanlan 1985:88).

From the beginning of the book history moves closer and closer to the Majestic: it surrounds and besieges the hotel in order to invade and damage it at the end. The movement of encircling and tightening is a structural principle characteristic of the narrative. First, the Sinn Feiners and members of the IRA are pursued only in the areas surrounding the property. This pursuit then extends to the adjoining buildings and finally, with the quartering of the Black and Tans, historical reality tangibly rushes into the hotel, inevitably causing the destruction of the place by fire. This is meant to be an act of revenge for the alleged anti-Irish attitudes of the residents. The officers introduce terror to the hotel and shake its apparent stability from the inside. All these steps show how history approaches, enters and eventually ravages Spencer's property and how it asserts its influence upon the lives of the patrons of the Majestic.

According to Lukács, in the historical novel historical consciousness is born when people "comprehend their existence as something historically conditioned, affecting their daily lives" (1983:63). This kind of consciousness is born in almost all characters, and even if they do not verbalize it, they intuitively feel it. They sense an ending, realize that the situation cannot last any longer and feel threatened and beset. The general decline of civilization characteristic of that period is mirrored in human existence. Edward Spencer maniacally reads aloud the names of dead soldiers at breakfast. As Dr. Ryan comments on people: "people are insubstantial, they never last" or "a person is only a very temporary and makeshift affair" (T:140–141), in the same way does the Major express his understanding of those times:

> At no point of recent history... in the past two or three hundred years could the standards of decent people have been so vulnerable and near to disintegration, as they were today (T:170).

Except for expressing it directly the Major can also sense the ending:

> Depression came down on the Major like a blanket of fog, suffocating him. What dreadful days these were! The future of the British Isles could never have seemed so dismal since the Romans had invaded; there was Trouble everywhere (T:277).

Lukács also states that the conflicts of fictional characters should mirror the contending historical forces of the time. Most of the arguments of the inhabitants of the Majestic concern political events and result from their radical views. The characters in *Troubles* represent a whole range of attitudes—they are Unionists or Separatists, Republicans or Nationalists, the Sinn Feiners or the Anglo-Irish, Catholics or Protestants. All of them utter prejudiced judgments typical of their standpoints. Their personal conflicts mirror the general political situation and the stress in the novel is put on the variety of opinions, usually contradictory. The views of the protagonists typify the political attitudes characteristic of the period. The chaos, complexity and confusion which Farrell permanently evokes link his works with the postmodernist scepticism about making sense of history.

In the historical novel the author's attitude towards and understanding

of history constitute an important problem. Farrell's approach to history is traditional, though peculiarly so. He seems to rely on the assumption that historical reality is significant and, even if not coherent, it did, as Carlyle put it, "in very deed occur." Farrell does not call into question our concept of factuality and history, which remain past actuality, not thought. Yet he realizes that history is not transmitted and reconstructed objectively—there are lies, intentions and interpretations depending on people's views, ideology and background. This is expressed best when the Major exclaims to Sarah: "You ask me to believe in these operatic characters when one reads entirely different things in the newspaper" (T:76). Farrell also realizes that "historical facts" can be misleading. Thus he is conscious that evaluations and meanings are chimerical or at best subjective, and he lacks the orthodox confidence that he is making sense of history.[3] The novelist views history as a process of organization and entropy. He seems to express a conviction originating from Hegelian dialectics that the fall of a civilization starts already at the moment of its highest prosperity. Thus, even though in the period described in the novel the British Empire contained over a quarter of the world's population and dominated over a quarter of the world's surface, the decadence and decay of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy augured the fall of the Empire. The fact that none of the young or energetic characters is willing to grapple with the situation is an indication that this civilization is drawing to its end. Spencer's son, Ripon, loses all interest in politics in order to lead a comfortable, affluent life; Sarah elopes with an officer, and the only "reasonable" person, Dr. Ryan, retreats to his home. It soon becomes obvious that nobody is going to continue the old politics.

Historical considerations are reflected in the novel's central metaphor of the hotel, which functions on many planes. As Bernard Bergonzi remarked, the destruction of the hotel in the novel coincides with the decline of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, British rule in Ireland and the impending dissolution of the British Empire (1980:59). This parallel is stressed by the very name of the hotel and its parts. There is an Imperial Bar there, the Prince Consort's wing and the place is guarded by a statue of Queen Victoria. The Majestic is rotting from the inside and proves too big a responsibility for the owners to maintain. Perhaps it does not make a terrifying impression on those who look at it not critically but through eyes affected by customary attachment, sentiment and youthful memories. This also reminds one of the Anglo-Irish attitudes of many people who, used to the conflict, cannot notice how it aggravates each day. The politicians still believe that mutual relations are correct, and if not, then remaining safe and controlled. Thus

[3] McEwan notices (1987:130) that Farrell is concerned with the problematic nature of historical interpretation rather than of fiction.

Lloyd George, as if deaf to information from Ireland, says: "I ask you not to pay too much heed to the distorted accounts by partisans" because the police are "dispersing the terrorists" (T:256–257).

All attempts to prevent the inevitable fall of the Majestic are futile. For instance, Edward's great ball does not restore the hotel to its previous splendor but rather brings it even faster to ruin. Furthermore, the troops of the Black and Tans contribute to the aggravation of the conflict. Demoralized officers, instead of taking control of Ireland, only provoke the Irish to using more cruelty and violence than ever.

The metaphor of the hotel serves also as a generalization upon history and seems to suggest that all social and political structures yield to time: they develop, metamorphose and fall. For, as the Major notices, "nothing is invulnerable to growth, change and decay" (T:259). This destruction, "drive" to ruin, is an imminent, dynamic force. The British position in her dominions is threatened by civil wars, uprisings and the fight for independence in a way analogous to the collapse of the Majestic caused by vegetation, animals and time (Binns 1986:58).[4] When the danger is not yet visible outside, when there are only small fissures and cracks, warning sounds can already be heard and disturbing sights appear. When Edward, alarmed by strange sounds of cracking at the Majestic calls an expert to investigate the state of the hotel, the architect, even though petrified that the building might fall down any moment, does not give an opinion. This scene is parallel to the speech of Lloyd George in Parliament, who undisturbed by the news from all parts of the world still believes in British strength and calls the Empire: "that Empire at the highest of its power, [...] that Empire at the greatest day of its glory" (T:256). Yet, under the thin coverage of stability and prosperity there had been forces at work which gradually led to its destruction. Considerations of troubles in different parts of the Empire bring to mind a scene in the novel when Archer and Sarah play the game of tracing bulges:

> Something was trying to force its way up through the floor. 'Good heavens! What is it?' The Major knelt and removed three or four of the blocks to reveal a white, hairy wrist. 'It's a root. God only knows where it comes from...' 'Why do you think it wants to come up into the lounge?' 'Looking for nourishment, I suppose. There may be lots more of them for all I know. One shudders to think what it may be doing to the foundations' (T:251).

[4] Binns remarks that the hotel is presented as a living organism leading itself towards self-annihilation. All the dynamic forces at the hotel—the uncontrolled hordes of animals, luxuriant, exuberant vegetation, structural defects of the building—are "a growth but of a cancerous kind, bringing decay and collapse" (1986:58–59).

Bergonzi also notices that the Majestic "is not just a static symbol, but is malignly active in decay" (1980:61).

The hotel, in its structure, coloring, atmosphere and weirdness resembles Ireland as perceived by the Major on his arrival. When Ripon, as a guide, shows Brendan different institutions, shops and churches in Kilnalough, the Major is puzzled for, to his surprise, he can "see no trace of them" (T:14). Yet what he notices are the smells and colors, the impression of poverty and strangeness. Ireland in *Troubles*, like the Majestic, is mysterious and incomprehensible, though fascinating. Only for the first few days can the Major control himself and resist its power: "like a man struggling to retain his consciousness as he inhales the first fumes of chloroform, he has not yet allowed himself to surrender to the country's narcotic inertia" (T:37).

There are several scenes in the novel which stress the parallel between Ireland under Britain from 1919–1921 and the Majestic, mainly in order to show the destruction both of them underwent. When after a conversation with Edward about the disastrous state of Ireland the Major looks at the Majestic, he notices: "How dilapidated it looked. The great chimneys towering over the hulk of wood and stone gave it the appearance of a beached Dreadnought" (T:199).

The metaphor of the hotel can also be considered as an interpretation of history.[5] With the passage of time events fade, the dramatic experience of people changes into "historical facts." There remain cool retrospections, reports about great personages, general trends and moods. When one reconstructs the richness and variety of the forms of life, human emotions and personal experience get lost, blurred by time. The very framework of the narrative seems to support such a view. In a remote manner, the opening sentences present the setting of the novel. The perspective is historical, there is a strong sense of the flow of time, evoked by frequent repetitions of "at that time," "in those days," "by then" (Binns 1986:46). The tone seems to be characteristic of a historian who after long years tries to reproduce a bygone era on the basis of what remains of it. From the huge layout of the hotel he may deduce that the Majestic used to be a fine establishment with a prodigious number of rooms, equipped with facilities of the day. However, very little can be said about the lives of the inhabitants of the place. So, when after years, the narrator looks at the ruins of the hotel, he notices that long before the fire the Majestic must have already been dilapidated. This is why he says: "by that time the place was in such a state of disrepair that it [the fire] hardly mattered" (T:7). But it did matter. The hotel witnessed dramatic events; people led complex lives there. When one looks from a distance of time at the lives of people, one is likely to reduce them to some universal, typical dimension or function, in the sense that they appear as a

[5] Butterfield (1924:113) claims that what makes "the historical novel historical is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force."

"distant species" conditioned by history. Thus for a historian the immediacy of human experience and dynamism fade. It is significant that at the end of the book, when the Major looks at the Majestic for the last time, he paraphrases the opening section of the novel noticing: "Now that these rooms were open to the mild Irish sky they all seemed much smaller—in fact quite insignificant" (T:411). Hence, the past loses its immediacy even for those who once were involved in it. Only a writer can express the immediacy of experience, show the rich texture of human existence as something past, but, nevertheless, as having happened "here and now."

In order to eliminate the time distance between the reader and the world presented, Farrell uses several narrative tricks which are essential to the structure of *Troubles* (Bartoszyński 1984:7). Thus the fictional world is presented by a narrator who is a grandson of the generation who lived in the Ireland of "the troubles." Nevertheless, the events are shown from the point of view of the main character. On the one hand, Farrell seems to assume that the reader will entertain many presuppositions concerning the thematic frame of the novel. It is possible because the implied reader, at least potentially, might learn about the bygone period from the generation that participated in the events of the past. When the narrator, probably in the late sixties, visits the ruins of the hotel with his grandson, he enthusiastically draws attention to the generation link: the grandfather, who himself could have been a teenage visitor to the Majestic, knows the history of the hotel and passes it on to his grandson.

On the other hand, when, in the seventies, the novel was presented to the reader, the Irish problem had become topical once again: 1970 was the beginning of "the troubles" in Northern Ireland; the conflict between Britain and Ireland brutally intensified. The dramatic events which happened in the twenties revived and started a series of brutal street-fights and bomb outrages. Thus, the writer could assume a competent understanding on the part of the reader. Besides that, the presentation of the fictional world from the point of view of the Major also makes history more accessible since the Major is unfamiliar with the Irish problem, is a "naive" character, and therefore must be equipped with information analogous to presuppositions. The reader, together with the Major, gets to know the Ireland of "the troubles" through topographic, political, social, domestic and psychological descriptions. Also different techniques applied in the novel, such as documentary realism, informative discussions among the characters or mutually contradictory quotations from the press and other historical sources present the complexity of the past.

The very style of the writer "metamorphosing from a realistic mode into that of the fairy tale, myth, fantasy, symbolism and parody" (Binns

1986:45), the rich imagery connected mainly with decay, colors and smells, bring the place closer to the reader so that the historical distance is not alienating. The Major ironically remarks that the intimacy he reached with the Spencers is almost ridiculous for "it's hard to be intimidated by people when one knows, for instance, the nature and amount of the dental work in their upper and lower jaws, where they buy their outer clothes... and many more things besides" (T:12).

Furthermore, Farrell's novel is populated by characters whom the reader recognizes as representative of the twenties (Bergonzi 1980:59; Winnifirth 1983:290). The Major is a well-known type of officer who went through World War I from which he emerged shell-shocked, with a neurosis resulting from his experience in the trenches. He is an English gentleman always responsible for weaker and threatened people; Angela, his fiancée, is a faded Edwardian beauty, a reminiscence of the past epoch; her father—the eccentric Edward—is a representative of ruthless Empire builders, a caricature of a pompous upper middle class Englishman. Finally, the gallery of old ladies with their knitting, salts and chocolates smelling of peppermint, the officers from the Black and Tans with their sense of superiority and aggression, furnish a broadly representative microcosmic world which suits the reader's preconceived notions about the twenties. Farrell's use of typical and, at least potentially, recognizable characters serves the effect of obliterating extraneousness separating the reader from the text (Bartoszyński 1984:10).

Farrell does not limit his presentation to strictly historical aspects—he concentrates on people who lead their lives, who love and suffer, who have their personal problems. He claims that human existence does not differ radically, because beside responding to history, the rest is "merely the being alive that every age has to do" (T:93). The readers find out that they have a great deal in common with the fictional characters: the details are different, the circumstances change, but the human condition remains the same. In this way Farrell enhances the historical self-consciousness of his reader. He also suggests that the present-day conflicts have their roots in the past. The past in *Troubles* is felt as a prehistory of the present, as formative history (Drabble 1981:190–191) which has influenced and shaped contemporary life. *Troubles*, with all its "truthfulness" and historical veracity, is directed towards current polemics and interpretations, and in this way "debunks" the past, stripping it of old sentiments and pro-English sympathies. It also offers a contemporary and less biased system of evaluations by verifying false and stereotypical judgments. This is reflected in the Major's permanent doubts about the attitudes and behavior of the British. Farrell speaks from the position of the lost Empire, not from the authoritative standpoint of power.

Troubles is not a factual historical study, but an imaginative reconstruction of politics, life and manners in Ireland in the twenties. The genre of the historical novel is here realized through several conventions, including the novel of manners, the "Big House" novel and the novel of ideas. *The Siege of Krishnapur*, similarly, is more than a book of history: like *Troubles*, it is an entertaining and thoughtful fictional narrative based on historical facts. The action of this book is set in India during the great Indian Mutiny of 1857, an uprising of the native soldiers who served in the British Army. Farrell's Krishnapur (the city of Krishna), a fictitious town, is probably based on Lucknow, a British administrative center in India. Topographic details, various phases of the imaginary siege and the fact that in the novel numerous ideas are taken from "diaries, letters and memoirs written by eyewitnesses" (SK:346 Afterword) of the siege of Lucknow, seem to support this supposition.

The historical background of this novel is depicted with great fidelity, but, as in *Troubles*, the events are put into a mosaic rather than a systematic exposition and are viewed from the perspective of the characters. Though the narrative deals with a crucial stage in Anglo-Indian relations, the Mutiny, the focus of this novel is on the besieged community, the English, who uncritically transfer a part of their country to an alien, totally different continent. Since the characters represent manifold points of view, philosophies and approaches to life, all of them embedded in the Victorian world, one is likely to treat them as a microcosm characteristic of the macrocosm. In a sense the enclave of Krishnapur encapsulates in miniature the essence of Victorianism, and the historical value of *The Siege of Krishnapur* lies more in its analyses of Victorian society there than in the problems of Indian independence (Binns 1986:64,72). The historical elements of this novel embrace not only past events, but also the intellectual climate of the period and its pattern of manners. This aspect is very important because, as Lukács stated: "What matters in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and the human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality" (1982:42). Such an approach to historical fiction prompts the author to apply the convention of the novel of manners which, as in *Troubles*, becomes one of the most important literary codes.

In the period described in this novel, Victorian self-confidence was at its height. Dynamic changes, ferment of ideas, inventiveness and expansion resulted in a general mood of optimism, complacency and stability. The English were proud of the newest technological achievements of the Industrial Revolution which, for them, were a concrete embodiment of a progres-

sive and rational civilization (Thompson 1981) and symbolized the triumph of Victorian thought. Besides, it was an age of religious controversy, when the conflict between science and religion intensified and found expression in "topical debates concerning the role of the church and the authority of the Bible, and the claims of scientific reasoning" (Norton Anthology 1968:I 733) as the most reliable method of discovering truth. All these ideas find expression in the novel, where much space is devoted to intellectual debates in which the characters think, speculate and build theories. Their views on progress, civilization, imperialism, human nature, religion and medicine reflect the Victorian frame of mind (McEwan 1987:143). Farrell shows his characters as absurd thinkers and assumes an ironic distance from them, to emphasize their overconfidence and complacency. The intellectual controversies between the protagonists are unfolded by means of the convention of the novel of ideas.

The most important intellectual debate in this novel of ideas, where the Collector and Fleury represent the most radical views, concerns progress, civilization and colonialism. Mr. Hopkins, the Collector of Taxes, is enthusiastic about progress and technological advancement which he identifies with progressive and rational civilization. In his opinion, scientific and industrial development is "a collective prayer" which brings "mankind towards union with that Supreme Being" (SK:59). Mr. Hopkins is deeply convinced that science leads to truth and moral and social improvement (Singh 1979:26). This ultimate cult of scientific progress, which is to bring about the moral elevation of people, is typically Victorian. In the following passage the Collector expresses the faith of his age:

> I believe that we are all part of a society which by its communal efforts of faith and reason is gradually raising itself to a higher state... There are rules of morality to be followed if we are to advance, just as there are rules of scientific investigation... Mrs. Lang, we are raising ourselves, however painfully, so that mankind may enjoy in the future a superior life which now we can hardly conceive! The foundations on which the new men will build their lives are Faith, Science, Respectability, Geology, Mechanical Invention, Ventilation and Rotation of Crops!... (SK:90).

Like Kipling's and Conrad's characters, he is a carrier of "the white man's burden."

The Collector rationally justifies the idea of the Empire and uncritically supports it:

> Not only had he returned to India full of ideas about hygiene, crop rotation, and drainage, he had devoted a substantial part of his fortune to bring out to India examples of European art and science in the belief that he was doing as once the Romans had done in Britain. Those who had seen it had said that the Residency at Krishnapur was full of statues, paintings and machines (SK:37).

The Collector's original enthusiasm and idealistic view of colonialism does not derive from naïveté or hypocrisy but constitutes a typically Victorian belief in progress. Historically speaking, his attitudes were representative of many people in the first half of the 19th century, the period preceding the Mutiny, when there were no serious controversies between the two nations. The English were too few in number to organize themselves into a strong society. Separated from their country, they treated India as their second homeland. There were no racial prejudices, and the Hindus coexisted peacefully with the British. Moreover, the memory of the earlier feuds and anarchy was so fresh among the natives, that they saw the Europeans as their liberators who, in turn, tried to civilize India (Woodward 1962:406–409).

Originally, the Collector shares the disillusionment of the empire builders who cannot understand why European civilization has been rejected and why it brought so little progress. He wonders:

> Why, after a hundred years of beneficial rule in Bengal, the natives should have taken it into their heads to return to the anarchy of their ancestors. One or two mistakes, however serious, made by the military in their handling of religious matters, were surely no reason for rejecting a superior culture as a whole (SK:176).

Later on he adds that "in the long run a superior civilization such as ours is irresistible" (SK:177). Nevertheless, when the Collector notices more and more signals of rejection and even hatred, he comes to the astonished conclusion that the English are not, and never have been, welcome in India. He finally realizes that the historical mission he believed in, and the idea of contented natives, were inventions, fictions, which cannot be defended. He concludes that:

> the British could leave and half India wouldn't notice us leaving just as they didn't notice us arriving. All our reforms of administration might be reforms on the moon for all it has to do with them" (SK:232).

The idea that British presence is not desirable in India is expressed several times in the novel in various forms and impresses itself forcibly in a metaphorical scene when the Collector observes a pet monkey trying to free itself of its clothes:

> In the twilight he saw two green pebbles gazing down at him from beneath a sailor's cap [...] the animal had managed to bite and tear itself free of its jacket but the sailor's hat had defied all its efforts. Again and again, in a frenzy of irritation it had clutched at that hat on which was written HMS John Company... but it had remained in place. The string beneath its jaw was too strong" (SK:193).

This scene reflects the desire of the natives to set themselves free from the British who impose on them an alien and unacceptable rule.

Fleury, the young poet, represents a romantic and idealistic trend in the Victorian thought and finds technological advancement harmful. He

expresses the conviction that "objects are useless in themselves" (SK:94), meaningless and empty when compared with "the world of external soul" (SK:92). For Fleury objects "are nothing but distractions for people who have been unable to make a real spiritual advance" (SK:93). The only real progress for the adherents of this theory would be immaterial and would rely on making "a man's heart sensitive to love, to Nature, to his fellow men, to the world of spiritual joy" (SK:94). According to this view, all civilization is bad because it "mars the noble and natural instincts of the heart" (SK:177). The controversy between the Collector and Fleury exemplifies one of the numerous discussions of the protagonists of *The Siege of Krishnapur* which reflect the Victorian world.

In *The Siege of Krishnapur* many forms of colonialism are shown, ranging from economic exploitation to friendly help. For some of the English, India provides a great opportunity for personal achievement and commercial success, for others it means a professional or social career. Since it was easier to move up in the British regiments stationed there, those officers who had little chance of promotion at home could achieve it relatively quickly overseas. Besides, impoverished English families, which had a rather low status in Britain but who had relatives of high rank in India, could expect social advancement and expedient marriages for their offspring. This practice was specially popular with young ladies:

> Calcutta was full of such 'nieces'... girls who could scrape up an acquaintance with a respectable family in India, as members of 'the fishing fleet' to find a husband. The war had taken such a toll of young men! Only in India was there still a plentiful supply to be found (SK:115–116).

In this novel Farrell devotes a lot of attention to the presentation of the colonial milieu and the problems of imperialism. What may appear as striking, though, is that there are hardly any portraits of the natives. Occasional glimpses of servants and soldiers are never fully developed and the motives of the sepoys are discussed only in as much as they relate to matters of strategy (Drabble 1981; Binns 1986:80).[6] The characterizations of the Maharajah and his son Hari are only superficially individualized because they, too, are presented as simple, if not primitive, inferior people, incapable of appreciating European patronage. Thus, in this respect, Farrell's presentation is one-sided and limited. This narrowing of characterizations, disapproved of by some critics, seems, nevertheless, to be done on purpose. While showing diversified approaches to imperialism Farrell concentrates on depicting Victorian attitudes and showing the impact of colonialism upon the British,

[6] Also McEwan remarked that *The Siege of Krishnapur* is open to a charge of unfairness to the Indians, since it offers no support for the view common among Indian writers that it was a nationalist rebellion.

not the natives. Once again the novelist limits the perspective in order to focus on the community of Krishnapur. Moreover, he suggests that the English did not make an effort to get to know the natives. Nor did they confront their views with the inhabitants of the country they colonized, but rather based their conceptions on ready-made, preconceived notions. What they were capable of noticing were only the conventional scenes and commonplace portraits which they expected to see in India, while there still remained "a lot of Indian life unavailable to the Englishman who came equipped with his own religion and habits" (SK:314) and thus not prepared to see the unknown. That their views are detached from reality is something the characters learn during the siege. The natives, to whom they deny any military abilities prove, when free of British command, to be far more effective soldiers than the British.

Farrell's presentation of India is also selective and limited. The country is seen from the point of view of white colonizers whose evaluation, at least originally, is rather unfavorable. For them India is a strange and alien country. Its inferiority is stressed in the opening passages of the novel through comparisons between the local villages and British stations. The fact that the English use bricks while the natives only mud shows the technological advantage of Europe. When a traveller approaches Krishnapur situated on an "unending plain," one passes by poor enclaves which

> are made of the same mud as the plain they come from; and no doubt they melt back into it again during the rainy season, for there is no lime in these parts, no clay or shale that you can burn into bricks, no substance hard enough to resist the seasons over the years (SK:9).

No matter what the life of the inhabitants looks like, "there is no comfort here, nothing that a European might recognize as civilization" (SK:10). Before the siege, the brick structure of the Residency adds to the Collector's confidence because he feels protected both by the firm building and by the authority that stands behind it:

> One felt very safe here. The walls were built of enormous numbers of the pink, wafer-like bricks of British India, were so very thick... you could see yourself how thick they were (SK:13).

As this passage suggests, the British in India are shut off from the problems of the country, they live in their stations and do not even try to understand the Indian reality. When the Collector looks at the Residency and his room, he admits with satisfaction that "it was hard to believe that one was in India at all" (SK:17). Moreover, the British know neither the language nor the culture of the country. Even though they have lived there for some time they know only a few commands. The Europeans purposefully built a civilizational barrier which would separate them from the Hindus and which would

guard the enclave from native penetration. With the flow of events this "civilizational wall" turns into fortifications because, under the changed circumstances, only real ramparts can protect the British. But when these are washed away by rain and solid objects cannot strengthen them any more, the besieged notice the rapid growth of wild vegetation around the Residency:

> While the ramparts had been melting, the jungle beyond them had been growing steadily thicker. [...] One thing was clear: it was as important to clear away the vegetation close to the ramparts as it was to maintain the ramparts themselves. There was already enough cover for a large number of sepoys to approach very close to the enclave without being detected (SK:272).

The English are, literally and metaphorically, in a trap, at the mercy of forces they can no longer control. The imagery of vegetation underlines in literal terms the spatial shrinking of the enclave and metaphorically the diminished power of the British in India.

Farrell's command of the period is shown not only in his capacity to give life and conviction to "unfamiliar modes of thought" (Bergonzi 1980:63), or in his knowledge of historical events, but also in his reconstructions of manners. This characteristic is very important because, as Lukács put it: "the being of the age can only appear as a broad and many-sided picture if the everyday life of the people, the joys and sorrows, crises and confusions of average human beings are portrayed" (1982:39). In *The Siege of Krishnapur* customs and manners complement the image of the epoch, in that historical events are mixed with everyday life. The fictional heroes live in the same world as great personages, though, as in *Troubles*, in *The Siege of Krishnapur* real personages are peripheral and only serve to strengthen the impression of historical verisimilitude. The characters are given historical credentials: Miriam is a widow because her husband, an officer, died before Sebastopol. Some of the besieged are introduced as survivors of real massacres which had previously taken place in India. This characteristic of Farrell's writing strictly corresponds to the demands made by the genre of the historical novel. Avrom Fleishman stated that: "when life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel. When the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel" (1971:4).

The community of Krishnapur mirrors the social relations existing in Victorian England. Though the characters are separated from their homes, with great scrupulousness they transplant British customs to India. Farrell subjects this community to comic scrutiny—numerous customs which would not strike one as ridiculous in England seem funny or absurd in India, and even more so in the situation of the siege. Thus, Farrell once again "uses his criticism of the English in India as a way of examining and passing judgment on fundamental Victorian attitudes and beliefs" (Singh 1979:24).

This society is based on strict class divisions, where birth and position in the social hierarchy rigorously dictate one's way of life. The upper class follows a code of behavior which frequently denies sound reasoning. For example, strict rules concerning proper behavior result in the fact that the Collector's daughters must wear velvet, flannel or wool dresses even during the hot weather, only because "they had a position to keep up in the community" (SK:69). Mothers of young officers protect them from husband-hunting women of lower social status because they believe that such a disastrous marriage can ruin a man's career. Families are concerned with proper marriages for their members and are more scared of social scandals than of military actions. Towards the end of the siege, when Louise notices that her brother fancies Lucy, the fallen woman, petrified, she confesses to Miriam:

> Alas, it's not the physical danger that I fear for him... or rather, I fear that too, but since we are all in God's hands I trust that he will not forsake us... no, it's another danger that I fear for him. My dear, you cannot have failed to see how Lucy is leading him on. Think what unhappy circumstances would attend his career if he should now be trapped by a penniless girl without family whose reputation is known throughout India (SK:246).

In Krishnapur all characters are aware of social norms. The ladies are more ready to put their lives in danger than to mix with those of lower status. Mrs. Rogers, forced to leave her comfortable room and to be accommodated with other women, does not hesitate to call her new lodging "a rabble":

> The ladies in the billiard room had divided themselves into groups according to the ranks of husbands or fathers. Mrs. Rogers, who was the wife of a judge, found herself unable to join any of the groups because of her elevated rank, and so she was in danger of starving to death immediately, for to make things easier, rations were issued collectively, a fact which had undoubtedly hastened this social stratification (SK:172–173).

The British in India lead busy social lives. In Krishnapur the Collector founds a Poetry Society. He honestly admits that he "had done so partly because he was a believer in the ennobling powers of literature, and partly because he was sorry for the ladies of the cantonment who had, particularly during the hot season, so little to occupy them" (SK:15). But very soon the Society turns a success and numerous members willingly join it. Poetry competitions become the ladies' favorite pastime. The action of the novel starts with a comic description of such a meeting, where poems are judged not by experts, poets or humanists, but by technocrats—by the Magistrate and the Collector—only because they occupy a high social position. The narrator ironically states that Mr. Hopkins "considered poems of value only for their therapeutic properties" (SK:19).

The British in India entertain themselves at picnics, parties and balls in the same manner as the social elite in England. They desperately try

to follow fashion, disregarding the fact that they now find themselves in a totally different country which, if not in other, more important ways, differs from their own at least as far as the climate is concerned. Thus the fashionable European dances, such as gallops, become a torture in the Indian heat. There is a great deal of irony in all the scenes which show instances of slavish imitation of the Victorian social customs. During the siege social life does not entirely expire, though it takes on grotesque dimensions. Sick, exhausted and dirty, the characters continue their tea-parties with propriety, though, due to the shortage of food, only hot water is served. As Neil McEwan observes (1987:141), such behavior is both funny and serious from the Victorian point of view. This insistence on customs and rituals in colonial literature goes back to Kipling, who claimed that the survival of the British in a remote culture depended on sticking to rituals (Daiches 1975:1091).

The characters in Krishnapur are fundamentally Victorian also in regard to relations between men and women and sex. Rumors about a massacre in Delhi evoke horror not so much due to the cruelty of the sepoys, but their treatment of women whom they stripped naked. Nakedness is more shocking than the tortures women were submitted to. The problem of nakedness and the anatomy of the opposite sex gains a most comic treatment in the mock-heroic scene when Lucy is attacked by a cloud of cockchafers. Since she has torn her clothes and is naked, Harry and Fleury have serious doubts about how to help her, because they cannot "dash forward and seize her with their bare hands" (SK:255). Finally, using the boards of the Bible as razor blades, they scrap insects off Lucy:

> Her body, both young men were interested to discover, was remarkably like the statues of young women they had seen... like for instance the Collector's plaster cast of Andromeda Exposed to the Monster, though, of course without any chains. Indeed, Fleury felt quite like a sculptor as he worked away and he thought that it must feel something like this to crave an object of beauty out of the primeval rock. [...] The only significant difference between Lucy and a statue was that Lucy had pubic hair; this caused them a bit of a surprise at first. It was not something that had ever occurred to them as possible, likely, or even desirable (SK:256).

This scene is a mockery of prudish Victorian education.

Farrell's presentation of Victorianism includes also a comment on the attitude of men towards women. In this society, women are treated as decorative objects, as complementary to men. They are thought of as inferior to men and have almost no rights on their own. So, while they are encouraged to accompany their husbands, they are not expected to reveal any views because:

> Speaking a great deal in company is not an attractive quality in a young lady. [...] a woman's special skill is to listen quietly to what a fellow has to say and thereby create the sort of atmosphere in which good conversation can flourish. [...] Mrs. Hampton, the Padre's wife, did occasionally venture an opinion, as her rank and maturity entitled her to... but she took advantage of her privilege only to support the view of her husband, which no one could object to (SK:54).

These women entirely depend on their husbands: they have never worked, never looked after themselves. How invalid they are, the ladies learn only during the siege when devoid of comforts, and when the simplest jobs they must perform exceed their abilities.

Many characters utter conventional and naive opinions about women. *The Siege of Krishnapur* abounds in such comments like: "funny creatures, women, all the same. One never knows quite what goes on in their minds" (SK:200), or "girls had a habit of distressing themselves over things which did not exist. It was something to do with their wombs..." (SK:210). Even though men see how women develop, how heroically they behave during the siege, they cannot change their prejudices. The Collector, the personification of the progressive Victorian thought, is able to modify many ideas but not his view of the opposite sex:

> 'Women are weak, we shall always have to take care of them, just as we shall always have to take care of the natives; no doubt there are exceptions... women of character like Miss Nightingale, but not unfortunately like Carrie or Eliza or Margaret... Even a hundred years from now...' the Collector feebly tried to imagine 1957... 'It will still be the same. They are made of a softer substance' (SK:175).

Thus, the Collector cannot imagine that in future the position of women might be different. As Frances Singh observes, this view is significant because the Collector's backwardness with regard to women represents "the real historical slowness of men to treat women as more than decorative objects, even though in other areas of life they have been able to give up outmoded principles" (1979:37).

Another important feature characterizing this Victorian community is their attachment to material objects. The inhabitants of Krishnapur are devoted to their properties, depend on them, and, unless forced, cannot part with them. When the British from Krishnapur are forced to hide in the Residency, they set off from their homes with all their possessions: precious objects and whole collections of things. The result is that the Residency is staffed with possessions, almost besieged, not only by the sepoys from the outside, but also from the inside by objects. Soon the Residency is shrinking with "the deposit of furniture, boxes and bric-a-brac" (SK:104) and there is hardly any room for people. There is an ironic relationship between objects and people: instead of being useful, things restrain their owners. The characters sleep on mattresses, while sofas and beds, stuck in various corners, are overlaid with boxes, books and parcels. Hardly anyone complains about the discomforts, hoping that objects will also survive the siege. During

the "massacre of possessions" the owners of the objects with which the fortifications are strengthened utter "the tune of distressing protests, or a heart-rendering pleas for clemency" (SK:270). The gravest comment on the cult of objects comes in the last defense. Since there is no ammunition the cannons are loaded with all sorts of objects. When this load is fired and reaches the enemy, a most devastating view can be seen:

> A sepoy here was trying to remove a silver fork from one of his lungs, another had received a piece of lightning-conductor in his kidneys. A sepoy with a green turban had his spine shattered by 'The Spirit of Science' (SK:318).

In his presentation of manners of the Victorian enclave in Krishnapur, Farrell is truthful to what is known about the period. However, his reconstruction is underpinned by irony. While showing the rules and customs the Victorians believed in or took as universal and divine, from the point of view of the twentieth century, these "universally acknowledged truths" appear ridiculous and absurd. As in John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, the past can be treated as a metaphor for today because both novelists direct their criticism not only towards Victorian values, but also, by implication, towards ours. It is easier to see absurdity in their views, manners and opinions than in contemporary life. McEwan observed that we may think ourselves wiser than the characters in particular instances, especially about those controversies which have been solved. We are more likely to see the absurdity of Victorian phrenology than the same absurdity in post-Freudian psychiatry. Thus we are not "encouraged to think that in general we judge more efficiently" (1987:145).

In *The Siege of Krishnapur* Farrell expresses his view of the workings of history. He makes it clear that individuals cannot control the world and that they must "undergo" history. Like *Troubles*, this narrative ends with a scene which suggests that history, when compared with the present, is remote and impersonal, because historical records cannot capture the immediacy of human experience. Instead, there remain myths and anecdotes or factual historical accounts. When the Collector returns to London he is known as a "hero of Krishnapur," a brave person who participated in the defense of a British station far from home. The Indian Mutiny is one of a countless number of historical events, another date or fact to be remembered. For the new generation, that is for Emily from *The Hill Station*, the uprising is only an exotic adventure during which "the McNabs had met under strained circumstances... in some battle or other with lots of flies around and without clothes on" (HS:92).

The Singapore Grip, Farrell's last complete novel, attempts to depict the development, growth and final collapse of British Singapore seen against the background of world events. In this narrative Farrell chooses to show the

history of the Far East from an economic point of view. On the basis of the fictitious rubber company of Blackett and Webb, Farrell traces the British domination in Malaya. The action of *The Singapore Grip* is set between November 1941 and February 1942, but is preceded by a section of eleven chapters which introduce the Blackett family from 1937. There are also numerous references to the earlier periods which explain the prosperity and economic expansion of the English in that region. The novel ends when Singapore is taken over by the Japanese. As with the first two parts of the trilogy, in *The Singapore Grip*, history "happens" to the protagonists without, or even against, their will.

The historical and economic background in this novel is presented more thoroughly than in the other parts of the trilogy, because more attention is paid to purely factual detail, information, interpretation, polemics and historical reconstruction. Farrell attaches a bibliography to *The Singapore Grip*, which includes works on colonialism, trade, economy, war and history. He also provides the reader with a map of the Malay Peninsula, which enables one to follow the details of the military campaign. As John Spurling put it, in this novel Farrell is "telling not just a story, but history itself" (1982:167).

Farrell uses different techniques to deal with his material. The progress of war in the Far East is depicted through the convention of the war novel; the defense of the city is narrated as a diary with day-to-day accounts. As in the earlier parts of the trilogy, the discussions of the protagonists are conveyed in the conventions of the novel of ideas, whereas the techniques of the novel of manners are used to present the social sphere.

The distance between the story and the author is only one generation. In this sense the novel belongs to the borderline group of historical novels (McEwan 1987:153)[7]: the events are reconstructed not only on the basis of documents but also on oral accounts of those who lived through the war in the Far East. In the Afterword the author himself expresses his thanks "to old Singapore hands" who enlightened him "about life there those days" (SG:569). But, on the other hand, it must be remembered that between 1940 and 1978 (the date of publication) the British Empire ceased to exist, so that the novel deals with a vanished era and a defunct form of politics. Farrell makes this fact clear from the very beginning of the narrative. He suggests that there is a huge gap "in time and space" (SG:12) between reader and author, on the one hand, and the world presented, on the other. He insists that though the events happened not very long ago, and despite the fact that the imperial past can still be felt by the readers "thousands

[7] Lukács also claims that the distance between the world presented and the time of writing should be about two generations.

of miles away, reading in bed or in a deck chair on the lawn, or to me as I sit writing at the table" (SG:12), there is no return to those times. As if taking the reader by the hand and leading him into the setting, the novelist stresses that the reader belongs to a different world. Such an impression is strengthened by the frequent usage of conditional structures like: "If you were merely a visitor, a sailor, say, in those years before the war, Singapore would undoubtedly have seemed no less exciting than another of the great Eastern sea ports. You would have gone to drink and dance..." (SG:10), or "when you staggered outside into the sweltering night, you would have been able to inhale that incomparable smell of incense..." (*l.c.*). Through such distancing techniques, the reader experiences the world presented as historical and remote.

As in the former parts of the trilogy, the protagonists of *The Singapore Grip* live in the same world as famous personages—Chiang-Hai-Shek, King George IV, the Emperor Hirohito. At parties, in clubs and at meetings the protagonists either meet or talk about the great historical characters, such as General Archibald Wavell, Winston Churchill or General Cartruox. However, the public personages are neither idealized nor glorified. They appear on the stage more frequently than in *Troubles* and *The Siege of Krishnapur*, though in less "historical" situations. They are shown as common, fallible people, of flesh and blood, who have the same fears, desires and needs as everybody else. It is the others who create myths about them. While Sir Thomas Raffles in Singapore is known as the mythical founder of the colony, in reality he was "by no means the lantern-jawed individual you might have expected: indeed, a rather vague-looking man in a frock coat" (SG:9). Neither are the commanders of the Singapore army drawn with respect. Some of them turn out to be traitors and cowards. General Gordon Bennet, in charge of the Australian troops, escapes from Singapore: "he had thought it best not to mention his departure to the GOC and had left an inspiring order for the Australian troops under his command to remain vigilantly at their posts" (SG:562). The generals seem to understand the situation even less than their soldiers or other civilians. Yet, General Percival, Commander-in-chief Far East, knows that "with one's own staff one must be careful to display confidence and an air of decision; the important thing is to give the impression that you know what you are doing, even when in doubt: any commander will tell you that. But what a burden it had been that he had had to carry by himself!" (SG:209). The irony of the narrator aims at showing clearly that these important historical figures are only common people and that their actions and motives seldom deserve adulation.

It might appear that Farrell's presentation of important persons departs

from the classical form of the historical novel. Lukács claims that the great figures should be portrayed as "human beings with virtues and weaknesses, good and bad qualities. And yet they never create a petty impression. With all their weaknesses they appear historically imposing [...] because they are to combine historical grandeur with genuine human qualities." Yet Lukács also states that the great historical figure must grow out of the "being of the age" and has to "generalize and concentrate a historical moment" (1982:45, 39). However, since in *The Singapore Grip* Farrell deals with the fall of the Empire, his historical individuals embody and mirror the processes of disintegration. Besides, such an anti-heroic attitude to great personages is characteristic of the postmodernist historical novel.

The Singapore Grip is a conscientious reconstruction of an historical moment. The very fact the action is set in a real city and not in fictitious places, as in the former two parts of the trilogy, obliges the author to treat his historical material with great scrupulousness and fidelity. In this book Farrell tries both to describe the past and to explain why certain historical processes took place. *The Siege of Krishnapur* ends with the Collector's feeling that "a people, a nation, does not create itself according to its own best ideas, but is shaped by other forces, of which it has little knowledge" (SK:345). *The Singapore Grip* takes this view as the starting point for the analysis of history.

Farrell finds economic explanation for the relationships between nations and claims that in reality it is the capital that governs the world. He allows Walter Blackett to explain this theory. And so, Walter states that:

> It was unjust that history should only relate the exploits of bungling soldiers, monarchs and politicians, ignoring the merchant whose activities were the very bedrock of civilization and progress! (SG:157).

Walter is convinced that the development of the world is not arbitrary but depends on concrete limitations. Even though he himself cannot arrange "countless millions of events" (SG:435) into a meaningful pattern, Blackett, for example, feels that history is not a collection of random events. He believes that each epoch has its "organizing principle":

> He believed that each individual event in a historical moment was subtly modified by an intangible mechanism which he could only think of as "the spirit of the time" [...] The spirit of these times, unfortunately, allowed the bombs of an Asiatic nation to fall on a British city. Walter had seen the roof growing weaker even during the early thirties: such ruinous Japanese competition in the cotton trade would not have been permitted by the spirit of yet earlier times (SG:435).

Though Walter does not find a more precise label for the force which governs history, his expression—"the spirit of the time" refers to the state of the world economy in a particular period. The relationships between nations and

political formations are not arbitrary, but derive from concrete situations. Colonialism is only a phase in history and, no matter whether people approve of its ethos or not, it must take place. The same can be said about war which, again, is "only a passing phase in business life" (SG:539). Walter's views are rooted in social Darwinism. He claims that in history there survive only strong nations because they "will always take advantage of the weak if they can do so with impunity. This is a law of nature" (SG:132).

Matthew, who represents liberal views, profoundly disagrees with Walter because, according to him, "security for business does not give people the right to invade and kill their neighbors" (SG:139). He is an idealist and, as such, cannot understand the workings of history which is full of contradictions, devoid of a clear purpose and altogether "too muddled" (SG:196). For him it is created by the whimsy of "degenerate foreign ministers" (SG:169) and results from the secret plotting of politicians. Therefore, he blames governments for immoral decisions. He believes that if they exhibit good will and accept some moral rules, collaboration between nations will be possible and will lead to the improvement of all races. Farrell sides neither with Walter nor with Matthew. He is critical of Walter's unscrupulousness and admiration for immoral decisions, as well as of Matthew's naïveté and spontaneity, which can do more harm than good.

The problem of colonialism, directly connected with history, is one of the major concerns in *The Singapore Grip*. Farrell deals with the history, mechanisms and functioning of colonialism in this part of the world. The novel gives "copious evidence of the mischief brought about in the name of trade" (McEwan 1987:152). In Malaya there functions the "ghastly Darwinian principle of economics known as the 'Law of Substitution,' which declares, more or less, that 'the cheapest will survive' " (SG:174). It means that non-economic values tend to be eliminated. As a result, the lives of the natives and their culture are subordinated to the needs of the unscrupulous colonizers who came here only for "cheap, unskilled labor" (SG:178). These ideas bring Farrell's criticism of colonialism and its devastating impact upon local communities into the sphere of Conrad, whose works outlined a similarly destructive influence of European colonial activities upon the natives' domestic social order.

In *The Singapore Grip* the characters represent similar views to those of the protagonists in *The Siege of Krishnapur*. *The Singapore Grip* does not add new arguments in order to criticize colonialism; it only gives a more thorough analysis of the phenomenon. There are more "technical" details and data. The naive Fleury is here replaced by Matthew, who criticizes colonialism in a similar, idealistic manner. Ehrendorf, in turn, repeats the Collector's ideas from the period when Mr. Hopkins still believed in the

benefits of civilization, but his enthusiasm has begun to diminish. Walter Blackett has no prototype in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, although he sometimes repeats the views of the Magistrate. Yet, while the Magistrate is sarcastic about the benefits of civilization, Walter is always enthusiastic about them. By letting Walter survive, Farrell probably suggests that no matter how immoral and unjust the world is, it develops in an inevitable direction and that no matter how people behave, they will not change the course of events.

The functioning of colonialism is not only discussed directly by the protagonists and the narrator but is also evoked metaphorically. The tasteless and absurd floats designed for the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Blackett and Webb ironically reflect upon the relations between the English and the Malays. Among them there is a huge rubber octopus with twisted tentacles which will embrace the necks of young women holding "banners proclaiming them to be Shanghai, Hong Kong, Batavia, Saigon." These adjoining countries will be " 'captured' in a friendly grip." Next to the octopus is a gigantic human float with eight more arms painted "dark brown, light brown, yellow and white to represent the four races of Malay stretching out by side to reach for prosperity" (SG:357). Needless to say, both of these inventions are caricatures of British economic enterprise in Singapore. The most ambitious and technically complicated float for the parade represents a "symbolical rubber tree [...] producing wealth for all races" (SG:361). It has a pump installed inside which will pump liquid gold through a hole. An employee explains the idea to the Major:

> 'Liquid gold?' Well, actually, it's just colored water... now what's the matter. Oh, I see, the pump's not plugged in. Here we go!' He pulled the switch and the tree began to spurt noisily into the basin. 'It looks as if it's... well...' said the Major (SG:361).

This farcical scene, despite its rather bold humor, gains symbolic meaning and reflects upon the relationship between the colonizers and the natives. The very name of the company Farrell chooses to describe—Blackett and Webb—is meaningful and alludes to the core of the colonial enterprise. The native producers and workers are in a spider's web of control and manipulation. Large European firms heartlessly "black" native producers, which denies poor people access to the market (Binns 1986:87).

The laws of economy resemble those of the jungle with their principle "eat or be eaten" (*ibidem*, 97). This is why the practices of the white colonialists are presented through the imagery of eating, of living organisms and of disease. Taking "the place of the rats and the centipedes which had made it their home," in Singapore businesses "rose and fell, sunk their teeth into each other, swallowed, broke away, gulped down other firms, or mounted each other to procreate smaller companies" (SG:12). In *The Singapore Grip*

there are many descriptions of parties during which the Europeans enjoy superb, plentiful meals. Their appetite runs parallel with their greed and desire to make more money, regardless of the costs. European companies "devour" smaller firms and this is the core of the Far Eastern enterprise.

When Matthew approaches Singapore, he sees the Singapore River and associates it with a snake:

> Presently, the Singapore River (which was really nothing but a tidal creek) crept from under the wing, ominously bulging near its mouth like a snake which had just swallowed a rabbit and then trailing back inland to the thinnest of tails on the far side of the city (SG:101).

His impression about the river reflects the relationship between the colonialists and the native merchants. The venomous "snake" of colonialism devours local trade and damages small enterprises. As R. Binns noticed, "the sophisticated and prosperous colonial society is unable to free itself from the stench of moral corruption" (1986:88). Suffocating smells persecute the characters everywhere:

> With the smoke there came, barely noticeable at first, a disagreeable smell. Old Singapore hands like Walter were used to unpleasant smells: they came from everywhere... from the drains and from the river above all, but also from less likely places, from Tanglin rose-gardens for instance, where the 'boys' sometimes failed to bury properly the household excrement, or someone's spaniel dug it up again. In Singapore you could never be quite safe: even while you stood smiling fixedly under the great candelabrum in the ballroom at Government House, [...] you might suddenly get a distinct whiff of something disagreeable (SG:506).

Capitalism in Malaya is as devastating as an illness. Matthew, disgusted with what he learns about trade there, shouts out with fury: "Profit took a grip on the country like some dreadful new virus against which no one had any resistance" (SG:172). Later on, he adds that: "The native masses are worse off than before. For them the coming of Capitalism has really been like the spreading of a disease" (SG:174).

In *The Singapore Grip* the very setting plays an important function (Binns 1986:93). As in *Ulysses* or *War and Peace*, the city is raised to the status of a hero. The novel opens with contrasting the city of the Blacketts between 1937–1940 with the island purchased by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. While in 1819 the place was almost uninhabited and the founder "stood there on that lonely beach and gazed up at the flag with rats and centipedes seething and tumbling over his shoes" (SG:9), in the 1930s, it was an imposing British city, "the great halting-place on the trade route to the Far East" (*l.c.*). Singapore was built from nothing in about a century due to the fact that the white community was very efficiently organized there.

From the opening pages of the novel the stress is put on contrasts and

social divisions. The Europeans live separately, "detached from the densely packed native masses" (SG:12). As it is ironically stated, the prosperous parts are "the work of a great and civilized nation" (SG:10), while in the "'lower depths' Chinese secret societies undoubtedly performed monstrous crimes, kidnapped their own prominent citizens, fought out appalling territorial battles, stunned themselves with drugs and so forth" (*l.c.*). While Tanglin offers huge, comfortable houses, cool swimming-pools, "a peaceful and leisurely life," the native population knows only hard work, child labor, begging, prostitution and inhuman living conditions like "living fifty to a room" (SG:110). Everything in Singapore is for the Europeans and the Eurasians must do what they are told and sell themselves in order to survive. While in Tanglin one feels the scent of "perfume and tobacco smoke in the soft, humid air of the tropical night" (SG:163), in the poorer districts there is only the persistent "vaguely smoky smell, as of smoldering rubbish or rags, the smell of poverty" (SG:389).

Farrell presents the city in great topographic detail. These parts of the novel are narrated with the stylization of a tourist guide. He walks the reader along "wide avenues and lawns" to the "monolithic government buildings," to "luxurious department stores," to the elegant suburb of Tanglin where the Blacketts live in a huge house and also to the native quarters where "Tamils, Malays and above all the Chinese lived, which were rather less imposing" (SG:10). Farrell's descriptions of architecture, occupations of people, streets and houses bring the city close to the reader so that after a while one feels acquainted with it and recognizes its parts. Dynamism, development and economic expansion are felt in all its quarters.

Singapore is a living organism, full of movement, colors and smells. One inhales there "that incomparable smell of incense, of warm skin, of meat cooking in coconut oil, of honey and frangipani, and hair-oil and lust and sandalwood and heaven knows what, a perfume like the breath of life itself" (SG:10). The streets are overcrowded and various wonders capture the attention of a passer by. A Chinese opera is taking place, a man sells bunches of dried frogs, acrobats turn somersaults. Such events take place in streets crowded with men and "women of every shape, size and color" (SG:163). The streets are full of traffic, of rickshaws, motor-cars, bullock-carts, pedestrians, stalls with food. From time to time there appear most peculiar sights like a beautiful, narrow street with "pots of ferns and baskets of flowers. Strings of dim, multi-colored lanterns" among which women are "set like a jewel" (SG:378).

Thus Singapore is a very powerful place that appeals to the visitor's every sense. It is also full of contradictions. It is real, physically tangi-

ble and magical at the same time.[8] Its crowded streets sometimes, in the starlight, look "like a vision from the Arabian Nights" (SG:78). It is a physical manifestation of this dream, but even though it exists, is a fact, there is something unreal about it. The very way it was founded sounds fictional: "It was simply invented one morning early in the nineteenth century by a man looking at a map" (SG:9). The city grew and flourished, though, in a sense it had no right to exist—it is situated on a wild terrain which was overgrown formerly by uncontrollable nature, a place which was once "covered in steaming swamps and mountains and horrid, horrid jungle" (SG:156). When Matthew Webb sees Singapore for the first time from the airplane window, he is surprised by how small everything appears. He notices "miniature buildings," scarcely big enough to house "a colony of fleas" (SG:101), a "fleas' cricket match" taking place on an open green, and several "flea worshipers" on their way to the cathedral. His association of people with fleas carries an obviously ideological charge: this diminution is a perspective which depreciates the capitalists. But it also endows Singapore with an unreal, fictional dimension resembling Swift's descriptions of the country of Lilliput.

Farrell's descriptions of the city are both realistic and dream-like. Singapore is seen both in terms of an ordinary city and of a "magical place" (SG:567). But the English are not safe there. Tanglin, the quiet suburb, bordered by the jungle, is constantly threatened by wild nature: "it was a suburb ready to burst at the seams with a dreadful tropical energy. Foliage sprang up on every hand with a determination unknown to polite, European vegetation" (SG:11). When the Europeans leave their houses unattended for a while, plants and "voracious house-eating insects" shake the foundations of buildings and visit gardens "with the idea of picking your fruit or swallowing your mice or even your puppy if you had an appetizing one" (SG:11). The whites are not safe in Malaya because they are exposed to various illnesses—to "deadly malaria" or "dengue fever" spread by mosquitoes. Nor do wounds heal there:

> If your child fell over while playing in the garden and cut its knee, you had better make sure that no fly was allowed to settle on the wound; otherwise, within a day or two, you would find yourself picking tiny white maggots out of it with tweezers" (SG:11).

Images of illnesses and animal life anticipate the end of British domination in Singapore. The end of colonialism is evoked metaphorically. When Matthew looks at the city at the end of the Japanese attack, he sees that the Singapore River is on fire:

[8] Binns (1986:94) compares Farrell's characters to Alice from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*.

> It seemed to be nothing but flame from one bank to another. The blazing oil which had surged up on the tide from the mouth of the river had enveloped the small wooden craft which clustered thickly over almost its entire length and breadth except for the narrow channel in the middle. Fanned by the breeze from the sea the fire had eaten its way up the twisting longbow-shaped course of the river, past another fire at Ord Road, under the Pulo Saigon Bridge and almost as far as the Adamson Quay (SG:540).

In *The Singapore Grip* the world is shown from the point of view of the British and the natives, who are allowed to speak, too. They also criticize colonialism, show their misery, the harm that has been done to them. They express their hatred and even promise revenge for exploitation. In this novel certain themes are treated with greater objectivity or, perhaps, more polivocally than in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, where the Anglo-Indian relations are shown exclusively through the eyes of the Europeans.

Before the British actually lose Singapore, they intuitively feel the incipient defeat. Walter Blackett, with his political intuition, has disturbing thoughts very early. Still before the Japanese invasion, "he could not avoid the feeling that his familiar world was crumbling away at an alarming rate" (SG:90). Now Singapore is a different city because "the old feeling of space and tranquillity which used to make Singapore such a pleasant place to live in had gone, and gone for ever" (SG:94). He is not surprised at the changes taking place in society and the world of commerce, because "the old order of things was as dead as a doornail" (SG:92). Other characters are also aware that they are witnessing the collapse of the old world. When Dupigny contemplates the situation, he concludes that "ideas had been changing, the relative power of the races had been changing, and not only in the British colonies but in the French and Dutch as well [...] Whatever happens with the Japanese the old colonial life in the East, the European's hand on the coolie's straw hat, was finished" (SG:294).

In *The Singapore Grip*, as in *Troubles*, the atmosphere of the period influences the protagonists. The characters are conscious of historical processes. Thus Farrell "portrays the great transformations of history as transformations of popular life" (Lukács 1982:49). Matthew Webb, his most sensitive character, notices with dismay that his personal life is a failure because it reflects the general situation:

> All the different matters, both in his own personal life and outside it, which had preoccupied him in the past few weeks and even years, his relationship with his father and the history of Blackett and Webb, the time he had spent in Oxford and in Geneva, his friendship with Ehrendorf and with Vera and with the Major, his arguments about the league and even the one about colonial policy which he had earlier in the evening with Nigel, and yes even his good bye to dear little Kate... all these things now seemed to cling together, to belong to each other and to have a direction and an impetus towards destruction which it was impossible to resist (SG:412).

The destruction Matthew is imagining comes very soon. The very fall of Singapore was as rapid as its foundation. One day, on February 15th, 1942, it ceased to exist and so did the British Empire: "This Sunday, then, was the last day of the defense of Singapore, the last day of freedom for the British who remained on the Island... almost, you might say with hindsight, the last day of the British Empire in these parts" (SG:556). Several years later and back in England now, Kate Blackett thinks about Singapore and concludes that the city "seems very far away to her now, and no longer quite real... a magical place where she spent her childhood" (SG:567).

Farrell ends his novel with a short *Nachgeschichte* and traces the history of the city for the subsequent twenty years. The reader learns that when, in the 1960s, Singapore became an independent, self-governing country, the situation of its inhabitants has deteriorated: malnutrition, diseases, child-labor, humiliating living conditions are everyday reality there. Even in the sixties, "many migrant workers on rubber or sugar plantations live in conditions of acute overcrowding. Sometimes there are up to 100 workers in one large room" (SG:567). Thus it seems that there is no hope for the future, because despite radical political changes things have not improved for the people. The novel ends with a bitter anecdote: "about King William and the boatman who asked who had won the battle ('What's it to you? You'll still be a boatman')" (SG:567–568). This anecdote is Farrell's last comment on the development of civilization. He seems to suggest that historical and political changes, even if they do take place, cannot supersede the one significant factor, that is economic relations. He claims that history is created by impersonal forces, that the world develops in a chaotic manner towards collapse and ruin and that nothing can stop this inevitable process. Thus Farrell's view of the world is pessimistic, if not tragic: one injustice is replaced by another and people will always be manipulated. Is it worthwhile, therefore, changing anything at all? The reader must answer for himself because the novel provides no simple answers.

Troubles, *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *The Singapore Grip* reconstruct three crises in the history of the British Empire. Farrell draws broad and many-sided pictures of these periods. To awaken the vanished ages, he must depict the interaction between man and his social environment. This is the reason why so much stress is placed on the presentation of everyday lives and manners. At the same time, the novelist devotes a great deal of attention to the contemplation of the workings and the nature of history. Thus history is used both as a factor dominating the personal lives of the characters and as an objective set of events shaping the narratives, a combination of processes (one internal, one external) handled by Farrell in all three novels of the trilogy with admirable skill and tact.

Conclusion

The work of J. G. Farrell falls into two parts: the early novels with their dominating psychological concerns, and the trilogy devoted to historical subjects. Yet, even though his first three books differ from Farrell's mature fiction, one can recognize a continuity of motifs, ideas and formal devices common to both groups of novels. In his fiction Farrell contemplates the problems of human existence. His characters are not free, since their lives depend on numerous factors over which they have no control. They are shaped by social, political or historical realities, by their immediate surroundings, by other people and their families. They are also conditioned by personal experiences and by their own bodies, which also impose on them numerous limitations. Obviously, different determinants are stressed in the psychological novels from those emphasized in the historical trilogy.

A Man From Elsewhere, *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* depict the inner dilemmas and conflicts of the protagonists who find it difficult to come to terms with themselves and other characters. They reject everybody around them, in the belief that they will be happier and more effective on their own. As a result, they deprive themselves of what is valuable in human relationships. Though they crave for love, friendship and respect, they feel that their families and all kinds of emotional bonds enslave them. Men and women wage a perpetual war, and love between them is not possible. The emotional problems of some protagonists (Sayer, Martin, Boris) stem from their childhoods, when they were rejected by their mothers. Besides, the characters feel the heavy demands of social pressures and the extent to which such pressures aggravate their personal problems. They want to act individually, but are aware all the time of their inability to set themselves free from society. Whether the characters want to shape reality (*A Man From Elsewhere*) or separate themselves from it (*The Lung*, *A Girl in the Head*), in the end they are victimized by it.

In the trilogy, emphasis is placed on the influence of history upon the personal fate and psyche of the characters. In *Troubles*, *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *The Singapore Grip* the protagonists meet with history directly—it shapes their lives and asserts itself often against their wills. The fate of the characters coincides with "the lines of force" (to borrow a phrase from Lukács); their conflicts and patterns of thought mirror the contending historical problems of the age. Farrell states clearly that people can neither separate themselves from nor govern historical processes: individuals can only submit to the general currents. In Farrell's view, history "happens" to people or, to use his expression, people "undergo" history. Besides, society

exerts moral and cultural pressures and forces the characters into certain kinds of behavior.

Farrell's protagonists are observed from a double perspective. On the one hand, they have great intellectual pretensions (Sayer, Regan, Luc, Martin, the Collector, Fleury, Matthew Webb, the Magistrate, Edward Spencer). On the other hand, they are painfully enslaved by their bodies, which impose strong limitations. Thus the characters cannot satisfy their aspirations, because their bodies are deceptive mechanisms and, as such, are subject to inevitable biological laws. The protagonists, especially in the first three books, are permanently reminded of these limitations when threatened by disease, death and the processes of aging. Illness, disability and old age debase individuals and shatter their hopes. The characters live with the paralyzing consciousness of mortality, and perceive the world from this perspective. This theme of the body has a literal meaning, but in a figurative sense it stands for the rottenness inherent in the relationships between people. In the trilogy this theme fulfils some additional functions. Beside reminding the characters of the vulnerability of their existence, it shows the contrast between their high pseudo-intellectual aspirations and their physical limitations, thus ridiculing their pretentiousness. Besides, while in the early novels the motif of the body refers metaphorically to the nature of human relationships, in the trilogy it simultaneously illustrates the corruption that underlies war, the social orders such as capitalism, communism and imperialism, and the various patterns of communication between different cultures and nations.

The characters being at the mercy of so many forces over which they have no control, feel threatened, besieged and at a loss. They understand neither the world nor themselves. Overwhelmed by reality, in an attempt to find a secure place, they frequently look for shelter in imaginary universes, thus isolating themselves from the real world. The protagonists from the early novels fail to overcome their isolation. Broken and defeated, they bitterly give up trying to improve their condition. In the trilogy the majority of the protagonists, though fully aware that their condition is grave, still believe in certain values, in moral rules which must be preserved. Responsibility for others, tolerance and human decency are the uniquely important values. The protagonists are free only in their own choices: they can make decisions about behavior, can prove themselves righteous, may face difficulties with dignity. This is the one reality that individuals can control. The Major, the Collector and Dr. McNab devote themselves to those under their care and spare no pains to help others survive. Though they realize how dangerous life is, they never abandon hope. They insist on keeping up ordinary routines and customs, on behaving to the end as if they utterly believed in survival.

These characters are reminiscent of the heroes of *On the Beach*, who know that they will die, but who reject this knowledge and carry on as before.

Farrell reveals a more generous and humanitarian view of man in the trilogy than in the early novels. The characters still have their weaknesses, are attached to material objects, are money-oriented, appreciate physical comforts and have their hobby-horses. At the same time, however, they are heroic, help one another and pass tests of courage and morality. Also the women, although seen as weaker than the men, unable to cope on their own and therefore husband-hunters, are courageous and praiseworthy. In *The Singapore Grip* and in *The Siege of Krishnapur* they assist in defense alongside the men. In *Troubles* it is the elderly ladies who help the Major in the running of the hotel and who rescue him. Moreover, it is the two girls, the twins, who have meaningful names—Faith and Charity, these two virtues being the only positive values in Farrell's world.

In the trilogy one can trace the functioning of a higher order, of some kind of justice which inflicts punishment whenever ethical or moral norms are transgressed. Those protagonists who offend others are penalized—Edward and the Padre by madness, Dr. Dunstaple by death. What are the rewards, then? The Major and the Collector also seem to be losers. Archer's love is rejected, the Collector abandons his optimism and faith in those ideals which he had held so passionately. Even if they are losers on personal grounds, they are still victors in a broader sense. They are raised to a higher consciousness and learn to understand the world. Obviously this awareness does not fill them with optimism, rather it explains the sad inevitability of human fate. It allows them to be reconciled with the world, and opens up for them those spheres of activity which give satisfaction and attach meaning to life. In Farrell's world only those characters who have not learnt this sad truth can be happy. Fleury, Louise, Harry, Matthew Webb and even Walter Blackett can celebrate because, despite all their experiences, they are ignorant.

Thus Farrell's view of man evolves. History and the external world crush individuals, but there exist certain values worth living for. His characters resemble Hemingway's heroes, for whom the essence of humanity is based on a heroic and persistent strife with reality. To be a man means to fight to the end, to preserve self-esteem and remain faithful to one's ideals. Hence, in contrast with the early novels, here Farrell suggests that the consciousness of one's own limitations, of the inevitability of human fate, does not have to lead to a bitter resignation or rigid pessimism. Despite the fact that man's condition is grave, what counts is obligations towards others and one's own humanity.

When one analyzes the structure of Farrell's narratives, their separable components and the substance of the narrated content, one can recog-

nize variants of the same story throughout all his works (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:6–7). All Farrell's novels deal with the problem of collapse and destruction. First, he shows the disintegration of his protagonists' personality. Later, he contemplates the collapse of the Empire and dissolution of the world into chaos. All his characters are strangers, "men from elsewhere" (Binns 1986:36). They are lonely in their struggle with the subjectively perceived or objectively existing reality; they must confront alien and hostile surroundings; they are at a loss and cannot bridge the barrier between themselves and the world. The plots of *A Man From Elsewhere* and of the historical novels make use of suspense: in the first book the reader wants to find out the truth about Regan; in the trilogy he wants to learn if the characters will survive. The settings of all his novels are limited to small, isolated areas which are always representative of the world contemporary to the action. When the characters are at the center of events, they are emotionally engaged in reality and cannot view themselves from a distance. Only when they leave the place of action and look retrospectively at the events do they experience the sad awareness that their involvement and devotion were quite insignificant, since they could not alter reality. Finally, the situation of the siege which underlies his historical works can be understood metaphorically and, in such a form, may also refer to the early novels where the characters are besieged by their own psyches and imaginations. In the trilogy, in turn, the sieges, while real enough, perform the additional function of tests of courage and morality for the protagonists.

One can notice that Farrell populates his novels with similar types of characters. Sayer and Regan can be treated as prototypes of some of the protagonists in the trilogy who have very strong convictions and who cling to their ideas at all costs. Edward, the Padre and Dr. Dunstaple, with their individual obsessions, resemble the patients in *The Lung* and the Dongeons in *A Girl in the Head*. Ripon Spencer and Monty Blackett are as helpless as Luc from *A Man From Elsewhere*. The heroines also seem to be similar in many respects. Mado, Flower, Louise and Angela are conventional women who submit to social expectations. Most of the female characters are seen as threats to male individualism, freedom and self-realization. For this reason the protagonists assume defensive positions, thus building a distance which makes understanding between the sexes difficult, if not impossible (Spurling 1982:162; Drabble 1981:184).

In his first novel Farrell develops his metaphorical style. He has a coherent system of imagery derived from physical decay, illnesses, animal life, food and vegetation, which in each novel gains new, additional meanings. In Farrell's works realism dissolves into other modes ranging from surrealism to symbolism. He has a great ability to underpin tragic events with

comic comments (Binns 1986:40). As a result, many events are reduced to farcical, grotesque or absurd situations. His favorite tone is ironic, and he uses parody to establish an ironic distance between his fictional world and the reader.

Farrell recreates his fictional worlds by means of several genre conventions. While *The Lung* and *A Girl in the Head* are psychological studies of characters, *A Man From Elsewhere* can be treated as a political novel which uses structures typical of the novel of ideas and of the psychological novel. *Troubles*, *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *The Singapore Grip* fulfil the criteria of historical narratives but, in a manner characteristic of this genre, the author also applies other literary conventions. The techniques of the novel of manners are frequently used in the trilogy because they allow the novelist to concentrate on social detail, on the colonial milieu and the characters entangled in everyday events. For the Indian and Malay episodes Farrell frequently uses the convention of the novel of ideas, especially when his protagonists engage in complex discussions. In *The Siege of Krishnapur* he goes back to historical romance and Victorian adventure fiction about the Empire.

Farrell turned for inspiration to imperial themes. Throughout the earlier part of the century Britain's dominions drew the attention of many novelists: Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, Edmund Candler and Joyce Cary. They dealt with characters "confronted with friction between cultures, challenging encounters with unfamiliar places and values, the dilemmas of government or, simply, exiled loneliness" (Stevenson 1986:143. See also 1993:126–128; Meyers 1973:143–144; Islam 1968:8; Mahood 1977). Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* and *The Hill Station* belong to the stream of the "Matter of India" (Bayley 1987:21) which has become a major field for epic and romance. The Sepoy Mutiny captured the imagination of many English writers like Flora Annie Steel in *On the Face of the Waters*, Hugh S. Scott in *Flotsam: A Study of A Life*, and Patricia Wentworth in *The Devil's Wind*. Yet in these early novels the Mutiny is not seen as a historical event but as "a static and exotic screen, as a rationalization for imperialistic policies, as a myth which has the purpose of depicting the English as courageous, strong and noble people" (Singh 1979:23–24). And so, it is yet another episode of British heroism, another proof of the superiority of the Europeans. In the past few decades, some of the imperial themes have reappeared in fiction. Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet* (1966–1975), takes as its subject matter Indian progress toward independence. His treatment of the theme is full of nostalgia for the earlier, grander days of the dominion. A contrast of the imperial India with the New India is depicted in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1975). A more critical view of the

Indian Empire underlinés David Rubin's *After the Raj*, Edward Thompson's *An Indian Day* and *The End of the Hours*, and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (Bayley 1987:21; Swinden 1981). *The Singapore Grip* may be linked either with novels set in the Far East or with World War II fiction. Thus it finds affinity with "other ambitious attempts to fictionalize some of the epic yet blackly farcical episodes of the 1939–1945 war, ranging from Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) to J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* (1983)" (Wiśniewski 1987:344; Binns 1986:85), or Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. Moreover, the Malay setting of *The Singapore Grip* brings to mind Burgess' Malayan Trilogy, *The Long Day Wanes* and Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession* (Massie 1990:66). *Troubles*, too, should be referred to a broader literary context because it belongs to the Big House Novel Tradition. During the period of "the troubles" the Big House was associated with revolutionary social change and passed away with the Anglo-Irish establishment. It was usually burnt down and as a charred ruin became a monument to a vanished order (Gill 1972:168–172; MacAndrew 1979). William Trevor, Evelyn Waugh, Iris Murdoch in *The Red and the Green* or Elizabeth Bowen in *The Last September* and *A World of Love* together with Farrell commemorated the highest values of the Big House. Farrell' s novels can be set along-side all these traditions, which shows that he uses many genre conventions and refers to various literary contexts. However, in each work he interprets particular genres and trends, rather than individual authors.

Farrell's specific literary imagination led him to elaborate an original model of the historical novel: a traditional narrative with vivid action, strong characterization and thoroughly delineated setting, but genuinely aware of the problematic nature of fictional representation and historical interpretation. He developed an interesting view of history. For him history remains past actuality, but the novelist does not believe in objective interpretations, reconstructions and evaluations of the past. In a postmodernist fashion he remains skeptical about judgments and about making sense of history, which, to him, is unpredictable. Farrell is concerned not with history, which is the object of study, but with people's personal experience of it. Processes gain significance not at the moment of happening but after years. As time unfolds, the dramatic experiences suffered by the protagonists lose their immediacy, leaving behind vague memories, recollections and anecdotes, while the events themselves turn into the dates and facts of the history books. The novelist is less interested in a factual reconstruction of history than in the way it is perceived by people and the extent to which it influences their lives. His intention is to contemplate history and to evoke the atmosphere, the general trends of the past and the life of common people.

The human, everyday experience of history is so life-like that it appears "unhistoric" to the characters (McEwan 1987:126). Farrell shows how diminutive and helpless the stature of the protagonists is in comparison with the drama of major historical upheavals. Too preoccupied with their own affairs, people underestimate the great catastrophes of history. Farrell deromanticizes great events, crises and heroes. The famous personages are ordinary people with their follies and weaknesses. There is nothing superhuman about them. He is rather fascinated by the quiet, everyday heroism of common people who must strive with the difficult reality of their days. They are Farrell's historical heroes, whose courage is revealed in simple matters. Some of them, like the Collector or Walter Blackett, will be known and remembered by future generations. However, the majority of real heroes, like the Major or Dr. McNab, will remain anonymous. For people who participate in it, history escapes simple interpretations and evaluations since it reveals itself as "random events" and "particles," to use Farrell's terms. The characters can never embrace the whole complexity of a situation, given their limited perspective at the center of events. Besides, people are not objective in their judgments. Their perception of the world depends on their views, ideology, background and emotional attitudes and, as such, is highly individual.

The problem of interpreting history is one of the most interesting aspects of the trilogy. The three reconstructions of various chapters of British colonialism show that it is impossible to find adequate explanations for historical processes. The Anglo-Irish conflict in *Troubles* resembles a vicious circle with rights and wrongs on both sides, with the oppressors who are oppressed, with the attackers who are attacked. No matter how hard one tries to understand the problem, it eludes clear judgment. Farrell refrains himself from an explicit comment and suggests that the only thing one can do is to attempt to realize the complexity of the Anglo-Irish conflict. In *The Siege of Krishnapur* Farrell has more sympathy for the British and beside enthusiastic Empire builders introduces some humane and friendly individuals who believe in peaceful and beneficial coexistence between the two nations. He ends with a suggestion similar to E. M. Forster's in *A Passage to India* that it is basically the cultural differences which make the understanding between the Hindus and the British impossible. While Forster believes that this may change in the future, Farrell remains skeptical about it. In *The Singapore Grip* the novelist criticizes colonialism most explicitly and radically by revealing the workings of capitalism in that colony. Farrell's attitude to the Empire is complex. Undoubtedly, he sympathizes with the Irish poor, the maltreated and deceived Malays, the Hindus who are reduced to second-class citizens in their own country. Nevertheless, one

can sense the author's nostalgia for the lost Empire and his need to justify the British presence in so many countries. Though he disapproves of the moral foundations of the Empire, he does not blame the English for all the wrong which took place in the dominions. The ending of *The Singapore Grip* makes this point clear. The British left the colony, but poverty, exploitation, and inhuman living conditions are still an everyday reality there. Under the new circumstances the Malays are no better off; on the contrary, their life has deteriorated. Farrell obviously does not speak for imperialism but neither does he treat the collapse of the Empire in terms of punishment or justice.

For Farrell there is no moral order in the operations of history: instead it is a process of organization and fall, where collapse is inherent in its very development, as the fall of a social or political order begins at the moment of its highest prosperity. According to Farrell's dialectical vision of the world, one formation replaces another, though what is born is not better than what has vanished. For him, history is shaped by impersonal factors such as politics, the economy, traditions of and relationships between nations and cultures. Since there are so many conflicting forces at work, the world develops in a chaotic manner. This lack of order inevitably leads civilization to destruction, to chaos.

This catastrophic idea has serious contemporary implications, because Farrell sees history as a metaphor for today and the prehistory of the present. He shows that the details are different but, basically, human life is unchanged and that in every epoch people are subject to the same processes (McEwan 1987:125). He shows that the past remains a part of modern experience, that it has influenced our reality, that the present-day problems and conflicts have their roots in history, and that the public events shape individual lives. Thus by choosing historical subjects he shows what is universally true about human experience. Farrell's faith in history as a suitable subject for a contemporary novelist and his belief in fiction as a means of interpreting the human condition place him among morally and historically responsible writers.

A Note on the Texts

Quotations from J. G. Farrell's works come from the editions listed below:

[ME] *A Man From Elsewhere*, Hutchinson, London, 1963.
[L] *The Lung*, Corgi Books, London, 1965.
[GH] *A Girl in the Head*, William Collins Sons, Glasgow, 1982.
[T] *Troubles*, Richard Clay, Bungay, 1982.
[SK] *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Richard Clay, Bungay, 1982.
[SG] *The Singapore Grip*, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1982.
[HS] *The Hill Station*, an unfinished novel and an Indian Diary, ed. by J. Spurling, William Collins Sons, Glasgow, 1982.
[P] "The Pussycat Who Fell in Love with the Suitcase," *Atlantis*, Winter 1973/74, pp. 6–9.

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