# *J.G. FARRELLL'S EMPIRE FICTION: BEYOND THE RHETORIC OF POWER*

A thesis submitted
to the University of Hyderabad
for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in the School of Humanities

By

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**June 1997**

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**Date :27th June 1997**

# *CERTIFICATE*

**This is to certify that I, K.K. Kunhammad have carried out the research embodied in the present thesis for the full period prescribed under Ph.D. ordinances of the University.**

**I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of the thesis was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.**

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## *ACKNOWLEDGEMENT*

This thesis would have been impossible in the present form without the consistently loving support and guidance of **Dr. Mohan. G. Ramanan. I** am deeply indebted to him for guiding me through a series of drafts.

I am grateful to Prof S. Vishwanathan for his advice and encouragement during the course of this study.

I wish to thank my teachers at the Department of English, Central University of Hyderabad: Drs. Sudhakar Marathe, Narayan Chandran, Hoshang Merchant, Nageswara Rao, Alladi Uma, Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sailaja, Sridhar and Sachidananda Mohanty.

For listening to and reading parts of this study, I would particularly like to thank Dr. M. V. Narayanan and P. K. Babu.

Also acknowledged is the timely help rendered by E. K. Sharif Samuel Devanand, Jolly, George Tharakan and my friends at Real Time Softwares Pvt. Ltd, Thalassery towards the realisation of this thesis.

I would also like to place on record the service rendered by the Librarians of Indira Gandhi Memorial Library, University of Hyderabad, ASRC, Hyderabad, USIS, Bombay, British Council Libraries of Hyderabad and Bombay and Calicut University Library.

Finally I am extremely grateful to my parents, my wife Laila, my son Shaaz Ahmed and my brothers for their unconditional love and support.

**(K. K. KUNHAMMAD)**

## *CONTENTS*

## *WORKS BY FARRELL*

**[Page references for quotations from Farrell's writings are taken from the editions listed below. The following abbreviations have been used in this thesis].**

### *Novels*

**A Man From Elsewhere (London, Hutchinson 1963). *AMFE***

**The Lung (London, Hutchinson, 1963). *L***

**A Girl in the Head (Fontana, London, 1967). *GIH***

**Troubles (Penguin Books Limited, England, 1970). *T***

**The Siege of Krishnapur (Penguin Books Limited, England, 1973). *SK***

**The Singapore Grip (London, Fontana, 1979). *SG***

**The Hill Station: an unfinished novel (New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1981). *HS***

***The Indian Diary,* Appended to The Hill Station: an unfinished novel (New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1981).ID**

### *Short Fiction*

***The Pussycat Who Fell in Love with the Suitcase, Atlantis* (Winter, 1973/74) pp.49-52.**

***The conquest of the earth, which mostly means taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down, and offer a sacrifice to....***

Joseph Conrad, **Heart of Darkness**

***In 1900 Englishmen ruled a great empire, and their minds thrilled with power; now in the 1980s they have lost it, and their minds sag with the sadness of loss.***

Martin Green, **The English Novel in The Twentieth Century**

## *Chapter 1*

# *INTRODUCTION*

### *(I) Aim, Scope and Significance of the Study*

In the 70s, three novelists received the Booker Prize, Britain's most prestigious annual literary award for their Empire-centred novels: J. G. Farrell for The Siege of Krishnapur (1973), Ruth Prawer Jhabhwala for **Heat and Dust** (1975) and Paul Scott for Staying On (1977). Of the three, Farrell is by far the most neglected and the least known in India and abroad. The fact that Farrell can very well stand comparison with the established heavyweights of the end-of-the empire genre of colonial fiction deepens the mystery behind this scholarly neglect and serves to justify the relevance of the present study.

Apart from the one book on him by Ronald Binns (1986), criticism of Farrell has been confined to a few stray articles and reviews, not amounting to a great deal. Strangely enough, the major books on the fictional literature of imperialism published in recent years—Molly Mahood, The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels (1977), John. A. McLure, Kipling **and** Conrad: The Colonial Fiction (1981), David Rubin, After the Raj: British Novels of India Since 1947 (1987) and D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, Images of the Raj: South Asia in the Literature of the Empire (1988) have marginalised Farrell. The most recent works in the field— K.C. Belliappa, Image of India in English Fiction (1991), Sujit Mukherjee, Forster and Further: the Tradition of Anglo-Indian Fiction (1993) and Vrinda Nabar and Nilufer E. Bharuchia (eds) Postcolonial Perspectives on the Raj **and** Its Literature (1994) do practically nothing to add to the critical literature on Farrell.[1] Again, almost all significant surveys and studies of post-war British fiction—for instance, Giles

Gordon, **Beyond the Words (1975),** Malcolm Bradbury, **The Novel Today** (1977), Ronald Hayman, **The Novel Today: 1967-1977** (1980), and Alan Massie, **The Novel Today: 1970-1989** (1991) have consistently ignored Farrell's work.[2]

Binns's **J.G.Farrell** is itself slim and hardly exhaustive. As **a** nutshell review of the corpus of Farrell's fiction, Binns's book is **a** handy guide to Farrell and my study will use it as a point of reference; but my work will attempt to go beyond Binns in the following matters. The variety of factors that were at work in the making of a Farrell novel which Binns only touches on will receive more elaborate attention. Perhaps due to obvious pressures of condensation, Binns's treatment of Farreirs fictional techniques and stylistic devices is only suggestively compact. Further, Binns does not pay enough attention to vital questions like Farreirs treatment of history and Farrell's profound response to colonialism in his Empire fiction. As Binns himself admits, "in the trilogy as **a** whole Farrell explores moral values and concepts of history and imperialism about which there will always be a great deal to say" (1986:102). My study will pay due attention to these questions and in doing so draw on the insights about historical fiction derived from Butterfield, Lukacs, and Fleishman, Umberto Eco and Linda Hutcheon and on colonialism and imperialism derived from Octave Mannoni, Edward Said and Martin Green. A minor but important aim is to refute Binns's belief that Farrell lies outside the broad tradition of British fiction about India. Though Farrell is not an Anglo-Indian novelist *a la* Kipling or Paul Scott, he undoubtedly deserves a significant niche within the rich tradition of British fiction about India. The proposed thesis, therefore, attempts to link Farrell more firmly to this tradition.

Farreirs early novels—**A Man From Elsewhere, A Girl in the Head** and **The Lung** are instances of pure fiction which are set against contemporary backgrounds while in the later novels, i.e., the Empire fiction, Farrell turned to historical settings. **Troubles** pictures the tragi-comic tale of **a** group of British

citizens in a decrepit hotel called the Majestic during the Irish troubles of 1919-1921; **The Siege Of Krishnapur** deals with the disturbances in India which culminated in the first struggle for Indian Independence in **1857; The Singapore Grip** looks at the collapse of Britain's imperial supremacy from an economic standpoint and **The Hill Station** is a sequel of sorts to **The** Siege **of Krishnapur.** The Empire fiction, on the whole, deals with the jolts that British imperial pride received from three of its formidable colonies.

My use of the phrase 'Empire fiction' rather than the oft-used 'Empire trilogy' is not an accident. The term 'Empire trilogy' is inadequate in that it excludes **The Hill Station** (1982), Farrell's unfinished sequel to **The Siege of Krishnapur** (1973). Binns's book is delimited by this exclusion in that a comparative study of **The** Siege **of Krishnapur** and **The Hill Station,** the former set in the troubled times of the Mutiny and the latter set in the middle of the long period of peace which followed the suppression of the Mutiny brings to light interesting contrastive affinities between the two novels. Fan-ell's own comments justify the term "Empire fiction." Farrell wanted his novel to be considered "as a triptych rather than a trilogy with each presenting a picture of the Empire at a different historical watershed and by their association shedding, I hope, some light on each other. / *can't promise that I won't add other"* (Dean 1978:68; Italics mine). Moreover, the inclusion of **The Hill Station** in the Empire fiction reinforces my argument that, Farrell, despite his interest in other colonies, takes India as the key. Shamsul Islam is of the view that India is "the key to the understanding of British imperialism and the imperial idea in general for the pattern of British colonial policy was framed in India" (1979:3).[3] In concentrating on India in the way Farrell does, one gets an idea of Farrell's insight into the Raj.

**In times of antiquity, imperialism meant a federation of states under a universal law and authority, spanning the entire known world, based on a**

philosophy of peace, order, discipline and internationalism. But, today the term is too loaded to be contained within the narrow confines of a simple definition. Edward Said is of the view that imperialism is "a word and an idea today so controversial, so fraught with all sorts of questions, doubts, polemics and ideological premises as nearly to resist use altogether" (1993:3). In its narrowest definition, imperialism refers to a policy of territorial aggrandisement while, at a deeper level, it can be anything—from an unscrupulous exercise of political and moral license on an alien people to a nightmare regime of exploitation, slavery, and inhuman brutality. In the former sense, imperialism is more related to 'colonialism' which, though "almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Ibid). The motive force behind imperialism, needless to say, is the building up of an Empire. Michael Doyle writes: "Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire" (1986:45). In other words, imperialism implies an approach to politics which is profoundly anti-democratic. Unlike orientalism [which is "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient" (Said 1979:95)], imperialism is totally free from any geographical boundaries[4] "The basis of imperial authority is the mental attitude of the colonist. His acceptance of subordination—whether through a positive sense of common interest with the parent state, or through inability to conceive of any alternative—made empire durable" (Fieldhouse 1991:103). Imperialism is an ideology in the Marxian sense: "Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations" (Said 1993:8). In other words, imperialism is a form of false consciousness in that it presents a world-view which is false primarily because it violently conflicts with the interests of the majority who conform to it (Larrain 1979:108). And a conscious attempt at the dissemination of false

consciousness was central to the concept of imperialism. 'The White Man's Burden,' *la mission civilisatrice* of the French, the superior *Kultur* of the Germans were all part of the mystique of imperialism. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the staunch champions of the British Empire began to develop a theory of imperialism by creating and popularising a body of myths about India and the colonies. The important forces behind the formulation of the imperial mythology were biology, religion, economics, politics and literature

The most dominant myth which Britain consistently perpetuated as an overriding justification for the preservation of Empire was a stubborn faith in the concept of a superior civilisation. In his influential book, **Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonisation,** Mannoni considers superiority an essential feature of the coloniser:

> a *colonial* situation is created, so to speak, the very instant a white man, even if he is alone, appears in the midst of a tribe, even if it is independent, so long as he is thought to be rich or powerful or merely immune to the local forces of magic, and so long as he derives from his position, even though only in his most secret self, a feeling of his own superiority (1956:18).

Biological science has had a significant role in the development of the imperial psychology even before Darwin pushed it to a new level of prestige. In 1841, Thomas Arnold had presented a racial theory of world history and a few years later, British biologist named Robert Knox of Edinburgh had explored the imperial implications of pseudo-scientific racism (Curtin 1971:xvi). The publication of Charles Darwin's **On the Origin of Species (1859)** boosted the Englishman's imperial confidence and the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest engendered the myth of racial superiority (Halliday 1911:389). Darwin, 'a half understood household sage/ demonstrated that some races, like some

animals were more efficiently evolved than others and had a right to leadership and possession (Morris 1968a:32).[5] This theory was found to provide a very sound basis for the justification of Britain's greed for imperial power and glory. As Brantlinger has put it, "Evolutionary thought seems almost calculated to legitimise imperialism" (1988:186).

Politically, Gladstone who described the triumphs of the Empire as 'false phantoms of glory' vehemently objected to Britain's hectoring interference in the affairs of foreign nations. He argued that so long as foreigners showed no willingness to be guided by the Englishmen, it could never be to Britain's national interest to meddle in other people's concerns (Morris 1978:48-49). And it was largely at the expense of Gladstone's anti-imperialist stance that Disraeli, 'the glittering impresario of Empire,' gained immense popularity. Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, was a staunch imperialist and Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, was an insatiable expansionist of a new kind. Sir Charles Dilke, himself a politician of no mean calibre, published his book Greater Britain (1869) which was instrumental in the spread of imperial myths. Dilke, while detailing the reasons for subjugating the colonies on a permanent basis, offered the educated Britons a new vision of themselves as a benevolent master race (Chakravarty 1991:6). This *rhetoric of power* continued to have an uncanny impact on writers and thinkers of the time. As Said aptly puts it: "the rhetoric of power all too easily produces an illusion of benevolence when deployed in an imperial setting" (1993:xix). John Seeley's The Expansion of England (1884) was more than an expression of "that greater pride in the Empire which is called imperialism and is a larger patriotism" (Rosberry in Thornton 1959:xxx).[6] As the journalist, Monypenny noted, 'Empire' and 'Imperialism' had taken the place which had been held by 'nation' and 'nationalism' (Ibid). Reporting the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, the Golden Issue of the *Daily Mail* printed throughout in golden ink and sometimes breaking into exultant cross-heads said *"The British-bred colonials were all so smart and straight and strong, every man

such a splendid specimen and testimony to the GREATNESS OF THE BRITISH RACE that there was not an Imperialist in the crowd who did not from the sight of them gain a new view of the glory of the British Empire" (In Morris 1978:32).

The prime motive of British imperialism was economic. Though nobler and subtler motives played their part, the deepest impulse of the Empire was the impulse to amass richer 7 The imperial overlords considered the colonies (as) a vast estate or plantation the profits of which were to be withdrawn and deposited in Britain. As a result, the colonies were systematically plundered. There were numerous instances of Englishmen rising from ‘rags to riches' overnight and returning home as self-styled nabobs, for, as Benjamin Disraeli said, “[T]he East was a career" (In Said 1978:5). In those 'gold-rush' years, Britain had found gold and silver in Australia, in New Zealand, in Canada and in India. In South Africa, the British had built the gold metropolis of Johannesburg, and the Big Hole created at Kimberly was "one of the most astonishing memorials to the impetus of avarice" (Morris 1968b: 100). Most leaders believed that the loss of overseas possessions would be disastrous to the imperial country. They thought that the dissolution of the Empire would be tantamount to a senseless act of economic self-destruction. "The Repeal of the Union we regard as fatal to the Empire and we will consent to it never - never - never" declared Macaulay in the nineteenth century and "India is our bread and butter, and without it we will go out, down, and under" asserted Winston Churchill in the twentieth century in a Parliament speech" (In Islam 1979:3). Thus, the Empire-builders fostered the myth of strengthening the economic structure of the colonies and providing an ideal government to them and went on to become the world's richest nation. This aspect of imperialism is masterfully handled by Farrell in The Singapore Grip.

At the religious level, the myth of the 'elect nation' was propagated as justification for imperialist policies. The pious imperialists believed that "empires are successive incarnations of the Divine" (Cramb 1900:230). The Evangelicals

projected themselves as representatives of a superior civilisation whose divine mission was to redeem the ignorant heathen of the tropics, and to establish light, order and law in dark places and whoever resisted the civilising mission would be tackled with an iron hand. As Calcraft-Kennedy boldly declared:

> Our mission is a high and holy mission. We are to govern India as delegates of a Christian and civilised power. We are here as representatives of Christ and Caesar to maintain this land against Shiva and Khalifa. In that task we shall not falter, we will oppose ideal to ideal, force to force... If you agitate you will be punished; if you preach sedition, you will be imprisoned; if you assassinate, you will be hanged; if you rise, you will be shot down (In Parry 1972:18).

The hollowness of this religious version of the high-sounding rhetoric of imperial power is held up to ridicule in The Siege of Krishnapur. As part of the dissemination of the imperial mystique, they promised to establish justice, relieve miseries, enlighten ignorant savages—all with the help of the agency of British power and money. Christian philanthropy was always a potent force in the colonial society and the existence of numerous inhuman social practices like suttee, thuggee, and infanticide not only provided the imperialists with an appropriate testing-ground for their philanthropic excesses but also corroborated the need for a civilised leadership. The suppression of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was also taken to be a triumph of the Christian God against the evil pagan deities, of Western culture over the Indian. Lord Curzon's passionate plea to the rulers of the Empire 'to abhor the imperfect' and "to remember that the Almighty has placed your hand on the greatest of His ploughs, in whose furrow the nations of the future are germinating and taking shape, to drive the blade a little forward in your time, and to feel that somewhere among these millions you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity ... a dawn of intellectual enlightenment or a stirring of duty, where it did not before exist, that is enough, that is the

Englishman's justification in India" (In Dennett 1953:105) is a measure of the reigning sentiment of religious superiority among the Imperialists. Farrell suggestively satirises this imperial pretence in The Siege of Krishnapur.

Most theorists of imperial literature tend to take Shakespeare's Tempest as a starting-point for an elaborate chronicle of imperialism in literature. Mannoni's exploration of the 'Prospero complex' is based on this chronology. In his pioneering study of literary imperialism, Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire, Martin Green makes a case for a different view of the matter:

> There are reasons for dating the British empire's rise at the end of the seventeenth century, in fact at the Union of England with Scotland, in 1707; which is to say at the very historical moment when the adventure tale began to be written, since Robinson Crusoe appeared in 1719. Defoe was one of the English government's agents in negotiating that union. And Defoe, rather than Shakespeare, is my candidate for the prototype of literary imperialism (1979:5).

Green suggests that the origin of the adventure tale is almost synchronous with the beginning of imperial discourse itself and even goes to the extent of concluding that the genre of adventure fiction was probably "more influential than the serious novel" (1979:49)—it is in this context that Farrell's parody of this genre in the Empire fiction assumes significance.

In the vast body of literature that followed–from Defoe to the present day-the dominant attitude towards imperialism has consistently been one of unqualified acclamation. In other words, in the literature inspired by British imperialism, *the imperial rhetoric of power* enjoyed a pride of place. In the heydays of the Empire, the quantity of imperial literature increased by leaps and bounds but without a corresponding rise in their literary quality. A substantial

number of works dwelt on life in the exotic East, in the heart of the Congo, and in a wonderful land of rajahs, and babus, pukka sahibs, burramems and punka-wallahs and of elephants, crows, rivers and cane-chairs on gymkhana verandahs. In all these works of fiction, the "mysterious Orient" [to use Edward Said's enviable phrase] was depicted as a fantasy realm of ahistorical, exotic and erotic pleasures. The massive intellectual output on the imperial theme clearly points to the fact that one of the driving forces behind this spurt of creativity was the propagation of the imperial *chanson de geste*. The imperial literature, to a great extent, was an expression of ecstasy about the ever-expanding colonial world and also about the exploits of a so-called 'exile race in action.' Imperialism had become a popular culture. Valour, glamour, dominion, law, discipline, and class were the most conspicuous aspects of a cultural consciousness.[10] "It was as though the whole nation was being deliberately disciplined into the imperial fervour" (Chakravarty 1991:2). Of the major instruments for the dissemination of colonial consciousness, John Mekenzie includes post cards, music halls, cinemas, boys' stories, school books, exhibitions and boys' scouts (1984:109). Even the theatre of the time was primarily devoted to the creation of racial stereotypes. In this literature of imperialism, figures like Kipling, Conrad, Orwell, Forster and Paul Scott stand out as writers of all times who succeeded in giving certain depth and respectability to the genre of imperial fiction, while Raj writers like John Masters, E. J. Thompson, Rumer Godden, Henry Rider Haggard, Leopold Meyers, Flora Annie Steel, Maud Diver, Philip Meadows Taylor, M. M. Kaye and novelists of Empire like Elspeth Huxley of Kenya, Olive Schreiner of South Africa, Jean Rhys of Dominica and Katherine Mansfield of New Zealand have either failed to pose any serious challenge to received ideas on imperialism in their works or to enter the mainstream of English academic culture. These writers may be seen to fit into the two broad categories of imperial fiction postulated by Martin Green.

In his book, The English Novel in the Twentieth Century; The Doom of Empire (1988:160), Martin Green explains how a writer's reputation stands or falls in course of time. Not all writers survive his/her generation of readers. In some cases, the writer as a man of letters passes into oblivion while he continues to be remembered for his ideology. In other words, the succeeding generations of readers do not read his/her work but they react to the idea that s/he has come to represent. For instance, in the fifty years after 1920, Kipling was widely ignored as a writer, though he was all along on the minds of readers of imperial literature as an ideologist. And the influence of such writers stays due to the fact that they were widely read by the people of their time. There are certain other writers, Green implicitly adds, who are forgotten both as writers and ideologists. Going by Green's theory, Farrell can be seen to present a Janus-faced personality—he is an ideologue of historical fiction whose works can make illuminating reading for all generations of readers to come.

All the novelists of colonial consciousness included in the category of immortals of imperial fiction [Kipling, Conrad, Forster, Orwell and Paul Scott], despite certain significant formal differences in the treatment of the colonial question, share traces of imperial pride in their writings. Kipling, 'the bard of empire's master class' and 'the great myth-maker of the colonies' [Martin Green's phrases] propagated the mystique of imperialism in most of his works. Kipling announced his artistic loyalty to the rulers of the Empire, exulted in his racial superiority and almost invariably attempted to spread the imperial myths. In other words, his works represent the most ardent expression of the rhetoric of power.[11] The most recurrent image of an Indian in the works of Kipling is that of a 'half-devil' and 'half-child' and it was in his view the God-given mission of the Empire-builder to exorcise the 'devil' and educate the 'child.'[12] Kipling's notorious description of the colonised as 'lesser breed without the Law' is usually taken as a clear proof of his racial bias.[13] Kipling had a heightened sense of the Empire's glorious possibilities and at the same time a strong feeling of well-

meaning scepticism about the fruition of those glorious hopes characterised his mature writing.[14]

All colonial writers of later generations following Kipling have maintained a Kiplingesque streak of adulation towards the Empire. Conrad's case is no less different. Conrad is said to have maintained a sharp difference between himself and Kipling[15] and is credited to have anticipated some of Mannoni's insights into the colonial psychology and also to have debunked some of the imperial myths in his works like Lord Jim (1900), The Heart of Darkness (1922), An Outcast of the Islands (1896) and Nostromo (1904).[16] Yet, his attitude to the imperial idea was not one of uncompromising antagonism. Conrad played a dual role in conflict with each other—as a critic and defender of imperialism. Despite the differences in the formative influences on their artistic development, Conrad, like Kipling, has eulogised the Empire-builder as "one of those unknown guides of civilisation, who on the advancing edge of progress, are administrators, warriors, creators ... They are like great artists, a mystery to the masses, appreciated only by the influential few, wilfully neglected by the great who love ease. Their work lives, but the simple wisdom which has given the very quality of their work is hidden forever to the common mind" (1920:4). Avrom Fleishman is of the view that Conrad had a colonial heritage which has helped to shape a pro-imperialist stance. "In the final analysis, (for Conrad) colonisation is a viable—the only viable—form of imperialism" (1967:288). Thus, in order to form a correct view of Conrad's reaction to the Empire, one must take into account not only those specific moments in Conrad's works when the power of imperial rhetoric holds sway but also the resultant contradiction in his personality.[18]

Though Orwell is generally regarded as an enemy of the Empire, rejecting the Empire along with its attendant myths and protesting against the immorality, injustice and hypocrisy of the entire colonial system, some writers have identified

a Kiplingesque strand in his attitude towards the Empire.[19] Orwell could never bring himself to hate the Raj with the intensity of contempt which characterised his attitude to Fascism or Communism. He is absolutely certain that the real motive behind imperialism is the economic exploitation of other people and he makes a mockery of the pious theories about the white man's burden. But in his later writings, Orwell's criticism of the Empire can be seen to have lost its sting due to his belief that when compared to other tyrannies of the world, the British counterpart was relatively mild. As E. M. Forster has aptly put it, "British imperialism, bad as he [Orwell] found it in Burma, is better than the newer imperialisms that are ousting it. All nations are odious but some are less than others, and by this strong unlovely path he reaches patriotism' (1974:71). Like Conrad, there was a latent contradiction in Orwell's personality too—as one of the most vocal detractors of Fascism, Orwell was aware of the imminence of imperial doom but at the same time, he wanted it to endure because he was confident that "it is a good deal better than the young empires that are going to supplant it" (Orwell 1980:92). So, Orwell too was not a thoroughgoing anti-imperialist as he is generally held to be; he was 'in fact, pretty close to Kipling in many ways' (Islam 1979:84).

E.M.Forster was perhaps the first novelist to consistently demystify, by suggestion and implication the imperial double-speak—of protecting India and adopting a policy of exploitation. Forster exposed the hypocrisy of reading lessons in constitutional behaviour to autocrats one day and to encourage insurgent factions the next, of supporting the doctrine of nationality in one case and ignoring its aspirations in others. Long before the disintegration of the Empire and the consequent intellectual proscription of imperialism, Forster was so dissatisfied with the imperial idea that he almost totally dissociated himself from the empire and left his readers in no doubt as to which side he belonged. Forster wrote chiefly against *the Kipling truths.' His masterpiece, **A Passage to India (1924)** shows that the imperial myths lead to inter-personal as well as inter-

racial alienation which in turn leads to the doom of Empire. As Sujit Mukherjee has aptly put it: "A Passage to India is the first clear intimation in literature of the mortality of British rule in India'* (1993:3). Forster expended a substantial amount of his creative energy in tracing the essential link that could have legitimised an intense symbiotic relationship between the two races and strengthened its nerve-centre. But curiously enough, despite all his sympathy for the Indians and his vehement rejection of the imperial idea, Forster did not favour granting of independence to India. In a letter to Lowes Dickinson, Forster expressed his conviction that "in India we have done much good and have a right" and "our sudden withdrawal would be disastrous" (In Chakravarty 1991:249). In an essay where he recorded his impression in a Kipling-like manner, he jumps to the conclusion that '[T]o the tragic problem of India's political future, I can contribute no solution" (1974:331). In the last analysis, though Forster cannot be equated with Kipling or Conrad or Orwell, his attitude to imperialism verged on the ambivalent.

Paul Scott has concerned himself with the theme of British imperialism on a massive scale and in **The Raj Quartet: 1966-1975,** he has successfully recaptured the final years of the Raj. His novels are artistic portrayals in the realistic mode of the nature and causes of the failure of the Raj, and also represent vehement denunciations of the treacherous policies of the British Empire—their faith in the illusion of race superiority and the "bloody-minded game of divide and rule."[20] But, despite Scott's highly publicised sympathy for the Indians, nowhere in his entire corpus does he portray the proverbial Indian kindness and generosity (Kohli 1987:123). On the other hand, Scott takes extreme care to portray the British restraint. There is not a single English character in Scott who is indiscreet or dramatic in public. It is quite curious that the very Englishness which renders Scott capable of depicting the English character with great perspicacity incapacitates him to depict certain traits intrinsic to the Indian character (Ibid).[21] Saraiya expresses a similar view: "Scott never grew to love

India ... nor could he intuit Indians, despite his loud protestations. Many of his Indian characters ... are projected as Indians seen by the British. Scott's concern was strictly a Britisher's concern for the British failure in India" (1994:38). According to Hilary Spurling, Scott saw the process of British withdrawal from India as a form of humiliation; he saw the colonial past as an "unfinished business" and consequently, was accused of "a sneaking desire to return to the bad old days of British supremacy" (1994:118); she is of the view that even Scott's choice of India was not the result of a genuine concern for the country and her people: "for Paul [Scott], the trip to India was a last desperate gamble, one he had put off as long as he could and risked [now] only because he could see no alternative for himself as a writer" (1990:268). That Scott was at peace with certain elements in his native imperial culture can be seen in Division of the Spoils where he commends (of course, with the typical British restraint) the greatness of Englishmen in peacefully granting independence to the colonies in an act of "Glorious Bloodless Renunciation," thereby miraculously averting the retaliatory violence imperialism should have provoked, and it is because of this, Scott seems to say, that the British have not been held responsible for the communal bloodbath between the Hindus and the Muslims which followed the partition (Green 1986:190). And this is how *the rhetoric of power* works in Conrad, Orwell, Forster and Paul Scott, unknown to the authors themselves but profoundly capable of dismantling the apparent anti-imperialist 'structure of feeling' [Said's phrase] in their works. Moreover, such rhetoric always carries heavy ideological baggage and "lead[s] inevitably to mass slaughter, and if not to literal mass slaughter then certainly to rhetorical slaughter" (Said 1991:28).

All these major novelists of Empire, discussed briefly in the preceding pages, have a certain close affinity in their ambiguous relationship to the colonial enterprise. Kipling exulted in the imperial glory while Conrad was a Kipling, guiltless of his proclivity towards racism. There can be no doubt about Forster's liberalist, anti-imperialist stance but he was not far-sighted enough to see a future

for free India. Orwell abhorred the fascist overtones of economic imperialism and at the same time, shared with Kipling a patriotic liking for the Empire. Though Paul Scott was basically an anti-imperialist writer of post-imperial Britain, a nascent streak of Kipling is demonstrably evident in his fiction. In short, no Empire-novelist of consequence before Farrell has been able to fully withstand the powerful pressures of Kipling's rhetoric—*the rhetoric of power*. While some of them basked in the sunshine of Kipling, openly acting as spokesmen for the Empire, others have not been completely successful in their attempts to escape the fall of Kipling's shadow.

Farrell certainly is one writer who can be seen to have transcended Kipling and his successors on the imperial theme in a self-conscious attempt to go *beyond the rhetoric of power*. Farrell is a writer of epic scope and scale and dwarfs his contemporaries and established masters in the field by what might be called a highly comprehensive treatment of the end of Empire in his fiction. Allen Greenberger, in his book Images of the Raj speaks about three distinct periods in the history of literature on the imperial theme. The first period from nineteenth to twentieth century is called the 'Era of Confidence,' the second period beginning with World War I is called the 'Era of Doubt' and the third period extending from 1940 to the present the 'Era of Melancholy.' Significantly, each of FarreH's complete novels in the Empire fiction is set in these periods. The Siege of Krishnapur is set in the middle of the Era of Confidence (1857), Troubles in the Era of Doubt (1919-21) and The Singapore Grip in the Era of Melancholy (1941). In the first two novels, Farrell isolates the mutinous moments of British imperial history and fictionalises the initial jolts to imperial self-esteem and the last novel centres round the disintegrating economic basis of imperialism. Landscaping the imminence of imperial doom in three important colonies of the Empire, Farrell gives representative pictures of the three important phases in the history of the decline of British imperialism. Thus, in comparison with the stalwarts of colonial fiction discussed above, with a nascent streak of

Kiplingesque adulation for the Empire in all of them, Farrell occupies a unique position for two important reasons: (a) comprehensive treatment of a facet of history and (b) fictional experimentation. A study of these two constituent elements of Empire fiction combine to make Farrell an essential component of any serious discussion of post-war British fiction about India and the imperial colonies.

### *(a) Comprehensive Treatment of a Facet of History*

Farrell's magnificent obsession is the disintegration, physical/spiritual, of the individual and society, of the body-politic, of dogs and other animals and of all the spatial and temporal structures within the text of the novels. The idea of disintegration, conveyed most powerfully through recurrent images of disease, death and decay is foregrounded to such an extent that it assumes an allegorical significance, heralding the doom of Empire. In other words, Farrell's Empire fiction is an extended allegory of the decline of British power.

An analysis of Farrell's thematic preoccupation with imperial decay is of paramount importance in any study of the author's oeuvre for two reasons. In the first place, such an analysis has not yet been fully undertaken. Binns's J.G. Farrell (1986) compresses too much in too brief a space and the resultant compactness, though quite helpful in the form of vital clues to the multifarious aspects of FarrelFs writing, largely overlooks Farrell's peculiarly distinctive mode of critiquing Empire and the imperial civilisation. Most writers on Farrell, including Binns, have marginalised Farrell's fictional explosion of the imperial mystique. A brief look at the critical focus in some discussions of the Empire fiction would substantiate my point. John Mellors described The Singapore Grip as "an exciting adventure story, with powerful descriptions of air-raids, fires on the docks and fighting in the jungle" (1978:410). According to Binns,"[T]he underlying philosophy of the novel has less to do with loving other people than with sustaining a stoic detachment in the face of the tragic condition of humanity"

(1986:44). Again, in his analysis of The Siege of Krishnapur, Dinns compares Farrell with Forster and Paul Scott to Farrell's utter disadvantage and concludes that "Farrell's interest lies less in the causes of the Mutiny or its historical developments than in the condition of an isolated community caught up in the dramatic experience of being besieged" (1986:64). Margaret Drabble argues that Farrell's novels work towards a "revelation of the absurdity and injustice of things as they are" and goes on to say that "Farrell combined a sense of the pointless absurdity of man with the real and increasing compassion for characters caught up in decay and confusion" (1981:181). John Spurling believed that the most dominant theme in Farrell's work is the horror at the in-built competitive nature of man : "Competition is built into human beings, from their mating habits to their recreations to their personal and national relationships to their religions and political creeds" (1981b: 145). Thus, most critics on Farrell have played down the imperial theme in his fiction. Though the fact that Farrell's Empire fiction can be interpreted even in purely ahistorical terms speaks volumes for the richness and complexity of Farrell's work, such interpretations would have the totally unintended effect of dethroning Farrell from a privileged position in the literary canon of English historical fiction. One reason for this critical neglect of an important theme could probably be that the imperial aspect of the Empire fiction is taken for granted—a fact which, far from justifying its own exclusion in any analysis of Farrell's work, corroborates the necessity of a detailed treatment of the subject. Part-A titled *Empire And Disease* of the first section–*The Rhetoric of Disease* of Chapter II—Farrell and Empire: The Rhetoric and Beyond inquires into this aspect of Empire fiction.

The second reason is that, though Farreirs obsession with the theme of disease and decay has been commented upon by most critics, no attempt has yet been made to show that Farrell's disease imagery can be interpreted in terms of a distinctively postmodernist and symbolic critique of imperialism. The present study would attempt to show that Farrell's language is fundamentally metaphoric

and poetic rather than conventionally realistic and prosaic as most of his critics believe. Edward Arnold writes: "..Farrell writes omniscient prose about the past, in the past tense, using a tough narrative voice to prevent his work appearing to be pastiche or uneasy current Victorian" (1979:30). In my view, nothing could be further from the truth. Unlike most writers on the theme of British imperialism, Farrell's novels rely for their magnificent effects on the powerful use of symbolism, of a fundamentally figurative language which is anything but ' Victorian.'[23] Farrell never attempts to *prevent his work appearing to be pastiche or uneasy Victorian'; on the contrary, Farrell makes generous use of pastiche and of numerous 'uneasy' metaphors to critique the disease of Empire and its civilisation.

An examination of the illusory faith in the concept of a civilised master race is significant in any study of Farrell for two important reasons. In the first place, discussions of the British-India encounter have almost always focused the magnitude of the impact which the British government made on India and its peoples (Parry 1972:1) and consequently, the Messianic mission of the Empire was always beyond suspicion. Secondly, Farrell's Empire fiction launches an extended critique of the concept of superior civilisation. In other words, Farrell's Empire fiction is an extended fictional illustration of the collapse of a superior civilisation founded on a brittle body of myths. Through his exposition of or inquiry into the theme of disintegration in his Empire fiction, Farrell seems to suggest that the cultural and racial superiority of the British is an imperial construct and as such cannot have any significance or meaning outside the realm of imagination. Farrell seems to suggest that the idea of a superior culture leads the colonisers to assume a self-righteous posture of unbounded self-confidence which results in an adaptational breakdown in times of acute crisis, personal or governmental—a theme gloriously handled in The Siege of Krishnapur. Farrell pictures the ordinary spokespersons of this imperial creed and shows how they are too crippled by this faith to face out the pressures of native resistance. All the

Empire novels, except the unfinished **The Hill Station,** address this vexed issue in a subtly postmodernist fashion. The opening sections of all these novels focus the colonisers' luxurious routine of dreadful complacency whereas later sections place their states of abject misery and vulnerability in sharp contrast. The topics of their discussions, formal or informal, change from civilisation and progress in the peaceful days to the bare needs of survival in turbulent times. Under the mounting pressures of militant nationalism, the usually self-assured and often arrogant British revert to a primordial state of instinctual existence which is anything but civilised. As A. P. Thornton has aptly put it : "Every doctrine of imperialism devised by man is a consequence of their second thoughts.... Imperialist ideas are less ideas than instincts" (1965:8). Farrell treats of this feature of the imperialist in a skilful manner in **The** Siege of **Krishnapur—by** presenting a strange world in which people ground their lives on chimerical abstractions. As Mannoni pointed out, "'Civilisation' is necessarily an abstraction. Contact is made not between abstractions, but between, real, live human beings" (1956:23). It is quite interesting and enlightening to see how a people nurtured on a set of abstract notions of superiority conduct themselves when they are forced, for the first time in their colonial life, to fight desperately for survival against a group of 'real, live human beings.' The second sub-section titled *Civilisation and Disease* of Chapter **II—Farrell and Empire: The Rhetoric and Beyond** undertakes to explore this component of Empire fiction.

The question of economic imperialism has fired **Farrell's** imagination so powerfully that his most ambitious novel **The** Singapore **Grip** is devoted to an exploration of the Empire's intricate conspiracy of economic exploitation of the native population. It is in **The** Singapore Grip that Farrell's critique of imperialism attains maturity and fullness. By centring the novel on the life and fortunes of two formidable English business families of Singapore, Farrell exposes not only the heinous ways in which the representatives of the imperial mission amassed fabulous wealth but also the rhetoric of power which was used

to achieve their economic aims. The second section of Chapter II–*The Rhetoric of 'Grip'* studies the Empire fiction from this angle.

Thus, on the whole, Chapter II–**Farrell and Empire: The Rhetoric and Beyond,** by discussing the multifarious ramifications of **Farrell's** use of disease as a central controlling metaphor in the Empire fiction, attempts to fill a **'gap'** in Farrell scholarship. In other words, the comprehensive and masterful handling of the theme of imperial decay gives an added dimension to **Farrell's** treatment of history and serves to underscore Farreirs uniqueness as a writer of the end-of-the-empire genre of fiction.

### *(b) Fictional Experimentation*

Farrell is a brilliant experimenter of form in the genre of historical fiction after World War II, rubbing shoulders with the master-innovator, John Fowles. Though not avowedly metafictional like Fowles, Farrell's work suggests possibilities of **'experimental'** fictional techniques. In the complexity of his narrative, Farrell goes a few steps beyond his contemporaries like John Masters and Paul Scott. Due to his postmodernist orientation, Farrell's fictionalisation of history does not follow the traditional mimetic mode and the narrative is not a straightforward omniscient one. In this context, it is instructive to note that an anthology [edited by Bradbury (1979)], devoted mainly to the study of the experimental reaction in fiction contains an essay on Farrell while Paul Scott's The Raj **Quartet:** 1966-1975 is almost ignored as "extended works derived more or less directly from personal experience" beyond which "lies the possibility of writing historical fiction proper" (Bergonzi **1979:59).** The first section, ***From Historical Fiction to Historiographic Metafiction*** **of Chapter III–Farrell and**

**the Fictive Imagination focuses** on how **Farrell's** concept of historical fiction conforms to and departs from the traditional notions of the historical novel.

**Farrell's** use of postmodern techniques like parody, pastiche and intertextuality are closely bound up with his subtle critique of imperialism. Through parody and pastiche, Farrell suggests not only the obsolescence of earlier literary modes of fictionalising imperial history but also of the British way of looking at the so-called exotic East, and the staggering number of intertexts in his works serve to remind us that his own texts are ' links in the chain,' drawing extensively on 'the always already-written,' that the past is available to us only in textual form. As Bergonzi has aptly put it, "Farrell shows himself adroit at the manipulation of multiple fictional codes" (1979:62). Bergonzi does not proceed to apply the structuralist model of codes in his brief overview of **Farrell's** themes; nor does he relate it to Farrell's critique of imperialism. It can be seen that **Farrell's** texts respond energetically to the Barthean aesthetic of reading. According to Barthes, there could be any number of codes in a work of art and these codes which determine our reading are present as much in the reader as in the text. The textual structure produced by the codes is not a fixed one but an ever-growing multiplicity of **significations:**

> The text is a galaxy of **signifiers,** not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is irreversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilises extend as far as the eye can reach, they are interminable (Barthes 1975:4).

Though no attempt will be made to stick slavishly to the Barthean concept of **codes,** the idea that "the text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" will hold good throughout the present study. In other words, while no attempt will be made to divide the texts into different **'lexias'** or reading units and

to read them sequentially through the grid of five codes, the present study would use the term 'code' as it refers to that part of a novel which once reactivated through a dynamic reader-participation would throw into relief the various fictional techniques employed by the writer. This partial use of this structuralist model of reading is justified on the ground that Farrell's Empire novels are 'writerly' or 'sriptible' texts which call for an active involvement on the part of the reader, producing or identifying varying levels of meaning ("to produce structuration"), while, on the other hand, a dogmatic adherence to a single method of reading will tend to delimit the scope of the study. Consequently, the present study makes varying readings of the same texts in different chapters, though all the readings are shown to have an inherent unity. For instance, Chapter II makes a reading of The Siege of Krishnapur and Troubles in terms of the 'cultural code' or disease, the controlling metaphor for the diseased imperial system while Chapter III interprets the same texts in terms of fictional experimentation and Chapter IV analyses The Siege of Krishnapur in terms of an extended fictional subversion of imperial myths in the context of India, offering a 'sub-version' of the colonial experience itself. Though different codes are activated in each of the different readings, they all share the same thematic focus. As Barthes puts it, "...each code is one of the forces that can take over the text. Alongside each utterance, one might say the off-stage voices can be heard: they are the codes" (Barthes 1975:4). In short, Farrell's novels are intensely intellectual and hence their realistic descriptions have symbolic significance which require active reader participation. This fact—that Farrell's novels can be approached from a variety of angles—and the use of techniques like parody ["Parody can operate only when the awareness of the reader is at its peak" (Shlonsky in Rose 1979:45)], pastiche and intertextuality serve to link Farrell closely to the postmodernist discourse on fictional representation of reality in general and on historical fiction in particular. The second section of Chapter *lll-Beyond Realism and Anti-Realism* examines this aspect from a theoretical perspective.

**Thus,** Chapter **III Farrell and the Fictive Imagination** undertakes to throw into sharp focus not only **Farrell's** attempt to go beyond the narrow confines of fictional realism or anti-realism but also to show how **a** serious study of Fan-ell's Empire fiction helps to bring out his distinctively original theory of history and historical fiction.

Chapter **IV–Farrell, Parody and the Exorcism of Laughter** makes an exhaustive analysis of the anti-realistic dimensions **of Farrell's** fiction and places his work in a postmodernist perspective, thereby refuting the consensual dismissal of his work as instances of pure fictional realism and linking him firmly to the current discourse on postmodernist historical fiction. As Farrell's **experimentalism** finds its most potent expression in **The** Singapore **Grip,** the primary illustrative focus of the chapter falls on this novel. The chapter seeks to activate **'the hermeneutic code'** in **Farrell's** novels, to explore the various ways in which Farrell ridicules the rhetoric of power in an attempt to transcend its limitations and to throw light on the ideological implications of Farrell's fascination for the insights of problematical fiction through an illustration of how he makes use of subversive fictional techniques like parody, pastiche and intertextuality as tools to subvert the conventional responses to imperialism through laughter. Chapter IV concludes that Farrell's use of the techniques of postmodernist fiction is intimately bound up with his critique of imperialism.

Chapter **V–Conclusion: Farrell and India** examines Farrell's Indian connection and presents the major conclusions drawn from the study. Farrell has had a long-standing association with India. He has visited the country twice and has written one completed novel **The** Siege of **Krishnapur** based on the **Indian** Mutiny, another novel entitled **The Hill Station** which was left sadly uncompleted following his premature death in **a** fishing accident and the non-fictional *The Indian **Diary,*** a collection of candid reflections on various aspects of life in India. The important fact that, of the fifty-odd novels written **on** the

Indian Mutiny **The** Siege of **Krishnapur** occupies a unique position in terms of technique and theme throws into bold relief the undeserved critical neglect of this great novel. Chapter- V, on the whole, examines the full implication of **Farrell's** sustained engagement with **India,** attempts to link Farrell more firmly to the Anglo-Indian canon of literature and, through an elucidation of how Farrell fictionalises the **British-India** encounter from a fundamentally postmodernist perspective, concludes that **The** Siege of Krishnapur is the only experimental novel on the Mutiny.

### *(ii) Farrell and the Early Fiction*

The above sketch is intended to give an idea of the main assumptions and bases of this study. The present section takes a close look at **Farrell's** life and career to understand his work in a biographical and intellectual context and also to develop the relation between Farrell's early and later fiction, with a view to showing how the early novels anticipate the later Empire fiction.

#### *(a) Farrell's Life: 'An Interrupted Journey*[24]

The influence of Farrell's life on his work is so powerful and consistent that there exists absolute critical consensus on this point. As Binns has remarked "Farrell was not an autobiographical novelist, yet his fiction cannot neatly be separated off from his life" (Binns 1986:30). Farrell's life has had a tremendous impact on his work. A close look at his work shows how certain treasured moments and unforgettable experiences of his own life are ingested by his artistic/creative consciousness and beautifully assimilated into the craft of fiction. Therefore, the **following** study attempts a biographical account of Farreirs life,

develops the relationship between his life and work and shows how his real-life experiences impinge on his fictional consciousness.

James Gordon Farrell was born on 23 January 1935 in a nursing home at 150 Moscow Drive, Liverpool. His mother Prudence Josephine Farrell (ne'e Russell) was the daughter of an English timber-dealer. She had been born and brought up in Ireland. Farrell's father, William Francis Farrell was the son of a wine merchant in Liverpool. Farrell's parents had been married in Burma in 1930 and they went to live in Chittagong, East Bengal where Mr. Farrell was the manager for the Pure Cane Molasses Company. In the early years, Mr. Farrell was a produce broker's clerk but later changed the profession and worked as an accountant abroad. Farrell, the youngest son of the family, had two brothers, Richard and Robert for both of whom his novel **A Girl in the Head** is dedicated. As Binns tells us, Farrell was noted for a precociously keen sense of observation. He had taken to reading quite early in life and his mother Jo Farrell captures the vivid memory of the boy's shrewd comment on Walter Scott's Ivanhoe (1819) as a wonderful story punctured by tediously long descriptions of scenery.

When World War II started in 1939, the Farrell family shifted to 'Boscobel,' an enormous rambling Victorian house in Southport which was bequeathed to Mrs Farrell by her uncle. The house had a large number of rooms which were occupied by homeless relatives and friends in no time. In 'Boscobel,' the Farrells had been living a peaceful life when suddenly in the spring of 1941, a German bomber heading for the Liverpool docks was attacked by a fighting plane and jettisoned a stick of bombs overhead. The house next door was flattened and the occupants killed. The blast hit 'Boscobel' and destroyed the house partially. Miraculously, no one in Boscobel was seriously injured. Farrell was six years at the time and **Southport Gazette** quoted boy Farrell's shrewd remark on the incident: "This man Hitler really is a nuisance" (In Binns 1986:18). The blast remained a haunting memory throughout his life.

This partial destruction of his house 'Boscobel' in a bomb attack during World War II was one of the most important incidents which made an indelible impression on the mind of Farrell. 'Boscobel,' with its numerous bedrooms occupied by Farrell's friends and relatives at the time of war, is reminiscent of the rambling Victorian hotel called the Majestic in Troubles where a number of Anglo-Irish people lead a leisurely life until Irish disturbances shatter their peace. Similarly, the total destruction of a familiar and loved room which rudely shakes the chief occupant of the Residency, Hopkins, the Collector, is graphically described in The Siege of Krishnapur and the description appears to be an imaginative reliving of his own real-life experience: "His shattered bedroom slowly materialised out of the darkness, the splintered wood work, the broken furniture, the wall-paper hanging in shreds form the shrapnel-pocked walls" (*SK*, p.226). Again, Mr. Hopkins witnesses a huge blast that bursts "with a flash that burnt itself so deeply into the Collector's brain that he reeled ... And then there was nothing but smoke, dust, debris, and a crash which dropped a picture from the wall behind him" (pp.237-8). The Singapore Grip is steeped in echoes of Farrell's real life and gives vivid descriptions of buildings and people being attacked from the air. And most interestingly, The Singapore Grip is set largely in 1941, the very year of the bomb attack on Farrell's house. Farrell attempts what could be called a close parallel between his personal tragedy and the sad plight of the Langfield family in The Singapore Grip: "The Langfields suffered a misfortune. A bomb jettisoned at random by a Japanese plane had fallen in Nassim Road, partly destroying the house. None of them had been hurt, except for a few scratches" (p.400). Shortly afterwards, the narrator tells us that Mr. Langfield "had reached the age when a person finds it hard to adjust to a sudden shock like the destruction of his house" (p.401). Again, in A Girl in the Head, the hero Boris sees "a couple of other houses (and so close that they appeared merely as a mist of pink brick) the Victorian mansion called Boscobel in which he himself lived" (p. 11). The attack on 'Boscobel' can be seen to have coloured Farrell's vision of human life. The theme of a besieged community is pervasive in

Farrell. Troubles, The Siege of Krishnapur and The Singapore Grip deal with the idea of man in a temporary shelter which is insecure and open to attack from within and without.

In 1945, the Farrell family settled down in Ireland and lived in a place called Saval Park Road, Dalkey. Once settled, the boy Farrell wrote a number of sentimental love stories and sent them to the publishers under a pseudonym, "Dora-Park Saval". At the age of twelve, Farrell, like his two brothers, was sent as a boarder to Rossall School, Fleetwood, on the Lancashire coast. Though he was not very happy, during his six years there, Farrell initiated himself into the works of Pierre Loti whose Pechéurd Islande (1886) enthralled him. Farrell devoured his works. He developed a keen interest in French writing in general and in Stendhal and Collette in particular and he was gradually led into the works of the great masters of fiction like Leo Tolstoy, Albert Camus and Joseph Conrad.

At the age of 19, Farrell left Rossall School and took up a teaching job in a prep school in Dublin. Afterwards, Farrell went to Canada with the declared aim of launching himself on a writing career. But Farrell's plans went awry. He lived in Baffin Island in the Canadian Arctic for seven months, working as labourer, fireman, and then clerk on the military Defence Early Warning Line. Later, he toured the US and returned to Ireland.

In the autumn of 1956, Farrell joined Brasenose college, Oxford, to read Law. Towards the end of his first term, he had a sudden attack of poliomyelitis which cost him the use of both the hands. It left him with severely weakened muscles from the waist up. A hefty Farrell with a "barrel-like chest" was transformed within a short period into an invalid. This was the second but by far the most traumatic shock Farrell received in his life. As Malcolm Dean tells us, despite his extreme physical disability, Farrell was fiercely independent

(1981:174). Though he regained the use of one arm in the course of systematic treatment, Farrell never fully recovered from this disability which might have contributed to his death since he was unable to swim when he fell into the river.

The polio attack has had a tremendous impact on Farrell's creative consciousness. The recurrence of certain themes and images in Farrell's works would illustrate this point. Farrell's picture of human existence as frail, insecure, and temporary consistently projected in his work underscores the profound impact of continued ill-health on his fictional consciousness. Malcolm Dean speaks about two distinct Farrells, "pre-polio" and "post-polio" (1981:177). The attack of polio which left Farrell an invalid throughout his life was perhaps the most shattering experience in his career. The pre-polio Farrell was an "insensitive, unthinking, rugby-loving, public school philistine" (Ibid) while the post-polio Farrell was. a cool cat, 'a sensitive plant.' The impact of this tragedy was so great that Farrell's second novel The Lung is a black comedy based on his experience as a polio victim. The hero Sands who lives up to the image of an 'unthinking philistine' before the polio attack turns out to be a 'demi-skeleton' later. Farrell never fully recovered from this trauma and consequently, was subject to infrequent fits of deep depression. Though he was incapacitated even to go through daily chores, Farrell did not lose heart. In A Man From Elsewhere, the novelist Reagan looks back on "a period when time had seemed to stand still, when the future had seemed a towering mountain-face and each new hour a breathless painful step in its ascent. In constant danger of slipping back, he had hauled himself into the future with numb and bleeding fingers" (p. 110). In A Girl in the Head, the horrifying scene of a group of cripples exercising in the hospital gymnasium is described with chilling realism:

> When you look at those people, you don't see them, you see great dramas of suffering and pain and heroism and God knows what else .... But that is all nonsense, perfectly irrelevant. / *expect you noticed that most of*

> ***these patients were young people paralysed in some way or other, Well, it's merely that they have in some respect aged all of a sudden.*** **Part of the machinery has** gone out of action. And that is all there is to it. Nothing else" (p.88; **Italics** mine).

And the doctor's consolatory remarks seem to echo **Farrell's** own stoic resignation to his fate of a crippled life: **"** 'I used to be like you,' the doctor said, vaguely looking somewhat bored. 'All misery is invented.' After a moment, he turned back to Boris and smiled, **'Happiness,** too, I dare **say'"** (Ibid).

Further, Farrell's admiration for writers like Solzhenitsyn, Thomas Mann and Andre Gide can also be seen to be closely related to his obsessive preoccupation with disease and decay. Like Farrell, Solzhenitsyn and Mann suffered from continued ill-health in their actual life (Meyers **1985:17)** and used disease imagery in their **novels.**[25] Unlike these masters of disease **fiction,** Farrell's protagonists are not cancerous or tubercular; nor does he use disease to highlight the difference between appearance and reality, **'the contrast ...** between the robust tanned look and the relentless inner decay' (Meyers **1985:44).** Though identical in his concern with disease, Farrell differs from Solzhenitsyn, Mann and Gide in the thematic orientation of disease imagery, in his ability to transform the clinical into the poetical; he concerns himself with the rhetorical aspects of sickness and draws on it to symbolise social pathology.[26]

In 1957, Farrell returned to Brasenose College and scrapped his Law course and took up Modern Languages. After the polio **attack,** Farrell decided to become a full-time writer. He started writing a novel entitled **The Lung** which was rejected by the publishers. After graduating in French and Spanish third class in **1960,** Farrell worked as a language teacher in France for three years. During these years, he wrote another novel entitled **A Man From Elsewhere** (1963) which he dedicated to his parents. This novel was accepted by Hutchinson and

publishers under the New Writer's Scheme designed to encourage young and unknown novelists. A Man From Elsewhere centres round a young Communist journalist, Sayer who is sent on a defamation campaign against a dying novelist, Reagan who is about to receive a Catholic prize for his best-selling novels. The novel presents the young Farrell tinkering with stylistic techniques in his attempt to come to grips with an original mode of creative expression. Set in contemporary France, the novel contains long ideological discussions about the political problems of the time like violence in Algeria and France, the Berlin crisis and the threat of nuclear annihilation. It also shows the strong influence of existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus. The novel received some critical attention. Reviewing the book, John Holloway wrote:

> 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. Of course, there are faults in this first novel, but they are good faults: the author tries to cram too much into too little space; there are loose ends; not all the characters justify their inclusion. On the other hand, Mr. Farrell shows that not only can he handle ideas, he is a story-teller as well. Altogether, this is a most distinguished debut" (In Binns 1986:24).

Farrell once complained that as a boy the Irish always regarded him as English and in England he was always regarded as Irish. As a result, he had a depressing sense of alienation in both the countries. A Man From Elsewhere which projects the life of an eccentric hero who is ‘a man from elsewhere,' alien to his surroundings, an outsider, pictures Fan-ell's life in the Rossall school when he was "a lonely schoolboy cloistered in a boarding school throughout his adolescence" (*AMFE*, p.46).

Farrell had a great flair for story-telling. Though he was basically a reserved and introverted character, his gift for story-telling made him gloriously

eloquent. Malcolm Dean says that he knew no other person who could tell a story so well or who would be asked so excitedly by friends to repeat a tale even though everyone round the table had heard it several times (1981:176). Farrell was later to fully capitalise on this God-given talent in his fiction.

Back in London in 1964, Farrell managed to eke out an income by teaching English to foreigners and by reading manuscripts for Hutchinson. Farrell wrote his next two novels The Lung (1965) and A Girl in the Head (1967). The Lung was more or less a revision of his rejected first novel. A more ambitious work than A Man From Elsewhere, The Lung is a black comedy about a man [named Martin Sands] in an iron lung making a desperate bid to regain his health in the company of a handful of fellow-patients and an attractive young nurse. Much of the comedy is provided by Sands's attempts to gratify his two driving appetites of sex and drink. Sands is the narrator and everything is seen from his point of view. The novel was generously reviewed by Bernard Share: "The writing is crisp and evenly tensioned, and the description of what it feels like inside a lung has a horrible authenticity. This is a human and entertaining novel, and confirms Mr. Farrell as a man with something to say and a skilful way of saying it" (In Binns 1986:25). Farrell dedicated The Lung to his Oxford contemporary, Russell McCormmach. The third novel A Girl in the Head, originally titled The Succubus is about Count Boris Slattery, 'a gaunt man with receding hair' (*GH*, p.33) who acts out certain comic misadventures in the dull seaside resort of Maidenhair Bay. Boris is an impecunious vagabond who is shattered by the Dongeon family into which he married. A Girl in the Head was severely criticised and the hostile reviews had a demoralising effect on Farrell, particularly because it was a novel which he himself liked very much. In a letter to his friend G.M. Arthurson, Farrell said that he was shocked by the bad reviews ; "as I consider this book as by far my best. Hardly anyone, even the people who liked the book had any sympathy for Boris and his predicament. Well, apart from his appalling defects of character, pride, dishonesty, self-centredness and so on, I

could not help thinking that Boris was significant in some way" (In Spurling 1983b:146).

In 1966, Farrell went to North America on a Harkness Fellowship where he began to work on a novel set in the past. It is possible that Farrell's shift of fictional focus had something to do with the hostile reviews A Girl in the Head received. Troubles (1970), the first volume in what came to be called Farrell's 'Empire trilogy' was an instant success. It was awarded the Faber Memorial Prize and with it Farrell's teething troubles as a writer came to an end. Set against the backdrop of the Irish troubles of 1919-1921, Troubles pictures the tragi-comic tale of Major Brendan Archer's short stay in a decrepit hotel called the Majestic in Ireland where he fondly pursues two women one of whom meets with an untimely death and the other elopes with another man. Though the setting had shifted to the past, most of the reviews were highly appreciative of the contemporaneity of the work. Bridget. O'Toole remarked that "taking into account the different historical setting, it is extraordinary how much seems relevant" (1981:59). The novelist, Elizabeth Bowen who had herself written a novel on the same theme [titled The Last September (1927)] remarked: "Troubles is not 'a period piece'; it is yesterday reflected in today's consciousness. The ironies, the disparities, the dismay, the sense of unavailingness are contemporary" (1970:58).[27] Troubles, thus gave an idea of Farrell's approach to historical fiction.

In 1970, Farrell moved to a cramped Knightsbridge flat at 16 Egerton Gardens, London. At that time, Farrell was preparing himself for the subsequent volumes to his Empire trilogy. At first, he thought of writing a novel set in Mexico in the 1860s based on the tragedy of the Austrian Archduke Maximilian and his wife, Carlota. He did intensive research on the subject and made copious notes about the historical background and later squashed the project. Then, he thought about a kind of sequel to Troubles, set in India.

In 1971, after his library researches into the Mutiny, Farrell made a tour of India the memories of which are recounted in what was later published under the title *The Indian Diary*. The Siege of Krishnapur (1973) soon appeared and won the Booker Prize. Farrell instantly shot to fame. The Siege Of Krishnapur deals with the disturbances in India which culminated in the first struggle for Indian Independence in 1857. In the Booker Prize acceptance address, Farrell took the donors of the Prize to task and accused in harsh words the multinational firm of exploiting and underpaying their black employees in the West Indies. Farrell's speech is significant for two reasons. Firstly, by taking an open political stand for the first time, Farrell received the public recognition a media-shy writer would never have got under ordinary circumstances. Secondly, it showed that he was profoundly dissatisfied with capitalist exploitation. Though he never joined a political party, he had a strong belief in the essential equality of human beings.

The Siege of Krishnapur received rave reviews. An anonymous reviewer called it "an utterly accomplished novel, a work of unusual and grateful intensity" (In Binns 1986:35). Sissman could see the myriad possibilities of a great creative genius in the making. "The Siege of Krishnapur is a winning and readable novel and it suggests that its author who is not yet forty is a man to watch" (1974:54). Julian Symons was all praise for the novel because 'the story was told with extraordinary verve and freshness....' (1978:1110). Mary McCarthy wrote: "What a book! It has everything you could expect to find in a big old-fashioned novel or several of them—characters, suspense, military action, romantic attachments, satire, wit, tenderness, philosophy. In my family, nobody from the age of eighteen to over sixty, could put it down" (1978:44). Altogether, in this novel, Farrell showed brilliantly how fact could be assimilated into fiction.

Farrell started thinking in terms of a thematically connected third novel and in 1975 toured Singapore and the Far East. He also visited the besieged city of Saigon. The debacle of Singapore caught his fancy and he said in an interview

that "it was an episode of British history largely left alone by historians, perhaps... because it was a defeat, not a victory" (Moorehead, 1978:34). When the third volume in the so-called trilogy appeared in 1978 under the title **The Singapore** Grip, there was a consensual breakdown among critics of Farrell as to which one of his last three novels should be considered his masterpiece. In Binns's view, The Singapore Grip is undoubtedly the best. Margaret Drabble said that it was "a fine piece of work, solid, informative, funny, tragic, one of those novels that present a whole world for the reader" (1981:152). Timothy Mo said that "[T]he novel may be Farrell's private attempt at War **and Peace"** (1978:337). Commenting on the documentary veracity of this imaginative *tour de force*, Christopher Porterfield wrote that "it is a rich and poignant chronicle and Farrell has researched it down to the last palm-oil statistic" (1979:70). Mo was perhaps the only critic who commended the political dimension of the novel:

> The account of the big Far Eastern commercial houses, the rubber business, the way native small-holders were systematically ruined, the unholy alliance of Indian money-lenders and Western capital which destroyed the old communities and created a pool of plantation and mining labour, the rise of Japanese imperialism—all this could be the work of a professional left-wing academic. May be it is. Farrell lists 50 reference books (1979:70).

Set in Singapore immediately before the Japanese invasion of it during World War II, Singapore Grip looks at the collapse of Britain's imperial supremacy from an economic standpoint and the trilogy, on the whole, deals with the jolts that British imperial pride received from three of its formidable colonies.

Farrell was a serious researcher and he used to spend more than a year researching for a novel in the British Museum. Farrell appended an explanatory half-page at the end of The Siege of **Krishnapur** which said that "many

incidents are taken from the mass of diaries, letters and memoirs written by eye-witnesses, in some cases the words of the witness only slightly modified'* (*SK*, p.345) and a full bibliography of sources to his most ambitious novelistic project, The Singapore Grip. He studied long-forgotten economics text books as part of his background reading for this novel where he treats of the economics of imperialism. Thus, by drawing extensively on documents, Farrell assimilated the historical facts into his fiction in a seamlessly beautiful manner. Once his research is finished, he never suffered the 'writer's block' and went ahead with the work like a 'writing machine' (Dean 1986:176).

Farrell returned to Ireland in April 1979 and set to work on his next novel which was intended to be a sequel of sorts to The Siege of Krishnapur. But, before he completed the novel in August 1979, Farrell died at the early age of forty four. He was fishing from some rocks on the beach near his farmhouse when he either slipped or was washed away by a huge wave into the sea and drowned. A picnicking family saw the incident but they were too far away to help. His body was swept ashore later the same month and he was buried in the graveyard of St. James Church, Durrus, Ireland.

The unfinished novel was edited by his friend and dramatist John Spurling and posthumously published under the title The Hill Station (1981) to which was appended *The Indian Diary*. With the publication of The Hill Station, Farrell again grabbed the active literary limelight and he was hailed as "one of the outstanding novelists of his generation" (Wilson,1981:21). *The Indian Diary* is a record of Farrell's impressions of the various cities and villages he travelled and the fact that it contains critical evaluations of works by Paul Scott and Conrad makes it all the more significant. His descriptions of the cities of Bombay and Delhi are highly evocative.

Most of the obituaries of Farrell referred to an obvious paradox in Farrell's attitude towards social relations. Basically a solitary man with a strong drive to have a wide circle of friends, Francis King described Farrell as "the loner who loved company" (1979:1). Malcolm Dean was of the view that the two sides were more complementary than they might seem: "While he needed his friends as a break from the solitude, he needed the solitude to recharge the emotional energy required in maintaining links with so many close friends" (1981:183). Farrell's death came as a terrible blow both to his friends and to literature. Pinpointing the uniqueness of Farrell's personality, Dean remarked: "Most people remind you of other people you know! Jim just reminded you of Jim" (Ibid). Considering the dazzling brilliance of his fictional output at such an early age, one is tempted to wonder, like the poet, Derek Mahon: "Who knows what magnificence he might have given us?" (1979:313).

### *(b) From Fiction to Historical Fiction*

The corpus of what may be called Farrell's early fiction consists of three novels namely, A Man From Elsewhere, A Girl in the Head and The Lung which are instances of pure fiction with contemporary settings. The sharp break with the early fiction which Troubles, the first of the Empire novels, represents are both in terms of theme and technique. The first three novels are set against contemporary backgrounds while in the later novels, Farrell turned to historical settings. In other words, unlike the historical novels of the later phase of Farrell's career, the early fiction treats exclusively of the living present. But, despite these marked differences between the early and later fiction, it is important to note that novels of both these phases maintain more than just a tenuous link with each other. While the early novels are not thematically identical with the Empire fiction, there are elements of consequence in them like Farrell's

distinctive tropology, his treatment of the theme of disease, death and decay and his absurdist and anti-heroic angle of vision which link them to the Empire novels and allow us to see Farrell's work as a whole. Though the early fiction is basically realistic in its mode of fictional representation of life, there is an undeniable consistency of theme in the totality of his work. John Spurling speaks about the strong connection between Fan-ell's early and later fiction: "From the first page of his first novel, he [Farrell] was aware of the long perspective" (1981b:141). Binns too has pinpointed certain recurring thematic elements in the entire body of Farrell's fiction. As he puts it, "Sayer, Sands, Boris, the Major, Fleury and Matthew Webb—central characters in Farrell's first six novels—each leave a familiar world behind and find themselves plunged, sometimes comically, often in heroic isolation, into unknown and threatening circumstances" (1986:36). Therefore, an attempt is made in the following pages to examine Farrell's early fiction *vis-à-vis* the Empire fiction.

A Man From Elsewhere, Farrell's first novel, tells the story of a dying novelist named Sinclair Reagan who is about to receive 'the Catholic Prize for World Peace' for his best-selling novels. Once a die-hard Communist, Reagan turns a staunch individualist. Gerhardt, one of Reagan's old comrades sends a young journalist Sayer to Reagan's house with the mission of digging up unpleasant facts about Reagan and defaming him. But a variety of factors makes it impossible for Sayer to successfully carry out the defamation campaign which is undertaken in the interests of international Communism.

Set in contemporary France, A Man From Elsewhere throws some light on Farrell's fascination for political history which is to find its fullest expression in the Empire fiction. A Man From Elsewhere is steeped in echoes of the torture in Algeria, plastic bomb atrocities in France, the anxieties about the atom bomb, Cold War and the Berlin crisis. Another important thematic link between A Man From Elsewhere and the later Empire fiction is the characters[9]

existentialist leanings and the very title bears some resemblance to **Camus's The Outsider** (1942). As Spurling points out, "Sayer is more of an existentialist model than a person" (1981b: 146). Disgusted with the growing trend of selfish individualism, Sayer

> wondered how on earth a society managed to keep going when it was held together only with rotten people who were obsessed with their personal comforts. People who differed meaninglessly from day-to-day, selling one another goods they did not need as if a human being was made to do just that and nothing else. They were slimy and disgusting like white worms one might look beneath a stone (*AMFE*, p.32).

The young English actor Simon Bowman holds a similar worldview: "Take any moderately sensitive person of my age in a world without values and you'll find he's really up against it. It's hard to carry on when you simply don't believe in anything, when you know the next war will be the last and that there's sure to be a war" *{AMFE,* p.57). Luc is even more cynical in his attitude to life: "God might have cared, but God's dead; he died the other day of bronchitis complicated by illusions of grandeur. So nobody cares, you see" (*AMFE*, p.77). This gloomy view of the world was later to become a central feature of the main characters in the Empire fiction.

The theme of disease and death occupies an important place in this first novel itself. Reagan, the novelist *in extremis* is almost elevated to the rank of a protagonist. Throughout the novel, death hangs in the air, a fact which perhaps made Binns call **A Man From Elsewhere** "a bleak cheerless book with a bleak cheerless ending" (1986:38). The novel contains excellent passages of profound reflections on death. The powerful metaphorical invocations of death in this novel may be said to have led to Fan-ell's profuse use of parodic techniques in describing death in the Empire novels. Reagan is described as a man who would

use death "as some distant ancestor of the human race had used fire, overcoming his fear of it" (p.84), and "every moment he could feel it [death] in his stomach expanding cruelly towards infinity, edging remorselessly back from the future into the present, a massive weight to which he was chained and about to drop through the universe, snaking after it through timelessness" (Ibid). Gretchen, the dying Reagan's daughter visualises her father's death in a manner that is darkly humorous and, for the same reason, quintessentially Farrellesque:

> All that remained was the sordid, daylight horror of the man dying over her head. And he was dying importantly with a disgusting animal growing in the filth of his body, eternally with a death as hard as the rocky shadows in the room. His death was something she would always carry about with her and show to people ... her friends would take it from her hands and look at it, turning it upside down and shaking it, sniffing it and telling her that it smelled like she did herself, or dropping it curiously on the floor to see if it bounced before handing it back to her with their compliments. There would be photographs of it in all the papers because it was an important death. There would be sermons about it because it was an exemplary death. There would be lectures about it because it was an intellectual death and posed certain philosophical problems. Above all, there would be official mourning over it because this death was a grievous loss to humanity (*AMFE*, pp.34-5).

Here, Farrell is actually experimenting with a technique which is to be developed fully in the Empire fiction. A brief comparison of the above description of death with the one in Troubles throws into bold relief the difference between a conscious realism and a purely parodic narrative:

> Gone to the angels....And now Angela had gone to join the ancient pre-Raphaelite poets and the steady-eyed explorers who had shed their earthly envelopes (as the saying goes). She had gone to join the dead rowing

> blues (they were most probably among those blurred chaps on Edward's War Memorial) who had quaffed pre-war champagne out of her slippers. She had gone to the place where all the famous people go, and the obscure ones too for that matter (*T*, p.94).

In the former, the description is couched in a solemn idiom with a latent suggestion of dark humour whereas in the latter, the narrative turns overtly parodic because in stripping death of all its traditional glory, it suggests the evident obsolescence of previous styles of describing death.

The Lung, Farrell's second novel, is a dark comedy about a young polio victim named Martin Sands in an iron lung. Before the sudden attack of poliomyelitis, Sands is an energetic youngster whose driving appetites are drink and sex and much of the black humour arises out of situations where Sands attempts to gratify his appetites in the restricted atmosphere of the hospital, in the company of a handful of eccentric fellow-patients and an attractive nurse. In one sense, Sands too is an outsider like Sayer, exiled to "the kingdom of the ill." The Lung presents a world which is basically melancholy and threatening, and therefore, reminiscent of the world of Farrell's Empire fiction.

Spurling is all praise for the descriptive power of FarrelFs prose in The Lung and concludes that "close attention to detail, which starting soberly in fact can later be made to yield episodes of pure surrealism, is brought to a fine art in the historical novels. One thinks of the overgrown conservatory in Troubles, of what happens to the Residency furniture in The Siege of Krishnapur, of the orang-utan and the naked girl doing her keep-fit exercises in The Singapore Grip" (1981b: 145). This exceptional talent for manipulating facts to fit in with the demands of his fiction is masterfully utilised in the Empire fiction.

One of the remarkable things about **The Lung** is that **it** introduces on **a** massive scale **a** basic theme which was to underline almost all his subsequent fiction, namely that of disease and decay. Though all the three early novels use the images of death and disease, it is **The Lung** which begins to explore the symbolic potentials of disease and makes it underscore the vulnerability and frailty of the human body and, by extension, of human life itself. Obsessed with an acute sense of physical disability, Sands embraces a pessimistic **world-view:**

> Most intelligent **people** end up by becoming an expert on something, but what I can't understand is how they manage to persuade themselves in the first place that these things are important. Once persuaded, once you've managed to slink over the barrier of absurdity, I see, of course, that they become an agreeable way of passing the time but ...What have they to do with being **alive? (*L*, p.** 166).

The large number of ailing characters in **The Lung** clearly points to **Farrell's** profound interest in disease which later led to **Farrell's** use of disease as a major rhetorical device in his critique of imperialism in the Empire fiction.

**The hero of Fan-ell's third novel, A Girl in the Head in an emotional cripple named Count Boris Slattery whose farcical misadventures provide much of the dark humour in the novel. With a beautiful girl named Inez 'in the head,' Boris lives out his weary life in the dull, provincial seaside resort of Maidenhair Bay, *the cemetery of all initiative and endeavour' (*GH*, p.5). Both Spurling and Binns have pointed to the characteristic features that Sands and Boris have in common:**

> Like Sands, he [Boris] is haunted by thoughts of death and consumed by a sense of the absurdity and worthlessness of existence. Boris, like Sands, also suffers from ill-health and the novel begins with his suffering a mild heart-attack" (Binns **1986:41).**

A unique aspect of A Girl in the Head is that it has two significant features in common with the Empire fiction. In the first place, it is in this novel that Farrell's fictional experimentalism surfaces for the first time. Techniques like typographical trickery and a conscious attempt to foreground the fictionality of his fiction by directly addressing his readers ["It is now my duty to push him [Boris] before the horrified eyes of the reader" (p. 117)] anticipate Farrell's masterful use of the insights of problematical fiction in the Empire novels. In order to drive home the idea that life never goes on a predictable straight line, Farrell makes typography imitate life's wayward movement by blatantly flouting the simple rules of punctuation and line-breaks in a manner which is reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut's postmodernist novel, Breakfast of Champions.

In the second place, A Girl in the Head shows Farrell attempting to locate the strong but hidden nexus between physical disease and external reality:

> This girl whom he had never met, the transience of life, the passing of summer without her, the sudden collapse of his own health—all these things gradually melted into each other and fused in his mind as if they had some direct though concealed link (*GH*, p.8).

It is this vague feeling which ultimately leads to the unmistakable realisation of Dr. McNab in The Hill Station "that everything was connected, that an illness was merely one of many fruits of an underground plant in the community as a whole. The illnesses propped up, here and there like mushrooms, apparently individual growths but all in fact the fruit of the same plant (*SH*, p.61).

*The Pussycat Who Fell in Love with the Suitcase*, the only short story published by Farrell, centres round a cat named Rameses, a shop-steward in a peppermint factory who falls hopelessly in love with a suitcase which he happens

to find in his bedroom one day. As the suitcase maintains an attitude of frosty indifference towards its love, the broken cat stops going to the factory as a result of which a lot of problems crop up in the factory and the town. The Mayor of the town soon solves the problem by hiding a tape-recorder in the suitcase which would tell Rameses at an interval of every five minutes that it loves him and the way in which Farrell rounds off the short narrative is significantly indicative of how his early fiction prepares his readers for the technical brilliance of the Empire fiction:

> The next day Rameses was back at the peppermint factory and soon everything was running smoothly again in our town. How pleased all the townspeople were that that they no longer had to eat raw peppermints. And Rameses seemed quite happy too. Pretty soon he was leading exactly the same life as he had before. After a few weeks, he was to be seen back in the pub drinking peppermint beer as he always had done and, one evening he told one of his friends that he was not as much in love with the suitcase as everybody thought. Although, of course, he agreed that the suitcase had a beautiful body, he explained to his friends, she was inclined to be clinging and frank, was not all that interesting to talk to. But then you can't have everything you want, can you?
>
> One of these days the Mayor will forget to change the batteries and the suitcase will stop telling Rameses that it loves him. But I doubt if Rameses will ever notice. He is quite affectionate towards the suitcase, however, and I'm quite sure they will both live happily ever after, the way people do (*P*, p10).

This short piece of comic fantasy which reads almost like a parody of the so-called immortal lovestories anticipates not only the parodic mode which is perfected in the Empire fiction but also the ironic treatment given to love-relationships in the Empire novels.

As pointed out earlier, Farrell's early fiction gives a foretaste of what is to come in his mature fiction of later years. The themes of disease, death and decay and of the pointlessness of human life with which the early novels deal are germane to the Empire fiction as well while the characters of the early fiction very strongly anticipate the immortal figures of the later fiction. In A Man From Elsewhere, the dying Reagan *could feel it [death] in his stomach' as *a massive weight to which he was chained' (p.84), Gretchen believes that hers 'is a generation of morons' (p.86) and for Luc 'God's dead' (p.77). In The Lung, Sands does not manage 'to slink over the barrier of absurdity' (p. 166) and the drunken clergyman Exmoore 'didn't give a damn about God' (p.206). In A Girl in the Head, Boris keeps saying that 'death is an in-built characteristic of all living things' and that human beings 'ultimately consisted entirely of chemicals' (p.46) and Dr. Cohen believes that human beings are nothing more than machines and that misery and happiness are equally unreal (p.89). In Troubles, the Major reflects that 'Death is the only peace on earth' (p.340) and Dr. Ryan disseminates the gospel of death: "People are insubstantial ... They are with us for a while and then they disappear and there is nothing to be done about it" (p. 154). In The Siege of Krishnapur, Fleury sadly reflects that "the higher his spirit soared, the more his face, neck and armpit seeped ... but such is man's estate" (p.118) and in The Singapore Grip, Dupingy opines that "People are like bubbles ... they drift about for a little while and then they burst" (p.463) and Ehrendorf believes that "the human situation, in general or in particular, is slightly worse ... at any given moment than at any preceding moment" p.284). Thus, the characters of Farrell's early fiction serve to underscore a thematic continuity with the melancholy view of human life most powerfully expressed by the Empire fiction.

Further, Farrell's fascination for bizarre metaphors has been quite evident right from the early novels on. Reagan is described as a man who

would use death "as some distant ancestor of the human race had used fire, overcoming his fear of it" (*AMFE*, p.84). Farrell describes writers as "the outriders of a slow-moving cavalcade in uncharted territory whose duty was to warn of danger and command, where necessary, a change of direction" (*AMFE*, p. 107). Again in the same novel, Gretchen's description of sexual intercourse as 'a sort of eight-limbed Australian crawl' (p.59) echoes Vera Chiang's reflections on the *Westem manner' of love-making in **The Singapore Grip**—as *a pair of drunken rikshaw coolies colliding briefly at some foggy cross-roads at the dead of night' (p.293).[30] In **A Girl in the Head,** the protagonist's mind is compared to a 'vacuum-cleaner,' 'collecting random and meaningless objects' (p.29). Boris's scarlet riding-cloak floating beautifully in the air is compared to 'the rapids of a blood-stained river' (p. 12). These far-fetched images in the early fiction anticipate the fabulatory metaphors of the Empire fiction.

A Girl in the Head marks a crucial stage in Farrell's writing career in that it is the last novel which is set against a contemporary background. Apart from the story *The Pussycat Who Fell in Love with the Suitcase* (1973), Farrell wrote nothing which dealt with the living present; in other words, Farrell moved away from pure fiction to historical fiction and historiographic metafiction. A variety of factors contributed to this rather sudden shift of thematic focus. According to Spurling, this shift was mainly due to the fact that "the passage of time puts inverted commas around issues which once seemed of vital importance and allows the novelist to observe human behaviour more coolly and clearly, from a seat in the gods" (1981b:141). Another possible reason behind the historical orientation could be the increasing awareness on the part of Farrell that recording of the life of the present was a largely futile exercise, best left to the journalists. As Farrell himself put it: "Another reason why I preferred to use the past is that, as a rule People have already made up their mind [as to] what they think about the

present. About the past they are more susceptible to clarity of vision" (In Vinson 1972:399). This idea is clearly summed up in A Man **From** Elsewhere where the protagonist Sayer reflects sadly over his achievements as a journalist: "Looking back over his work, he suspected that he had done nothing more than express his own confusion and the confusion of his own time" ***(AMFE,p.107).*** Fictionalising the present, perhaps Farrell too thought, like Sayer that "he had been unable to respond to the modern nomad moving restlessly over his desert of cement" (Ibid) and felt [again as Sayer did] like a soldier who "had gone to the final trench armed with a bayonet and machine-gun merely to discover that what he needed most was a gas-mask" (Ibid). Further, the fact that A **Girl** in **the** Head which was **Farrell's** favourite among the early works, was very severely criticised probably made him think in terms of a thematic shift.

In conclusion, the Empire fiction actually represents a happy fruition of the hopes and expectations stirred up by his early fiction. In other words, the early fiction vividly charts out **Farrell's** evolution as a novelist along the continuum from pure fiction to historical fiction to historiographic metafiction.

Chapter **I–Introduction** comprises two main sections titled *Aim*, ***Scope and Significance of the Study*** and ***Farrell and the Early Fiction.*** Both the main sections are divided into two sub-sections each namely, *Comprehensive Treatment of* ***a*** *Facet of History* and *Fictional Experimentation,* ***Farrell****'s Life: 'An Interrupted* ***Journey'*** and *From Fiction to Historical Fiction.* **Introduction,** on the whole, states the basic aims, scope and significance of the study and presents a brief account of the social circumstances in which Farrell wrote his novels, of the existing criticism on Farrell, of his life and career and finally, of the ways in which his early fiction is a preparation for the mature Empire fiction.

***Notes***

1. Saraiya devotes just a few lines to **Farrell's The** Siege of Krishnapur (1994:34-5).

2. Of these three writers, Massie's omission of **Farrell's** work is the most glaring because the prime criterion which governed his selection of novelists makes anyone look for Farrell in his book. He writes: "This survey excludes **fiction** written in foreign languages and novels first published in the United States. What should properly come within its scope is a difficult question. The Booker-McConnell Prize, which was established in 1969 and which has contributed to a public interest in fiction, is open to novels written by citizens of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and the Republics of South **Africa,** Ireland and Pakistan, if written in English and **first** published in the United Kingdom. Of the eighty different novelists short-listed for the prize since its inception, at least a quarter are not British citizens. The prize is imperial in conception; eligibility is conferred by citizenship of any country which was within the British Empire a hundred years ago. On the whole I have found it convenient to adhere to this liberal, if illogical criterion" (1991:1). And quite **'illogically,'** Massie gives "inadequate consideration" (p.70) to Indians like Anita Desai, Australians like Thomas Keneally and Peter Carey, and Canadians like Robertson Davies and Margaret Atwood. If, as he says, **"their** work seemed especially relevant to the theme of a particular chapter", one wonders why in his section on the contemporary historical novel (p.39-42) [where even the American historical **novelist,** Gore Vidal recieves a passing reference] Farrell is totally ignored. Interestingly, Massie's description of the special features of the historical novel **["it [historical** novel] allows the writer to consider permanent qualities of mind and character simply by setting a distance of time between the novelist and his material; it

frees him from the tyranny of the here and now" (p.39)] echoes Farrell's view of the same: "Another reason why I preferred to use the past is that, as a rule people have already made up their mind what they think about the present. About the past they are more susceptible to clarity of vision" (In Vinson 1972:399).

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3. Benita Parry subscribes to this view for a slightly different reason: In an era when overseas possessions were a status symbol and Empire was acquiring a mystique, India manifested Britain's position as a European power and a great nation. India's more tangible importance was in providing the territorial and military base for Britain's far and Middle Eastern policies, and in serving as a satellite of the home economy" (1972:9).

4. Brantlinger defines imperialism as "an evolving but pervasive set of attitudes and ideas towards the rest of the world" (1988:8).

5. In Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire, Morris gives an exhaustive and highly readable account of the extent of the Empire at its climax with its shipping routes, mails, cables and so on.

6. Seeley declared: "We in Europe ... are pretty well agreed that the treasure of truth which forms the nucleus of the civilisation of the West is incomparably more sterling not only than the Brahmanic mysticism with which it has to contend, but even than the Roman enlightenment which the old Empire transmitted to the nations of Europe" (1883: 193).

7. Sarvepalli Gopal describes how the British economic policy crippled India: "The British had given an impetus to the destruction of the old economy but did not permit the rise in its place of one more suited to the modern age. India

was made to serve as the supplier of raw materials to Britain's new industries and as the market for her manufactured goods" (1967:7).

8. As Suhash Chakravarty has aptly put it: "the Raj continued to create its myths and legends. It sparked off its various imperial stereotypes" (1989:vii).

9. In her book Delusions and Discoveries, Benita Parry writes: "The historical context cannot explain why British literature about India can claim only two important writers and a single masterpiece" (1974:5).

10. A substantial number of works have been written on this theme: James Morris (1978,) Benita Parry (1974), Patrik Brantlinger (1988) and Martin Green (1988), just to name a few.

11. In a letter to his friend, Rider Haggard, Kipling wrote: "Any nation save ourselves, with such a fleet as we have at present, could go out swiftly to trample the guts out of the world and the fact that we do not seem to show that even if we aren't very civilised, we're about the one power with a glimmering of civilisation in us" (In Brantlinger 1988:245).

12. Kipling's poetic exhortation has achieved the status of a proverbial adage.

**Take up the white Man's burden**
**Send forth ye breed**
**Unbind your sons to exile**
**To serve your captives' need,**
**To wait in heavy harness**
**On fluttered folk and wild-**
**Your new caught, sullen peoples,**
**Half-devil and half-child.**

13. The 'Law' which is the central theme in Kipling's works signifies a principle of order on both internal and external levels and imperialism is seen as a means of spreading the 'Law.'

14. However, it should be made clear that Kipling was not a jingo-imperialist. Writers like Benita Parry, H.G.Weils (1911), C.E.Carrington (1940), and T.S.Eliot (1941) have come forward to vindicate Kipling from the charge of racism. The gist of Eliot's argument is that though Kipling dwelt on *the glory of the Empire,' he was quite critical of the faults of imperial rule. In Eliot's view, Kipling thought that the British had a greater aptitude for ruling, that they were supremely gifted to organise, control and administrate but he espoused no formal 'doctrine of race superiority.' Kipling championed the imperial cause out of a sense of the moral responsibility of the Empire-builder. He wanted to see the fruition of the declared intent of the English rulers—to protect, lead and govern the Indians. But the chasm between rhetoric and reality, myths and facts, theory and practice went on widening.

15. In his work, McLury writes: "Kipling was invited to place the ultimate responsibility for his suffering on humanity's innate depravity and the need to control foreign savages. Conrad was invited to blame his sufferings largely on the aggressive intrusion of a foreign state into a coherent community. Kipling was educated to believe that imperialism ultimately reduced suffering, Conrad, to believe that it needlessly augmented it" (1981:91). In an essay entitled *Geography and Some Explorers*, Conrad described imperialism as 'the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration' (1926:17).

16. Farrell had serious reservations about Nostromo. Though 'quite a good read,' Farrell believed that Nostromo was "basically so unreal and fatuous" (1981:203). Edward Said also speaks of the "crucial limitations in [Conrad's]

vision" in the novel **Nostromo** which "embodies the [same] paternalistic arrogance of **imperialism" (1991** :xx).

**17.** Again, in the opening pages of **The Heart of Darkness,** we **find** an assertive glorification of imperialism. Conrad writes that the river Thames "had known and served all the men of whom the nation is **proud—from** Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and **untitled—the** knights-errant of the sea It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of **time...Hunters** for gold or pursuers of fame, they had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the night within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth. The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empire" **(p.2).**

**18.** Frances. B. Singh expresses a similar view. She writes: "Ambivalent, in fact, is probably the most accurate way to sum up Conrad's attitude toward colonialism. In 1899, he wrote both that "England alone sends out men .... with ... a transparent sincerity of **feeling"** and that "intentions will no doubt count for something (i.e., when colonising nations have to face the Day of Judgement), though, of course, every nation's conquests are paved with good intentions...". If a writer is to be called truly anti-colonial then such ambivalence is not permissible, for it compromises the **position.** the compromises that **Marlow** makes ... stem from Conrad's own inability to face unflinchingly the nature of colonialism" (1988:279). Three years later, Said wrote: "Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that **'natives'** could lead lives free from European **domination.** As **a** creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them" (1991:34). Alan Sandison views Conrad's

compromise from a different angle. He analyses the relation between Conrad's inner struggle and his concept of imperialism and concludes that for Conrad, the empire was an objectification of his desire to dismantle the barriers of *otherness*: "The embarkation of the self on its rapacious cognitive conquest to overcome the world's 'otherness' thus finds an equivalent expression in the imperial idea" (1967:62).

19. John Atkin, George Orwell (New York:1971), E. M. Forster, Two Cheers for Democracy (London: 1974) and Shamsul Islam, Chronicles of the Raj (1979).
20. In a letter to a friend, Scott wrote: "No one had yet the courage to say that Divide and Rule has come full circle... All this is in my book" (In Spurling 1990:308).
21. Farrell thought that Division of the Spoils was a work of 'dubious' quality (1981:195).

22. Brantlinger makes a similar division of imperial regime into three periods, namely "Dawn", "Noon" and "Dusk" (1988:11).

23. Novelists who have written on the imperial theme have mostly resorted to the realist mode of fictional representation. John Fowles who leaps into mind as an obvious exception is more of a historical rather than an imperial novelist. Though Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook (1974) is essentially postmodernist in technique, the novel marks a departure from the imperial theme and concentrates on the current polemics on sex, gender, feminine writing etc. And E.M.Forster's Passage to India, though admittedly a masterpiece of realism and symbolism, is more of a fictional discourse on the possibility of forging personal relationships between the coloniser and the colonised.

24. I am indebted to Binns (1986) for the biographical details of Farrell's life. 'An Interrupted Journey' is the title of an article on Farrell by Paul Theruox (1981).

25. Solzhenitsyn's The Cancer Ward, Mann's The Magic Mountain and Gide's The Immoralist [which is often called a 'sick novel'] are masterpieces of disease fiction.

26. It may be noted here that, like Mann in The Magic Mountain, Farrell too exploits the rhetorical as well as the physical dimensions of cholera in The Siege of Krishnapur. Moreover, Hans, the hero of The Magic Mountain resembles Sands in The Lung in that both are continually haunted by love and disease.

27. Farrell considered The Last September (1927) a 'splendid' book *(ID,* p.204) and Bowen admired Farrell's Troubles so greatly that she gave it a glowing review entitled *Ireland Agonistes* (1970).

28. In all his novels, Farrell expresses his aversion to dogs. The dog Sidney in A Man From Elsewhere always likes to lick Sayer in his face and is kicked. In A Girl in the Head, the dog Bonzo has a weak bladder which it tended to relax when shown affection.Troubles is full of dogs, cats and rats. The dog Chloè in The Siege of Krishnapur is shot while eating human flesh and the dog named 'The Human Condition' is 'decrepit,' 'hideous' and 'internally rotting.'

29. In an attempt to explain certain phenomena of life, Vonnegut resorts to drawing of pictures in the text of his novel, Breakfast of Champions.

30. In a similar vein, Dr. Cohen describes "the act of sex ... as the automatic coupling of machines" (*GH*, p.31).

*Chapter 2*

# *FARRELL AND EMPIRE: THE RHETORIC AND BEYOND*

***... it is hardly possible to take up one's residence in the kingdom of the ill unprejudiced by the lurid metaphors with which it has been landscaped.***

Susan Sontag, **Illness As Metaphor**

***Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion. You seem to believe in literalness and explicitness, in facts and also in expression. Yet nothing is more clear than the utter insignificance of explicit statement and also its power to call attention away from things that matter in the region of art.***

*Joseph Conrad,* **Conrad to a Friend**

## *(!) The Rhetoric of Disease*

In the Empire fiction, Farrell's critique of the imperialist ideology is brilliantly accomplished through a masterful use of the rhetoric of disease and 'grip.' 'Rhetoric' is not merely the art of eloquence; it ... "is rooted in an essential faction of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew" (Burke 1969:43). Mulhern echoes the same view when he says that rhetoric is the study of "*language* and thus of forms and meanings; of language in action and thus also of its occasions, purposes and effects" (1992:18). According to Barthes, the term 'rhetoric' denotes not only 'the set of connotators' which exists as a latent potential within the text but also the ideological load which underlies use of the rhetoric. 'Rhetoric,' for Barthes 'appears as a signifying aspect of ideology' (1977:49). As he observes: "the common domain of the signifieds of connotation is that of ideology, which cannot but be single for a given society and history, no matter what signifiers of connotation it may use" (Ibid). Thus. in Barthes's view, 'rhetoric' is essentially the 'rhetoric of power.' The present chapter attempts to study the 'forms and meanings,' and the 'occasions. purposes and effects' as well as the ideological ramifications of Farrell's use of the rhetoric in Empire fiction. While in Troubles and The Siege of Krishnapur, Farrell draws extensively on the rhetoric of disease to communicate the decline of British power over the rest of the world, in **The** Singapore Grip, the rhetoric of 'grip' powerfully conveys how with the British colonisation of Singapore, "profit took a grip on the country like some dreadful new virus against which nobody had any resistance" (*SG*, p. 172). The effect of disease in Farrell's novels is not only the realistic subject of his novels but becomes a metaphor for the larger sickness of the body-politic. Farrell makes use of fatal illnesses for imagery. While cancer is the dominant image in **Troubles,** cholera recurs throughout **The** Siege **of Krishnapur** As Sontag has pointed out,

"To use only fatal diseases for imagery in politics gives the metaphor a pointed character" (1982:82).

One of the important possible reasons behind Fan-ell's sustained interest in disease could be the sudden attack of poliomyelitis which reduced him to an invalid throughout his life. "Illness seems to stimulate creative genius for the constant anxiety, terror and sense of doom intensifies isolation and introspection" (Meyers 1985:13). Though Farrell attained partial recovery from the disease, he Was quite self-conscious and always attempted to conceal his disability. As Dean tells us, Farrell took pains to prove to his friends that he was self-sufficient. And it is quite clear that a poignant sense of personal inadequacy has dis/coloured his perception of life. Physical infirmity was a disgusting companion to Farrell throughout his life. Living a life of weakness perhaps forced Farrell to people his fictional world with weaklings and eccentrics—characters who are maimed either physically or psychologically.

Another important reason could be the wide range of metaphorical possibilities provided by disease as a dominant trope. The philosophical, ideological, political and moral ramifications of the rhetoric of disease coupled with his own invalidism seem to have led Farrell to draw extensively on 'the kingdom of the ill.' As Sontag has aptly put it, "the subjects of deepest dread (corruption, decay, pollution, anomie, weakness) are identified with the disease. The disease itself becomes a metaphor. Then, in the name of the disease (that is, using it as a metaphor) that horror is imposed on other things .... Something is said to be disease-like, meaning that it is disgusting or ugly" (1988:58). Farrell found the metaphor of fatal diseases highly appropriate for the portrayal of the imperial curse. Though Farrell is not the only writer who has exploited the metaphorical fecundity of illnesses,[1] Farrell is undoubtedly the first novelist who used disease as a controlling metaphor to explore and expose the colonial pathology. The scourge of imperialism which is a brutal expression of the

primitive instinct of the strong to subjugate and exploit the weak is shown to carry within itself the cancerous viruses of its own destruction. Such a subtle diatribe against imperialism can only be the result of acute dissatisfaction with the imperial idea and the regime of political corruption and exploitation which it turns out to be once the idea is put into practice. "Modern disease metaphors specify an ideal of society's well-being analogised to physical health, that is as frequently anti-political as it is a call for a new political order" (Sontag 1988:76).

### *(a) Disease And Empire*

> ***Tyranny is a habit capable of being developed and at last becomes a disease.... The man and the citizen disappear for ever in the tyrant; and then a return to human dignity, repentance, moral resurrection becomes almost impossible.***
>
> **Dostoyevsky, The House of the Dead**

Disease forms a dominant factor in the structural organisation of Farrell's Empire fiction and constitutes a major rhetorical technique whereby Farrell foregrounds the political and personal pressures in the cultural moments of the colonial experience. Farrell's obsessive pre-occupation with the theme of disease and decay in his Empire fiction can be seen to be closely bound up with his serious and sustained engagement with the decline and decay of British imperialism. His fictional characters who suffer from various illnesses and infirmities are doomed to live out their lives as part of a political system which is itself ill and infirm at its foundations. As a writer constantly plagued by illnesses and disabilities in his real life, Farrell's novels are steeped in extrapolations from his own personal life which become in the larger context of his fictional world rhetorical catalysts for a powerful commentary on the 'dis-ease,' decay and the

eventual demise of the Empire. The ailing material bodies of his characters become a metaphor for the larger illness of colonial domination as a deplorable human condition which results in the total loss of mental 'ease' and individual dignity for both parties involved—the coloniser and the colonised. In the Empire novels, illness isolates, exposes, intensifies and transforms characters and structures the work as we follow the characters to recovery or death. A careful, profound and 'symptomatic' reading of Farrell's Empire fiction would not only reveal the real nature of the imperial 'dis-ease' but also throw sufficient light on how Farrell's meticulously planned and beautifully woven texts attempt to diagnose and heal the 'dis-ease.' In Farrell's Empire fiction, desire for physical health can be seen, by a metaphorical displacement, as a desire for the health of the body-politic the foundations of which are badly shaken in all colonies of the Empire.

Farrell's critique of imperialism in the Empire fiction is achieved primarily through images and symbols. As James Vinson puts it: "Farrell has an eccentric and highly sensuous imagination finding expression in a powerful and suggestive use of imagery, much of which takes on the force of symbol" (1976:427). Margaret Drabble locates the reason for this acceptance of the symbolic mode in an awareness on the part of Farrell about a "curious dislocation between thought and language, as though the words of the thought can't quite catch the painful complexity without an undue formality" (1981:188). In the light of these reflections, it is argued in the following pages that Farrell took recourse to a 'disease symbolism' to avoid an 'undue formality' in his subtle critique of imperialism. In other words, through an adroit manipulation of the 'cultural code,' drawing on the important branch of medical science, Farrell communicates the disgusting effects of imperialism. Before moving to Farrell's critique of imperialism in Troubles, it would be appropriate to place the novel in its historical context.

The 'troubles' of the title refer to the first Irish civil war of 1919-1921, though recently the term has come to be used in connection with the internal disturbances in Northern Ireland which started in 1968 and continued till the recent promulgation of cease-fire by the militant outfits. The novel covers the two-year period from July 1919 to July 1921. In 1919, Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and governed by the British from Dublin Castle. With the formation of the Irish Republican Army (or IRA) in January, the imperial authority had to face sporadic acts of IRA violence. IRA continued its guerrilla war against the British administration. As the war raged on, the British Government brought in the Black and Tans and the Auxiliary Division who had a "taste for fighting and brutality, who became an autonomous terror squad" (Taylor 1975:206). The novel ends with July 1921, the month which witnessed the signing of a truce which put an end to the fierce fighting and led eventually to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922.

Numerous books have been written on "the Irish Question" as it came to be called. L. J. McCaffery (1968) offers a traditional interpretation, sympathetic to Irish nationalism while Nicholas Mansergh (1965) gives some interesting insights into the European implications of Irish nationalism. Like any troubled period in the history of a nation, the period of Irish turbulence has also been looked at from various points of view, and consequently, has fired the imagination of the literati too. In A History of Modern Ireland, published a year after Farrell's Troubles, Edward Norman speaks of this elusive aspect of the Irish troubles: "Englishmen have often supposed it to be a lamentable chronicle of good intentions frustrated by an ungovernable and ungrateful people; in Ireland, on the contrary, a review of the past has only too readily suggested an unceasing catalogue of usurpation and oppression" (1971:9). The only novel written against the background of the 'troubles,' The Last September (1927) by Elizabeth Bowen attempted to diagnose the imperial 'dis-ease' in a purely conventional and realistic mode. And as Edward Norman has aptly put it, "certainly not everyone

could have been correct in the diagnosis of Ireland's troubles" (1971:15). It is in this context that an analysis of Farrell's diagnosis in Troubles assumes special significance.

Troubles begins with an elaborate description of the decrepit and rotting Majestic—a rambling hotel which functions as a powerful metaphor for the decaying state of the Empire. Though some reviewers of the novel were really thrilled by the metaphorical implications of the 'diseased' Majestic, no attempt has yet been made to read the Majestic's steady disintegration in terms of a telling commentary on the gradual disintegration of the Empire itself. As Patrick Skiene has noted, "One of the many imaginative and technical marvels of the novel is that the metaphor of the Majestic is sustained and continually developed and embellished throughout" (1983:29). Martin Levin, reviewing the novel a year after it was published, pointed out that "The Majestic, decaying from within even faster than it is being battered from without, goes the way of the Empire" (1971:38). Fifteen years later, Binns averred that "In Troubles, the transience of life and the collapse of health are implicitly connected to the condition of Ireland and of the Empire," (1986:58) but discussed it in terms of the novel's "concurrent theme of the tragic vulnerability and brevity of human life" (Ibid:60). As pointed out earlier, Binns's analysis focuses on the extra-historical aspects of Troubles.

As the novel opens, the Majestic is in an advanced stage of disintegration. In other words, the Majestic is seriously ill. Though the disease is never explicitly mentioned, Binns is of the view that in metaphorical terms, the Majestic has cancer (1986:58). If the Majestic suffers from cancer, the Majestic does not merely stand for the Empire; the Majestic *is* the Empire. Susan Sontag defines cancer as follows: "In cancer, the patient is 'invaded' by alien cells, which multiply, causing an atrophy or blockage of bodily functions" (1977:18-19). And significantly, Farrell describes the Majestic in terms of a living organism:

> the rooms they had been staying in for twenty years were dotted here and there over that immense building and, though whole wings and corners of it might be dead and decaying, there would still be a throbbing cell of life on this floor ... slowly, though, as the years went by and the blood pressure dropped, one by one they died away" (*T*, p.11).

The picture of the 'throbbing cells' of the Majestic, 'dying away as years went by' runs parallel to the Empire's gradual loss of the colonies. Farrell reminds us that the Majestic had a glorious past. “Here and there among the foundations one might still find evidence of the Majestic's former splendour" (p.7). Quite significantly, Sontag uses the colonial metaphor to describe the effect of cancer: "cancer cells 'colonize' from the original tumour to far sites in the body, first setting up tiny outposts ("micrometastases") whose presence is assumed, though they cannot be detected" (1977:64). Through a skilful employment of disease symbolism, Farrell throws light on the corrosive and corrupting impact of imperialism. Of the aptness of the use of cancer as a political metaphor, Sontag remarks: "It amounts to saying, first of all that the event or situation is unqualifiedly and unredeemably wicked. It enormously ups the ante" (Ibid:82). With meticulous care, Farrell continues to describe the Majestic in terms of a living organism which, as it ‘ invades' and is invaded by the multiplying 'alien cells,' gets atrophied.

An important image that recurs in the novel is that of an ‘abscess’—a cankerous tumour which threatens to bring down the whole building. The Major Brendan Archer is quite disturbed to find the wooden blocks of parquet flooring 'bulging ominously like a giant abscess' (*T*, p.25). Horrified at the dire consequences of such a cancerous growth, ("one shudders to think what it may be doing to the foundations" (p.251)), the Major and Sarah inspect the Majestic and go looking for 'suspicious bulges’—an exercise which finally turns into a 'marvellous game' of sinister significance. Farrell adds: "Although a number of

these bulges proved imaginary, once one started looking for them at the Majestic, there was no shortage of genuine ones" (p.251). Even the Majestic's "rusting drain-pipes bulged on the southern walls *like varicose veins*" (p.201; Italics mine).

The Majestic's illness steadily aggravates as troubles become rampant in Ireland. Occupants begin to move from one room to another as plumbing or furniture fails. Even the 'Do More' generator which was installed to restore the Majestic's 'reputation' goes out of order. The amenities of the hotel go from bad to worse. Mirrors everywhere become more 'fogged and grimy than ever'; the gas mantles that have been burning on the stairs and in the corridors stop working. The quality of the food goes down. Edward Spencer, the owner of the Majestic decides to announce an 'economy drive.' At this point, Farrell inserts a newspaper cut-out which serves as an ironic dig at the imperial rhetoric of power:

> *We haxe won the fight, but we have gone into debt in buying the "gloves. " It was a glorious fight for humanity, but the creditors call regularly for interest on the loan nevertheless ...* (*T*, p.69).

The Empire's plea for financial aid from the country's citizens for colonising weaker nations of the world is symbolised in the economy drive enforced in the Majestic while the Majestic continues to disintegrate.

'One unseasonably warm day,' the giant letter 'M* of the Majestic detaches itself from the facade of the building and demolishes a small table. Like The Siege of Krishnapur wherein the disease hits from inside just as the mutiny rages from outside, the occupants here are threatened from within by the Majestic's own worsening condition as the Irish rebels weaken the Empire from without

The significance of the 'abscess' becomes quite overt towards the end of the novel when, Edward, the jingo-imperialist, with his reason almost unhinged by the mounting violence of Irish nationalism, turns paranoid and kills an innocent Irish boy, (a Sinn Feiner, according to Edward)—an act which even the soft-spoken Major condemns as 'inhuman' and 'intolerable.' But significantly, Edward feels better after this murder and Farrell adds a telling comment: "Edward's frame of mind had improved to some extent since he had killed a Sinn Feiner. *An abscess had been lanced and a quantity of poison had been allowed to escape. Nevertheless, the Major was aware that it would fill up again.*" (*T*, pp.388-9; Italics mine). The Major who is effectively given the weight of the author's voice knows for sure that the Majestic is beyond diagnosis and recovery. The poisonous 'abscesses' have come to stay and the demise of the Empire is only a matter of time. Tired of 'comprehending a situation which defied comprehension,' the Major reconciles himself to the tragic fate of being forced to live in constant fear of disease and death under 'the spreading umbrella of decay.' When Boy O'Neill says that the Auxiliary terror squad would cure the Sinn Feiners' disease, the Major profoundly replies that "the cure may be as bad as the disease" (p. 158).

Edward Spencer is the King of the 'Majestic' Empire and significantly, the disintegration of Edward's sanity coincides with the disintegration of the Majestic. The fact that Farrell wanted to portray Edward as symbolising the King of a decaying Empire is implicit in Farrell's description of the Major's reflections on Edward's contempt for his son, Ripon who missed a splendid chance to serve the imperial army: '"A chance to do what?,' wondered the Major. To have his name carved into the dark wood of Edward's war memorial, a dead servant of His Majesty?" (p.46). Even as Edward goes ahead with his futile efforts to cure the Majestic (by calling in a mason to inspect the structure etc.,) Farrell reminds us that "nothing is invulnerable to growth, change and decay, not even one's most fiercely guarded memories" (p.259). Edward wants to fight for the English

dominance of Ireland and his insanity which leads to the murder of an innocent Irish boy symbolises the failure of the military ideal and the barbarism within the Empire.

‘ Bulges' and 'Sinn Feiners' are not the only 'abscesses' on the structure of the Majestic as far as Edward is concerned. To him, everything that affects the general health of the Majestic are abscesses which must be lanced to allow the poison to escape. On an earlier occasion, the Major lists out the potential threats to the safety and security of the Majestic: they are the proliferation of cats in the upper storeys, the lamentable state of the roof, the ‘ivy advancing like a green epidemic' and the poor state of the foundations. As Farrell develops these 'abscesses,' it is impossible not to notice their significance. The proliferating cats weaken the state of the Majestic's roof while the malignantly spreading vegetation threatens to pull it down by the foundations. The political overtones of the spreading vegetation and of the proliferating cats are incontestably powerful. Throughout the novel, cats symbolise a sinister force which is potentially capable of undermining the Majestic. When Sarah comes to the Majestic, she is disturbed by the 'frightful smell of cats' and Miss Stavely finds, to her dismay, a 'litter of kittens' in her knitting basket. As the disturbance caused by cats continues, Edward keeps the doors and windows shut. But still the infiltration of cats continues unabated. Finally, when an 'evil, orange, horridly whiskered' cat comes out of a rent in the side of the sofa and leaps into Mrs. Rappaport's lap, everybody is taken aback. And Edward begins to smell a rat in the proliferation of cats. A little later, the Major senses a 'threatening movement' in the darkly swaying shadows of the Majestic, and on closer inspection finds that "it was only one of the multitude of cats out for the purposes of hunting or mating in the Majestic's endless forest of furniture" (p.297). The Majestic thus becomes a scene where disturbing elements are hatched just as the Empire disperses the seeds of militant discontent in its ‘endless forest' of colonies. But Edward is all-out to defend his Empire by hook or crook. As the proliferating cats worsen the

already deteriorating health of the Majestic, Edward undertakes a 'grim harvest of cats.* He goes upstairs and shoots down all cats:

> So one day Edward had steeled himself to climb the stairs with the revolver. The eucalyptus reek of cats was overpowering, so long had they dominion over the upper storeys. *Ah, the shrieks had been terrible, unnerving, as if it were a massacre of infants ...but it had to be done in the interests of the Majestic*" (p.300; Italics mine).

Edward justifies his inhuman cruelty in terms of his sincere concern for the health of the Majestic while the whole scene re-enacts, in purely symbolical terms, one of the many instances of imperial brutality. A final irony emerges as the Major finds a couple of weeks later that the shoot-out of cats has led to the proliferation of rats which is even more dangerous. Farrell adds: "a cat, however savage and wild, can be passed off as a pet. Not so with rats" (p.307). The massacre of cats necessitates the massacre of rats and thus one brutality leads to another and then to another and so on *ad infinitum* in any system of imperial domination.

As the novel nears its end, everything that happens in and to the Majestic acquires political overtones. For instance, Farrell skilfully juxtaposes his description of the powerful impact of spring storms on the structure of the Majestic with that of the escalating violence of Irish rebels on the Empire—a rhetorical feat whereby Farrell reinforces the Majestic's symbolic terrain. Shortly after the graphic description of IRA violence in which 'eminent British soldiers and statesmen were blown off their feet,' Farrell describes the great storms that "blew in from the north-east and once more all the windows in the Majestic were rattling *in torment,* while the chimneys *groaned and whined like unmilked cows,* half threatening and half-pleading, and draughts *sighed gently* under doors *like love-lorn girls"* (p.356; Italics mine).

Farrell makes use of other images which are powerfully satiric. As troubles go on to assume alarming proportions in Ireland and various colonies of the Empire, the rotting Majestic's equally rotting occupants begin to cling absurdly to some illusion of power and permanence. As the only way to improve their sagging morale, the Majestic's population turns to the game of whist and gradually the whist tables which dispense a ‘ faint odour of cats' become the centre of social life in the hotel, with each player finding a 'retinue of advisers and confidantes' at her or his elbow. Within a day or two, this ‘*epidemic* of whist' (p.221) takes such a grip that the game continues almost without interruption throughout the day and on into the night and Fan-ell's intentions become quite evident as he describes the players moving to their bedrooms:

> And everyone would climb the stairs, chuckling, to their rooms and dream of aces and knaves and *a supply of trumps that would last for ever and ever, one trump after another, an invincible superiority subject to neither change nor decay nor old age, for a trump will always be a trump, come what may* (*T*, p.222; Italics mine).

FarreU's use of cricket matches is also symbolic in a similar fashion. As the Majestic continues to disintegrate, the cats to proliferate and the vegetation to advance and engulf the hotel, England continues to lose cricket matches in Australia. Farrell juxtaposes the erosion of imperial power and the continued loss of cricket matches in such a way that it becomes an obvious satire on the Englishman's sense of invincibility:

> What dreadful days those were! The future of the British Isles could never have seemed so dismal since the Romans had invaded; there was trouble everywhere. The ultimate stunning blow arrived just two days before Christmas with the news that .... England had been defeated in the first test match

> in Australia by the appalling total of three hundred and seventy-seven runs (p.278).

Farrell persuades us that most Englishmen considered the loss of a test match as regrettably and deplorably un-English as the loss of a colony.

Another image of decaying imperialism that has been consistently and marvellously developed throughout the novel is that of a 'sinking ship.' It is Ripon who first compares the Majestic to a 'sinking ship'—a comparison which reinforces the Majestic's symbolic status as Empire. On one night in the Majestic, Major dreams that he was in a ship and that the captain and crew had fallen overboard. The dream comes true at the end as everybody except the Major leaves the Majestic. As the novel nears its end, Farrell uses the image more overtly: "that night he (the Major) lay awake listening to the wind and the waves, thinking that he might have been alone in a great ocean liner, drifting in the eye of a storm" (p.358). Finally, the Major realises "that he must continue to row furiously for the nearest land, for the boat continued to settle lower and lower in the water" (p.392).

On their last day in the Majestic, the Major and Edward engage themselves in straightening the statue of Queen Victoria—an activity whose metaphorical implications are darkly humorous and bitingly satiric. In the

> last afternoon at the Majestic, he (Edward) and the Major took sledge-hammers and rained blows on Queen Victoria and her horse in an attempt to restore her to a more vertical position. For half an hour, they hammered away at her shoulders, her head, even her bosom, the sound of their blows ringing cheerfully over the country-side. As they worked, her delicate green metal became pocked with brown marks.. but little else was achieved. She was still leaning drunkenly sideways. At most, they had managed to correct her position a few inches by

the time they retired, **perspiring,** to **drink** some tea... After tea they returned to hammer down her ruffled skirts. That was all they could do for her" (p.394).

This is perhaps one of the best examples of the typically **Farrellesque** attack on imperialism and on those who work hard for the cause of the Empire.

To sum up, **Troubles** throws light on **Farrell's** unique use of various symbols and metaphors as tools for his critique of imperialism. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, most novelists of Empire, even those who were clearly critical of the Empire, resorted to a more direct method while Farrell, aware of the fact that the so-called realism conjures away the represented reality rather than replicates it accurately, makes effective use of the symbolism of physical illness and other disorders to convey the gravity of imperial evil. Now, a careful inquiry into the rhetoric of disease in The Siege of Krishnapur would throw this aspect of FarreU's fiction into sharper relief.

### *(b) Disease And Civilisation*

***There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.***

Walter **Benjamin, Illuminations**

***... [A]s one surveys the aims of civilisation and the means it employs, one is bound to conclude that the whole thing is not worth the effort and that in the end it can only produce a state of things which no individual will be able to bear.***

Sigmund Freud, **Civilisation and its Discontents**

In The Siege of Krishnapur, Farrell uses two major tools in his critique of civilisation and imperialism. In the first place, he resorts to the use of disease symbolism on a scale as massive as that of Troubles. The images of disease are integrated into the text in such a way that the connection between the sickness of characters and certain external events becomes incontestably self-evident. Though all the three Empire novels make extensive use of the images of disease and decay, it is in The Siege of Krishnapur that they become one of the most dominant structural devices for a powerful critique of civilisation. In the second place, Farrell presents two equally important characters in the novel who represent conflicting responses to the concept of a superior civilisation. Fleury who seems to represent the author's voice in the novel is in perfect disagreement with the Collector, Hopkins who speaks and acts out the rhetoric of power.

The illusory faith in a superior master race with an infinitely rich civilisation was always a hallmark of the imperial temperament and there has always been "a sustained political campaign to equate imperialism with modern civilisation and a 'civilising' mission" (Williams 1976:159). This concept is most belligerently articulated by the French exponent of imperialism:

> It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a *hierarchy of races and civilisations*, and that we belong to *the superior race and civilisation*, still recognising that, while *superiority* confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimisation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of *our superiority*, not merely our mechanical, economic and military *superiority*, but our moral *superiority*. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity (In Curtin 1971294-95; Italics mine).

Quite paradoxically, this mad faith in the natural inheritance of **a** superior civilisation led to the development of **a** governing ethos in Britain which was characterised by primitive notions of justice and **a** peremptory demand for loving awe from the subject race. In his recent book **Culture and Imperialism,** Edward Said explores this puzzling paradox which was at the heart of the imperial rhetoric of power: "Most professional humanists ... are unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of such practices as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial **subjection,** on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction, and philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other" **(1993:xiv).**[2] The primitive impulse to conquer the weaker nations of the world was never seen to be in conflict with the hallowed concepts of progress and civilisation. This apparent paradox was allowed to remain irreconcilable as a matter of convenience and Great Britain continued to become **'greater'** by subjugating the 'benighted' regions of the world one after another till it grew to be the "Empire of the Sun."[3] In other words, Britain kept succumbing to the instinctual compulsions of territorial expansion so that the vanquished races could attain to a higher state of civilised existence. The rhetoric of power **was** so powerful that it could make a military campaign look like a great civilising mission which fitted in perfectly with the lofty notion of a superior civilisation. As Said aptly puts it, "the rhetoric of power all too easily produces an illusion of benevolence when deployed in an imperial **setting" (1993:xix).** Thus, with a notion of civilisation which was **'antiseptically** quarantined from its wordly affiliations' (Ibid: xv), Britain went on to destroy native cultures so as to bring light to the dark continents of the world: **"Africa** grew dark as Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists flooded it with light, because the light was refracted through an imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of "savage customs" in the name of civilisation" (Brantlinger 1988:173).[4]

According to Raymond Williams, the first use of the word **'civilisation'** in its modern sense was made by John Stuart Mill for whom it meant:

> the multiplication of physical comforts; the advancement and diffusion of knowledge; the decay of superstition; the facilities of mutual intercourse; the softening of manners; *the decline of war and personal conflict; the progressive limitation of the tyranny of the strong over the weak*; the great works accomplished throughout the globe by the co-operation of multitudes" (In Williams 1976:58; Italics mine).

My emphasis in the quoted passage would substantiate my point. Farrell's derisive view of the concept of a superior civilisation, by equating it with disease, is to be understood in the context of Mill's definition of the term 'civilisation.'[5] Like Farrell, Coleridge, perhaps the first writer to refer to civilisation as a disease, thinks that civilisation has a 'corrupting influence': "civilisation is itself but a mixed good, if not far more a corrupting influence, *the hectic of disease*, not the bloom of health ...this civilisation is not grounded ...in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our humanity" (Ibid:59; Italics mine).[6] But in its use by the rulers of the Empire, the word 'civilisation' was always contrasted with 'savagery' or 'barbarism' and the uncivilised methods of the Empire's civilising mission made the word lose itself into a synonym of its opposite. In other words, the very exponents of a superior civilisation began to valorise savagery in an attempt to retain the sinews of imperial power. Mannoni makes a splendid analysis of this aspect of the imperial psychology:

> the savage .... is identified with the unconscious, with a certain image of the instincts... And civilised man is painfully divided between the desire to 'correct' the 'errors' of the savages and the desire to identify himself with them in his search for some lost paradise *[a desire which at once casts doubt upon the merit of the very civilisation he is trying to transmit to them]* (1956:21; Italics mine).

In his influential book The Psychology of Jingoism, Hobson, too, describes imperialism as a "reversion to a savage type of nature'* and as a “depraved choice of national life" (1901:19). And it is against this background that Walter Benjamin's statement ["there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (1968:37)] assumes profound significance. Farrell refuses to agree with the hackneyed view that the problems of the colonised lay in their lack of civilisation. According to Farrell, civilisation of the Empire is not the cure for the colonial ‘dis-ease’; on the contrary, it is, extending the metaphor a little further, the disease and therefore the main reasons for the continued failure of the Empire to understand and to ‘ improve' the natives are the diagnostic errors perpetually repeated by novelists as well as historians of Empire. The following section examines Farrell’s metaphorical treatment of this aspect of the imperial enterprise in The Siege of Krishnapur

Binns has complained that Farrell’s critique of Empire in The Siege of Krishnapur is devoid of an ‘underlying seriousness’ and that the ‘predominantly comic tone' of Farrell’s novel 'conjures away the problem of evil' (1986:59) involved in the imperial enterprise. On the contrary, the 'predominantly comic tone' of Farrell's narrative underscores the seriousness with which he tackles the question of imperial evil—this is the subject of the fourth chapter. As Margaret Drabble has aptly put it, Farrell's "comedy is serious, and although there are moments of mock-epic and mock-heroic, we remain convinced that Farrell is deeply engaged with his subject-matter" (1981:178). Though it is easy to argue like Binns that Farrell's treatment of Empire is quite different from that of either Forster's or Orwell's (1986:80) which is actually the central thesis of this whole chapter, his view that Farrell's critique of imperialism is flippant fails to stand textual scrutiny. In The Siege of Krishnapur, Farrell undertakes an attack on imperialism with consummate skill, unmatched in the fictional literature of imperialism. Another criticism which Binns hurls against The Siege of Krishnapur is that atrocities perpetrated on both sides during the Indian Mutiny

are slurred over and that the actual siege was an infinitely more painful affair than it is in the novel. To accuse Farrell of such a flaw is to mistake a novelist for an historian. **The Siege of Krishnapur** is not a historical record of the Indian Mutiny; it is the fictional recreation of a historical reality. Moreover, good historical fiction *does* take liberties with verifiable facts. Drabble has complained that Farrell's "sepoys are never shown as people at all, but mere as cannon fodder and comic fodder at that, and ...their cause is given the most frivolous explanation, seen as it were through the British eyes" (1981:190). This charge is similar to that of Binns's in that both are based on what Stanley Fish calls "the disparity between reader-expectation and reading experience" (1965:153) which he considers a distinctive aspect of great literature. In this context, it is instructive to note that Farrell was writing a novel on the Mutiny at a time when more than fifty novels had already been written on the subject. The following excerpt from R. J. Crane's **Inventing India** substantiates my point:

> The events which began on 10 May 1857 are known variously as the Indian Mutiny, the Sepoy Mutiny, the Sepoy Rebellion, the Sepoy revolt and the First War of Independence. That those events should have come to be known by so many names illustrates the vastly different ways in which they have been interpreted and suggests the general air of confusion, fuelled by emotion which has always surrounded them. It was not an Indian Mutiny because the revolt was largely restricted to the northern region of India. It was not simply a mutiny or rebellion by the Bengal sepoys, as many Victorians saw it, because although it was by no means embraced by the whole population, it was not confined solely to the sepoys either. Nor was it truly envisaged as a war of independence, though it may well have been the seed which gave rise to the independence struggle in later years. It was perhaps a mixture of all these things—*the truth lying somewhere between the extremes of contemporary imperialist interpretation and more recent nationalist interpretation"* **(1992:11; Italics mine).**

Farrell knew that as long as the truth was 'lying somewhere,' a fictional replication of the Mutiny which takes no liberties whatsoever with facts would read like just one of those numerous biased history texts. So, if atrocities committed on both sides in the Mutiny are not sufficiently dealt with, as Binns complained, it was because Farrell wanted to effect a shift of focus in his treatment of the Mutiny. In a fiction which concerns itself with a subtle yet effective critique of imperialism and its civilisation, accurate representation of historical facts is immaterial.

Perhaps, the best possible rejoinder to Drabble's criticism of The Siege of Krishnapur is inscribed within her own text. If, as she complained, the sepoys are 'never shown as people at all,' it is so because Farrell is presenting them 'through British eyes'; if their cause is shown as 'most frivolous,' it is so from the British point of view. If the picture of the Mutiny is comically painted, it is so because Farrell's angle of the fictional vision of history is distinctively different. Farrell suggests that the colonisers, swollen with a sense of false confidence in the glory of their civilisation looked down upon the colonised in general (and the sepoys, in particular) merely as 'cannon fodder.' Farrell implies that the Empire had to beat an ignominious retreat from most of its colonies because rulers of the Empire were firmly grounded in the misconception that the British civilisation is a panacea for all the cultural, political and administrative hindrances to nation-building. James Morris ironically puts it: "Never mind the true motives and the methods of imperialism; in the days of their imperial supremacy, the British genuinely believed themselves to be performing a divine purpose, innocently, nobly in the name of God and the Queen" (1973:37-38). And Farrell explores and exposes the 'true methods and motives of imperialism* in The Siege of Krishnapur.

Like the city sieged by plague in Albert Camus's The Plague (1947), a novel whose echoes abound in The Siege of Krishnapur, the Residency in

which the white community is trapped is pictured as "a mysterious sign isolating a contagion form the dark countryside" (p. 142). In Camus' novel, the plague is a metaphor for fascism—a mighty and macabre alien that invades and infects a city's population. In The Siege of Krishnapur, cholera is used as a similar structural device but with a distinctive difference. Here, the imperial civilisation is a ' contagion' which attempts to infect the pure Indian population. At the very outset of the novel, after the ominous distribution of chappatis which "swept the countryside like an epidemic" (p.11), the Collector is filled with a depressing sense of foreboding and like a 'prophet of doom' buttonholes every Englishman about an impending disaster. As part of his serious efforts to avert the supposedly imminent scourge, the Collector orders the digging of a deep trench combined with a thick wall of earth around the perimeters of the Residency. But ironically enough, the disease hits from inside—a fact which forces the readers to reflect deeply on the significant metaphorical overtones of the disease which threatens to exterminate the imperial community marooned in the Residency. The disease remains undiagnosed and this diagnostic incapacity is implicitly related to the hitherto undiagnosed disease of imperial civilisation which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the health of the Empire.

As the novel opens, the most striking thing about the town of Krishnapur is its capacity for distortion, misperception and illusion. Farrell seems to be suggesting that the entire colonial adventure and the eventual catastrophe have opined resulted from a certain set of fundamental misconceptions about the colonies and purposeful distortions of the imperial mission. Farrell's subtle critique of an erroneously conceived notion of a superior civilisation is implicit in the very description of the lie of the land of Krishnapur which is the metaphorical centre from where the disease of civilisation spreads like an epidemic:

> Anyone who has never before visited Krishnapur
> and who approaches from the east is likely to think

> that he has reached the end of his journey a few miles sooner than he expected" (*SK*, p.9).

This chasm between illusion and reality, compounded as it is by the ubiquitous presence of heat and dust and the vastness of the Indian plains seem to be at the heart of the imperial failure. Here, in *the heat-distorted distance' of the vast expanse, the foreign visitor sees nothing as it *is* but only as it 'appears to be.' The new-comer to Krishnapur is deluded into thinking at first that the town 'is not quite deserted' because he thinks he finds a traveller here and there "but as he approaches, he will see that the supposed town is utterly deserted. Nearer again, he will find that it is not a town at all but one of those ancient cemeteries" (p. 10). As the new visitor continues to look for some vestiges of civilisation, he realises that "there is no comfort here, nothing that a European might recognise as civilisation' (Ibid). When he suddenly finds walls made of brick, Farrell intrudes with an ironic aside: "Bricks are undoubtedly an essential ingredient of civilisation; one gets nowhere at all without them" (Ibid). Thus, in his description of the landscape of Krishnapur, Farrell has made clear in a typically Farrellesque fashion that **The** Siege **of Krishnapur** is **a** serious and cunningly accomplished attack on the civilisation of the Empire. And it is from this point of view that Farrell's description of the land of Krishnapur as an agent of distortion, misperception and illusion sets the tone of the whole novel. Farrell proceeds to debunk the myth of the imperial civilisation by maintaining an ironic narrative stance and by introducing characters who represent conflicting responses to the colonial experience.

Fleury calls the Empire's civilisation **a "beneficial disease"** (p.42). **Fleury** is an important character in **The Siege of Krishnapur who falls a little short of** being **Farrell's** mouthpiece on **civilisation. Fleury** comes **to India as a romantic** young man who has been commissioned **to write a book on "the** advances **that**

civilisation had made in India under the company rule" (p.24) and returns to Britain with profound misgivings about the theory of a superior culture. Unlike Conrad's Kurtz who, delving deep into the heart of darkness in the hope of dispelling it for ever merges with its symbolic landscape, Fleury comes to the Indian subcontinent to compose a volume on its darkness, is distressed to find his own people blinded by the dazzling light of an alien and elusive culture and goes back home enlightened. Fleury's description of civilisation as a 'disease' suggests that in his Empire fiction Farrell is attempting a final diagnosis of this colonial 'dis-ease.'

Fleury says that although the abolition of Suttee and the digging of canals are all sure evidences of improvement, they are only 'symptoms.' And as he puts it: "The trouble is, as you see, that although the symptoms are there, the disease itself is missing" (p.42). And this is a 'trouble' which hinders the accurate diagnosis of the disease. Farrell uses the Great Exhibition (which was considered to be a landmark of western civilisation) held in Hyde Park in 1851 as an instrument by which he can ridicule the coloniser's 'diseased' concept of civilisation. The Collector, Hopkins, another possible protagonist like Fleury , is one of the staunch exponents of the theory of the superior culture of the Empire on which he bases his administration and personal conduct in Krishnapur. He is the champion of the Great Exhibition where 14000 exhibitors displayed their goods. Hopkins had attended the exhibition in an official capacity and regards it as a 'a collective prayer of all civilised nations' (*SK*, p.48). He has spent a substantial part of his fortune to bring over to India, a number of exhibits like statues, paintings, sculptures, machines etc., from the Exhibition which he considers as "a concrete embodiment of a progressive and rational civilisation" (Binns 1986:66). Most of these 'hallowed' objects which are emblems of a superior culture for the Collector are condemned by the Magistrate as 'artistic and scientific bric-a-brac.' Farrell's attitude to the idea of a superior culture becomes quite evident when he makes the Collector assert that some articles brought from

the Exhibition which are bizarre, tasteless and even comically preposterous to modern eyes are synonymous with civilisation. Fleury tells Hari bluntly that "the Great Exhibition was not, as everyone said it was, *a landmark of civilisation*; it was for the most part *a collection of irrelevant rubbish* such as your ancestors might well have collected" (p.92; Italics mine). The Collector's obsession with the Exhibition as symbolising civilisation and progress becomes a powerful critique of civilisation itself. For the Collector, "Faith, Respectability, Geology, Mechanical Invention, Ventilation and Rotation of Crops" are the essential ingredients of civilisation. And it is quite ironic that Miriam whom the Collector wants to impress by his monologue on civilisation "found that her eyelids kept creeping down in spite of herself. Even when the Collector began to shout ... about the progress of mankind... about the conquest of ignorance and prejudice by the glistering sabre of man's intelligence, she could not manage to keep her eyes properly open" (p.90). Farrell uses the clichèd rhetoric of power ['the progress of mankind,' 'the conquest of ignorance,' 'the glistering sabre of man's intelligence'] as a tool to critique the reprehensible ideological formations they imply.

The Collector quotes examples of human inventiveness and ingenuity from the Exhibition and considers those "humble artefacts of God-given ability to observe and calculate as minute steps in the progress of mankind towards union with that Supreme Being in whom all Knowledge *is* and ever shall be" (p.59). But Fleury who controverts his view strongly believes that the real spiritual and mystical aspect, 'the side of the heart' is missing in such a concept of civilisation. says: "What is required is a completely different aspect of it [civilisation]..., the side of the heart" (p.42). Later on, Fleury tells Hari that civilisation as it is now has changed man into an engine and that "an engine has no heart" (p.95). "...[O]nly the person capable of listening to the tenderest echoes of his own heart is capable of making that aerial ascent which will unite him with the Eternal" (p.57). He continues:

> As for your brilliant engineers, if they don*t listen to the voice of their hearts, not a thousand, not a million balloons will be capable of lifting their leaden feet one inch from the earth (Ibid).

This description by Fleury of the cramping effect of civilisation links up incontestably with Dr Dunstaple's description of the effect of **cholera.** Dr Dunstaple describes the effect of cholera in similar terms. He says that as cholera strikes "the blood continues to be black... and in due course the heart becomes asphyxiated" (p.230). This 'asphyxiated heart' is similar to what E. M. Forster called the 'undeveloped heart' of the British which, according to Ashish Nandy "separated them not merely from the Indians but also from each other" (1983:34), Ashish Nandy continues to speak about this 'undevelopment' (Ibid) in terms *of* an illness which has indirectly caused large-scale destruction and cruelty, creating "a new pathological fit between ideas and feelings" (Ibid).

Even as the siege is raging outside, the white community is complacently engaged in lengthy and fruitless discussions of the causes of cholera. In **The** Siege of Krishnapur cholera and the siege are thus thematically bound up with each other. Just as the beleaguered community in the Residency attempts to fight the actual threat of **cholera,** the sepoys outside it are fighting to contain the spread of a 'cholera' from the symptoms of which they have been suffering for decades. Dr Dunstaple's speech underscores the irony with tremendous impact:

> Ladies and Gentlemen. I need not tell you how we are ravaged by this disease in Krishnapur! Many have already departed by the way of this terrible illness, no doubt **others** will follow before our travail is over (p.277).

Even Dr McNab is not quite certain about 'the supposed invisible cholera cloud.' And Farrell's use of language reinforces the metaphorical implications of the 'cholera cloud':

> but McNab continued as he always had, grave and rather lugubrious, knowing that given time, the 'cholera cloud' would move on ... but *this would happen imperceptively, and not, perhaps like a cloud passing, but more in the way that sediment settles in a glass of muddy water* (p.302; Italics mine).

The whole passage with its image of the 'cholera cloud' is a telling commentary on the eternal threat of imperial domination—a threat which will never actually disappear from the world but can only be temporarily suppressed. Farrell implies that the imperial idea will always remain dormant in the British national consciousness like a 'sediment' that 'settles in a glass of muddy water' and that can be stirred up and brought to the surface anytime in one form or other.

If, as Fleury says, those instances of material progress symbolised by the Great Exhibition are symptoms of a 'disease' called civilisation, it goes without saying that the self-same imperial custodians of the human race carry the viruses of a dangerous disease which can shatter the 'ease' and 'peace' of innocent native communities. Such ironic reversals are central to Farrell's technique and invite us to look at the imperial enterprise from a stunningly original angle of vision. Farrell implies that the concept of a superior civilisation is a disease for which no accurate technical name has yet been found. Thus, Farrell is occupied with frontiers of imperial consciousness beyond which words fail and only symbols and metaphors are of any help. As Conrad puts it: "nothing is more clear than the utter insignificance of explicit statement and also its power to call attention away from things that matter in the region of art" *(hi* Kimbrough 1988:232).

When Fleury finds the ailing Collector with a red and swollen face, he fails to guess the nature of his illness. But as the Collector falls sideways, rapping his head on the floor, "all became clear to Fleury and he drew back with horror, thinking ' Cholera!'—a diagnostic error which is quickly corrected by Dr McNab as erysipelas. And most significantly, the Collector's recovery from his disease coincides with the abandonment of his belief in the 'superior civilisation' of the Empire: "India itself was now a different place; the fiction of happy natives being led forward along the road to civilisation could no longer be sustained" (p.249). In other words, the illness of the Collector's body heals the illness of his mind— the dis-ease of civilisation. And this profound realisation dawned on the Collector in his delirious state of ill-health when he was "possessed with the vehemence of a strange inner life where no one could reach him" (p.247). Shortly after this recovery, when Miriam taunts him on his faith in the Great Exhibition, he replies that it was just one of his 'tricks.'

The problem of the accurate diagnosis of physical illness receives a major focus in The Siege of Krishnapur With two doctors holding diametrically opposite views on the causes and treatment of almost all diseases, it becomes quite difficult for the ailing occupants of the Residency to decide on the most reliable doctor. Binns has pointed out that "Farrell shows a great interest in medical debate as an expression of the battle between tradition and orthodoxy on the hand and rationality and innovation on the other" (1986:46). But what the medical debate results in, as far as the ailing community in the Residency is concerned is an acute state of indecision as to which of the two doctors–Dr Dunstable and Dr McNab–would best diagnose their disease. The rift between the two doctors aggravates as the siege progresses—a fact which assumes a metaphorical significance: "It had become clear to the garrison that not only did the doctors sometimes apply different remedies to the same illness, in certain cases, these remedies were diametrically opposed to each other. So what was a sick man to do?" (*SK*, p.275). With the cholera epidemic functioning as a

metaphor for the rotting state of imperial civilisation, Farrell symbolically presents the larger problem of the need for a coherent perception of the imperial question. Dr McNab says that it "is wrong to suggest that there is an accepted treatment of cholera. The medical journals still present a variety of possible remedies, many of which sound most desperate and bizarre... all of which is a sure sign that our profession remains baffled by this disease" (p.282), If the disease–the 'profession' of imperialism- is universally accepted to be beyond diagnosis and cure, the only thing that can be done is to carry on with it as best as one could. Farrell's irony is implicit in the silence that falls immediately after Dunstaple utters the word 'cholera,' "a silence only made more absolute by the sound of a distant cannon" (p.277).

If, as R J Crane has pointed out, Dr McNab represents the post-Raj view of imperialism (1992:29), the fact that the traditional Dr Dunstaple has the greatest number of adherents has to be viewed from a different angle. This fact—that most people are on the side of the short-tempered, ill-mannered and illogical Dr Dunstaple in this 'cholera controversy' throws into sharp relief the majority dismissal of Fleury's view that the idea of a 'superior culture' is an imperial construct. Thus, the clash between the two doctors about the best possible diagnostic method and treatment of cholera is a paradigm of the battle between the pro-imperialist and anti-imperialists for 'the best available treatment' (p.271) for the colonial 'dis-ease.' Farrell persuades us that the true pathology of this dangerous disease seems elusive.

Hari, the prince of Krishnapur and the only Indian character who is developed to some degree in the novel is a victim of the disease of imperial civilisation. Farrell's description of Hari's first appearance in the novel reveals the symptoms of this disease:

> Near a fireplace of marble inlaid with garnets, lapis lazuli and agate, the Maharaja's son sat on a chair constructed entirely of antlers, eating a boiled egg and reading *Blackwood's Magazine*. Beside the chair, a large cushion on the floor still bore the impression of where he had been sitting a moment earlier; he preferred squatting on the floor to the discomfort of chairs but feared that his English visitors might regard this awkward" (p.79).

Beneath the thin veneer of his sophistication, Hari remains a biased Indian whose British education has taught him nothing except that his own culture is far inferior to that of the British. Matthew's description of such an Indian in The Singapore Grip suits Hari perfectly: "... an Indian bloke ...in his striped tie and cricket blazer, modelled on some fatuous English tradition that has no real meaning for him at all. He has borrowed a culture that doesn't fit him any better than his jacket" (*SG*, p. 173). Hari appears out of place in his Indian surroundings and yet quite ill at 'ease' in British surroundings. He is shown eating a boiled egg and reading *Blackwood's Magazine* but at the same time preferring to squat on a cushion rather than sit on a chair. While the natives who stubbornly resist the disease of civilisation are indirectly admired by the British, Hari appears quite unappealing even to a Briton like Fleury. When Fleury says that "the only *real* progress would be to make man's heart sensitive to love, to nature, to his fellow men, to the world of spiritual joy" (p.94) Hari's response is one of dogmatic intolerance. He says: "I am very sad that you, Fleury should reveal yourself so frightfully backward" (p.95).

Hari's misused idioms, misquoted Shakespeare, and his great interest in daguerreotype are all symptoms of the disease of imperial civilisation. The fruits of his British education plucked him out of his cultural roots and made him live in a room "laden with mercury vapours, and a variety of other fumes no less toxic, emanating from crystals and solutions of chlorine, bromine, iodine and potassium cyanide" (p.91). With his emphasis on 'potassium cyanide,' Farrell

reveals the 'toxicity of the intellectual hegemonising of British education. Hari's British education turned out to be unhealthy for him rather than a step on the road to progress and culture. As Vrinda Nabar has aptly put it: "the introduction of English as a medium of instruction .... insidiously transformed virtually every educated Indian into a kind of cultural schizoid. While Indians have coped with this psycho-cultural duality in various ways, they have never been able to come to terms with it completely" (1994:6). Hari's eventual shift of allegiance in the name of 'progress' and 'civilisation' comes in for a good deal of sharp though veiled criticism from Farrell. Hari, 'firmly on the side of Progress,' falls out with his father who, according to him,. was prepared to "connive at the destruction of the fount of knowledge" (p. 142) and switches his loyalty to the British. And Farrell, the ironist is seen to be at his best when Hari, the exponent and lover of freedom of thought ends up in British captivity where he realises that even in the civilised 'Mr Hopkin's (Hari reduces Hopkins to the singular for grammatical purity!) scale of values, political expediency takes precedence over justice. The sarcasm implicit in the description of Hari's captivity in a stable is calculated to shock:

> It was here, in the days when life in Krishnapur had been on a grander scale, that a former President, anxious to emulate the local rajahs, had kept a pair of tigers. Now where once the tigers had lived, Hari strode endlessly back and forth behind the bars (p.194).

Hari, 'anxious to emulate the local rajahs' of the Empire ended up in an imperial stable. British education keeps him a prisoner of the imperial theories of progress and civilisation while his attempt to practise those theories lands him in British captivity. Thus, Hari is a victim of the imperial 'cholera.' And significantly, just before Hari's exit from the novel, the Collector takes him to the roof from where he watches the cantonment burning: "From the roof it seemed as if a perfect semi-circle of fire had stretched around the Residency enclave like some mysterious sign isolating a contagion from the dark countryside" (p. 142).

Through the profound portrayal of Hari's divided psychology, Farrell successfully diagnoses his 'disease' and seeks to heal it in his readers.

As flesh-and-blood people, Fleury and the Collector share certain common characteristics but as structural devices to critique civilisation and imperialism, each represents opposing views on the theory of superior civilisation. For the Collector, civilisation seems at first to be a judicious mixture of science and religion, faith and mechanical invention. The Collector's faith in the Exhibition as the consummate embodiment of progress and civilisation is held up to ridicule when he agrees with Mr Rayne, the opium agent who cites the rise of the opium trade as one of the glorious instances of material progress and civilisation. As Ashish Nandy has aptly put it, "... much before the modern doctrines of progress came home to roost in the First and the Second Worlds, the colonised societies had to bear their full brunt" (1983:40). Significantly, Farrell almost gives Fleury's view the full weight of the author's voice by a conscious accentuation of the discrepancies in the Collector's views. Fleury remains consistent in his view that the imperial civilisation as it existed in the heyday of the Empire is very dehumanising. When Hari, the Maharaja's son shows him one object after another as symbols of progress and civilisation, Fleury says: "...we must change the direction of our society before it is too late and we all become like engines which will soon be galloping across India on railway lines. An engine has no heart" (p.95). On another occasion, Fleury tells Dr Dunstaple that "civilisation as it is now denatures man" (p.42). But the Collector is inconsistent in his view. He agrees and disagrees with Fleury. In his reflections on the character of the Magistrate, the Collector is shown to be in agreement with Fleury's stance.: "Even after all these years in India, muses the Collector, Willoubhy doesn't understand the natives. He is too rational for them. He can't see things from their point of view because *he has no heart*" (p.98; Italics mine). And it is interesting to note that this reflection is immediately followed by a detailed description of the Collector's favourite room which is 'ornamented' with

loudly about the inferiority of the 'arid' eighteenth century, with its 'poor conception of man' and 'fruitless ratiocination* in sharp contrast with his own century as the terminal point of progress and civilisation of the entire humanity, a cannon shot from the sepoy lands in the mudwall, missing him narrowly and showering him with pebbles. And Farrell, comparing the lingering influence of imperial fictions to *amputated limbs' that continue to 'itch,' adds his telling remark:

> Somehow the shock of the narrow escape had a sobering effect on him [the Collector] and his confidence drained away, and with it the satisfaction with his own epoch. He thought again of those hundred and fifty million people living in cruel poverty in India alone...Would Science and political Economy ever be powerful enough to give them a life of ease and respectability? He no longer believed that they would. *This notion of the superiority of the nineteenth century which he had just been enjoying had depended on beliefs he no longer held, but which had just now been itching like amputated limbs which he could feel although they no longer existed* (p.223; Italics mine).

Consequent to this profound awareness, the Collector is "shocked" to see that there was a growth of a beard on his chin which "was sprouting with an *atheistical tint* of ginger" (p.251). Through the accentuation of such oddities in the life of top British officials whose ostensible love for scientific and artistic elements of cultural production and the contemptuous attitudes to the native population always remained irreconcilable, Farrell seeks to expose not only the imperial doublespeak inherent in the imperial psychology but also the gaping chasm between the rhetoric of power and the reality of life under the imperial system.

By Presenting such ideological inconsistencies in one of the leading characters, Farrell hopes to highlight the pathetic inadequacy of the theory of superior civilisation. Once in a 'wool-gathering' mood, the suffocation that Fleury feels in the evening dress coats worn in India by Englishmen leads him to ponder on the possibility of the natives' feeling of suffocation under a foreign rule:

> He was thinking of civilisation, of how it must be something more than the fashions and customs of one country imported into another, of how it must be *a superior view of mankind,* and of how he was suffocated in his own evening dress coat (p.45).

Farrell's contempt for the so-called civilised imperialists is voiced directly and indirectly in many parts of The Siege of Krishnapur, Mrs Dunstable is introduced to the young British officers who have come to Calcutta 'for a bit of civilisation' and immediately afterwards Farrell makes an ironic thrust as the young officers call her son Harry Dunstaple a 'rotter' and 'rascal' right in the face of Mrs Dunstaple.

Again, in his 'objective' discourse on the "perplexing question of why after a hundred years of beneficial rule in Bengal," the natives would want to return to the anarchy of their ancestors, the Collector says that one or two serious military mistakes committed by the Empire were surely no reason "for rejecting a superior culture as a whole" (p.76). But when Fleury says that he must take issue with the expression, "superior culture", both the Collector and the Magistrate ignore him completely. Fleury's attempts to broach the subject of 'superior culture' as 'a doubtful proposition' meet with stiff opposition. But when the Collector finally says that "a superior civilisation such as ours is irresistible" (p. 177), Fleury boldly declares : "It's wrong to talk of a "superior civilisation" because there isn't such a thing. *All* civilisation is bad. It mars the noble and

natural instincts of the heart. Civilisation is decadence!" (Ibid). The Collector's vaunted 'objectivity' takes leave of him at this stage of the discussion and he dismisses Fleury's idea as 'gibberish' and quickly changes the subject to Fleury's dress. Fleury stands dumbfounded, "taken aback at the speed with which his theories had been dismissed" (Ibid). Farrell's conscious attempt to lay bare the imperial hypocrisy is foregrounded when the Collector tells Fleury a little later that "the principles behind a civilisation are more important than the question of whether they were actually realised in a concrete manner" (p. 178). As the Collector continues to harangue Fleury in this way, an enemy rocket from the Sepoy lines careers down at them in wild loops out of the sky. When they find that the rocket is luckily defused, Fleury remarks to the Collector that the rocket which could have snuffed out their lives in no time was also "one of the advantages of civilisation" (p. 179). And the fact that the Collector fails to grasp even this simple irony serves to make the whole incident look all the more ironical from the standpoint of Farrell's fictional structure.

The actual events of the Mutiny are described with a touch of ironic humour.[9] The way in which the very emblems of civilisation become weapons of destruction is hilariuosly humorous and, at the same time, bitingly ironic: "A sepoy with a green turban had his spine shattered by the *Spirit of Science;* others had been struck down by tea-spoons, by fish knives, by marbles, an unfortunate *Subadar* had been plucked from this world by the silver-sugar tongs embedded in his brain" (pp.318-319). As Frances. B. Singh has aptly put it, "... in the last defence of the compound, the very implements of civilisation, progress and science become missiles of pain, horror and death" (1979:29).

Farrell continues to take to task the English imperialists who considered themselves superior to the natives in terms of culture and race. Stranded in an exotic land of myths, legends and superstitions, Farrell's imperial representatives play comic 'Prosperos' in a land of heroic 'Calibans.' During Fleury's visit to

Rayne's house, for a tea-party, Rayne introduces his servants whom he calls by the name of animals and insects: "We call this lad "Ram". That is not his real name. His real name is Akbar or Mohammed or something like that We call him Ram because he looks like one. And this is Monkey" (p.62) and an 'elderly and dignified' servant is called 'Ant'". It doesn't stand to reason that Farrell would introduce such scenes as instances of coarse humour because as V. Glendinning has pointed out "nothing in FarreH's world (is) simple" (1981:442). Farrell's intention is to satirise the coloniser's overweening sense of superiority which has always remained a serious obstacle to a rapprochement between the British and the Indians. A whole new dimension emerges as one considers the famous words of Aimè Cesaire: "... the coloniser, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal,* accustoms himself to treating him like an animal and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal" (1972:57-58). Farrell implies that such instances of insulting attitude towards Indians were axiomatic in the British way of life in India and this is clear from the fact that Fleury doesn't seem to find anything particularly strange about Rayne's behaviour. The tea-party turns into a drunken gathering and Farrell adds a comic incident as Fleury decides to leave Rayne's house: "What, Can you be off already?" exclaimed Rayne. "I haven't yet had a chance to talk to you... A talk about civilisation " (p.66).

R J Crane has pointed out that "in India as elsewhere in the Empire, the British simply established their own society and culture imposing their buildings on the landscape and shipping the furniture and possessions to fill them as if it was their right and the natural course for a superior race" (1992:15). Farrell makes wonderful use of such possessions shipped to India from England as tools to ridicule the pretensions of the 'civilised' British. The huge busts of Plato and Socrates, the powerful representations of Western civilisation stand out awkwardly in the Indian surroundings. The pictures of the four Greek

philosophers gazing out at the inscrutable plains of India throw the imperial pretensions into sharp relief (*SK*, p. 109-110).

Farrell also employs animal imagery with consummate skill to reflect on the physical and mental deterioration of the British colonisers. While Farrell uses cats and rats in Troubles, in The Siege of Krishnapur he makes use of dogs. As Spurling has pointed out, Farrell's "treatment of dogs is especially interesting" (1981b: 159). Dogs in his novels are "not dear, faithful pets, but squalid, even faintly sinister creatures who attach themselves to people purely for the dog's own convenience and protection" (Ibid). Interestingly, Spurling's definition of Farrell's dogs is strangely similar to the post-imperial definition of the coloniser--a fact which is corroborated by a scene from A Man From Elsewhere wherein Farrell satirically praises dogs on the ground that they are better equipped than humans for keeping a firm grip (with their four legs) on the surface of a revolving globe (p. 1).

In The Siege of Krishnapur, Fan-ell's description of dogs slumbering beside a well and the Collector's following reflections on the various kinds of dogs read like a poetic commentary on the effect of the siege on the British and the Indians: " they [dogs] included mongrels and terriers of many shapes and sizes *but also dogs of purer breed...* setters and spaniels, among them, Chloe and even one or two lap-dogs. What a spectacle they made. The faithful creatures were daily sinking into a more desperate state. *While jackals and pariah dogs grew fat, they grew thin; their soft and luxurious upbringing had not fitted them for their harsh reality"* (p. 193; Italics mine). This passage is illustrative of the Farrellesque mode of satirising not only the class-consciousness of the British but also the caste-ridden Indian society.

Again, Farrell seems to be in perfect agreement with Jane Austen's view that "a sick chamber may often furnish the worth of volumes" (1958:156). Disease is a grisly but fascinating subject which offers profound insights as to how to deal with the immutable law of inevitable mortality. Disease reminds us that we are all mortal; it forces us into a realisation of the fact that our lives can be terminated in a brief flick of time, that we can lose our world and become nothing. "Sickness is a shocking experience that exposes the victim's physical and psychological nakedness; plunges him into the anguished aesthetics of despair; jolts him to a recognition of his loneliness and vulnerability" (Meyers 1985:13). In most of Farrell's novels and the Empire fiction, in particular, Farrell introduces invalids and doctors who explore the metaphysical overtones of disease. Disease awakens the victim to the pangs of isolation and neglect. Most doctors in Farrell are acutely aware of human mortality and in some of them, this awareness verges on existentialism. But Farrell is not interested in an exploration into the philosophy of existentialism; nor does his protagonist nose-dive into "the anguished aesthetics of despair". For Farrell, it is just another fictional tool to project his views on the disintegration of Empire. The Farrell hero is no more the flamboyant, rosy optimist who takes the world in his stride; he is a desperate individual who is constantly trying to come to grips with realities in a world of myths. Farrell's protagonists are no more the fittest to survive. On the contrary, plagued by various 'unmentionable illnesses' throughout their lives, they wobble about in life. By picturing characters afflicted with a poignant awareness of the inscrutability of human life ("People are like bubbles, Brendan; they drift about for a little while and then they burst" (*SG*, p.463), Farrell suggestively underlines the transience of earthly power. Farrell's absurdist vision of human life, by implication, underscores the absurdity of all the constructs of imperialism. In other words, in Farrell's works, absurdity and the colonial enterprise go hand in hand.

Farrell's Empire fiction presents a macabre world of deadly diseases where Nietszche's theory of man as "the sick animal" finds one of its most profound and finest expressions. Farrell shatters the myth of the healthy white and shows that the English are as vulnerable to the onslaughts of physical illness as the natives are. The Empire novels are pervaded by images of physical illness, death and decay. Most characters in these novels suffer from various diseases, some of which are not even diagnosed. The disease of the characters is suggestive of the tangible presence of physical decay in the living representatives of the old order.

In Troubles, the Major is just out of hospital when he comes to Kilnalough 'with a bitter, weary expression in his eyes' and is clearly yet to recover from the trauma of wartime experiences. His fiancee, Angela is dying of leukaemia and Sarah, the Major's second love is a semi-cripple and is frequently attacked by a mysterious disease which defies medical diagnosis. And Angela's detailed account of the dental work her family required is ominously significant. The Major's aunt in London experiences a series of haemorrhages and dies. We learn that Angela's mother died of an embolism. The Unionist Boy O'Neill suffers from cancer and Ripon's father in-law is ill with chest trouble and high blood-pressure. Dr. Ryan is an apostle of death itself. Obsessed with a devastating sense of inevitable mortality, Dr. Ryan reminds everyone that they are going to die, that life is 'a fugitive affair at best'(p.l40). Thus, the various characters are the tangible manifestations of decay and disease which is at the heart of their political system.

In The Siege of Krishnapur, the Joint Magistrate is reported to 'have gone away to die in the hills' (p.49). The Collector sends his wife to England due to ill-health and the Collector himself gets laid up with erysipelas and his youngest child dies of poor health six months earlier. Dr McNab's wife has died from cholera. Mr Donolly and Dr Dunstaple die of heart attacks. During the

course of the siege, Mrs Scott gives birth but the baby is stillborn and she herself dies afterwards. During the siege, two more babies are born and one dies almost immediately. Little Mary Porter dies of a sunstroke- Dr Dunstaple gets used to death: "...these days death was the genial doctor's drinking companion** (p.230). And once the cholera strikes, everybody lives under threat of disease and death. The white community's fear of being killed *en masse* by the sepoys is ironically related to their fear of an outbreak of cholera which Farrell describes in terms of an enemy: "... an epidemic of cholera, with black banners fluttering was advancing in solemn deadly procession through the streets of the enclave" (p.275). This inventory of sickness and death underscores the frailty of the white community and by implication, of the Empire itself. Thus, in the larger context of Farrell's fictional diagnosis of the colonial 'dis-ease,' the Sepoy Mutiny becomes a life-and-death struggle to contain the cholera of imperial civilisation.

To sum up, in The Siege of Krishnapur Farrell accomplishes a critique of imperialism and its wonted civilisation in two ways.. First, by accentuating the presence of death and disease and equating disease with civilisation, Farrell suggests that the imperial community is not only vulnerable to physical disease and disorder like the natives but also that they suffer from a disease of the mind— the disease of civilisation. Secondly, by presenting characters who are the very picture of ambivalence itself, Farrell suggests that, far from being the benevolent owners of a superior civilisation, the Empire-builder is a sort of 'wounded surgeon' (Eliot's *Burnt Norton)* who ineffectually attempts to cure the colonised of a disease, the causes and symptoms of which can be traced to the *surgeon' himself. Or, to use Mannoni's words, "the civilised man is painfully divided between the desire to 'correct' the 'errors' of the savages and the desire to identify themselves with them in his search for some lost paradise [a desire which at once casts doubt upon the merit of the very civilisation he is trying to transmit to them]" (1956:21).[10]

Thus, in Troubles and The Siege of Krishnapur, Farrell employs the rhetoric of disease with a single-minded consistency of purpose. Both these novels are set against a backdrop which powerfully evokes realistic and symbolic dimensions. As the novels move towards the end, the Majestic and the Residency begin to look increasingly like a hospital whose inner atmosphere corresponds to that of life in a repressive system of colonial rule—the lack of privacy, the necessity of obedience, the economic and physical vulnerability and the personal degradation. Both these places of one-time luxury become, as the novels proceed, a prison or concentration camp in which the condemned man endures the cruelty of power and the threat of imminent death. Moreover, the unequal relationship between the helpless patients and the god-like doctor licensed to treat them represents a paradigm of dictatorial power. In both the novels, the happy Englishwomen represent the British unawareness of the growth of militant nationalism that threatens them. As England fails to fulfil her historic destiny, the political violence of Sepoys and Sinn Feiners inspires barbarism within the imperial force and brings disease to the organism of Empire.

## *00 The Rhetoric of the 'Grip'*

***...the Empire is a vast business concern***

**J.G. Farrell, The Singapore Grip**

*The political and moral ideas of the age are to be examined in the very closest relation to the economic development ...*

**Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery**

**Though The Singapore Grip is the most experimental and anti-realistic of Fan-ell's novels, it has an unquestionably firm substratum of historical fact. As Barthes observes: "not all elements of the lexia can be transformed into connotators; there always remain[s] in the [fictional] discourse a certain denotation without which, precisely, discourse would not be possible" (1977:50). In the Author's Note to The Singapore Grip, Farrell pointed out that 'although many of its bricks are real, its architecture is entirely fantastic' (p.7). Farrell's note clearly points to the two vital facets of the novel—the realist and the anti-realist—and therefore, any reading that fails to take into account the factual foundations–'the bricks'–of this great masterpiece, ['Farrell's private attempt at War and Peace' (Mahon 1979:313)] would be to miss the submerged part of the proverbial iceberg. And, as will be discussed in the next chapter, since Farrell draws extensively on the insights of both these modes of fiction-making with a view to transcending the limitations of both these modes, a concentration on these dimensions of the novel would serve to highlight the techniques by which Farrell, though 'self-conscious ... about the limits of mimesis' manages to 'reconnect [his] readers with the world outside the page' (McCaffery 1982:264). An attempt is made in the following pages to articulate the realist dimensions of The Singapore Grip while a detailed discussion of the anti-realist strand is made in the fourth chapter.**

**While Troubles and The Siege of Krishnapur treat of the internal disturbances caused by the native population, The Singapore Grip deals with the first major threat to the Empire posed by an external Asiatic power.**

Historically, **The** Singapore **Grip** fictionalises the British surrender of Singapore to the Japanese force during World War II. *The fall of **Singapore,'** as it came to be called is widely held to be one of the greatest diplomatic disasters of imperial Britain. Colin Cross described it as 'the worst single military defeat the Empire ever suffered' (1970:240). There was something quite anti-heroic and bathetic about Britain's loss of its 'grip' on Singapore which lends itself to a Farrellesque **fictionalisation.** As the leading business centre of South Asia which facilitated maritime access to other formidable colonies like **India,** New Zealand and Australia, Singapore was of great consequence to the Empire. As a **result,** British administration always expended much energy and money in making it an impregnable vantage point of the Empire **and** gradually, **'fortress** Singapore' began to be looked upon as an inspiring symbol of imperial sovereignty: "in British imperial mystique it [Singapore] ranked second only to the Sues Canal itself (Ibid; **p. 141).** Therefore, the British surrender of Singapore to the Japanese came as a totally unexpected and humiliating shock to the British national consciousness and to the official disseminators of the imperial mystique. The bitter irony of history becomes very evident when one considers the air of cocky confidence which characterised the official attitude towards the defensibility of Singapore. In **1942,** Winston Churchill wrote:

> The possibilities of the Japanese undertaking an attack on Singapore, which would involve so large a proportion of their Fleet far outside the Yellow Sea are remote; in **fact,** nothing can be more foolish from their point of view (In Owen **1962:40).**

In such an atmosphere of high morale, the shameful surrender of Singapore on 15 February 1942 with a garrison of **85,000** British troops to a numerically inferior Japanese force turned out to be an **anti-climactic** setback to imperial supremacy and Churchill's **description** of the event as **'the** worst

disaster and largest capitulation in British history' passed into familiar quotation. And the very fact that historians have always been very reluctant to focus the fall of Singapore implies certain ideological constellations. Farrell pointed out that Britain's loss of Singapore was "an episode of British history largely left alone by historians perhaps ...because it was a defeat, not a victory" (Moorehead,1978:46).

Farrell's main focus in The Singapore Grip, however, does not fall on the tactical oversight of British resistance which resulted in the loss of Britain's 'grip' on one of its formidable colonies but on the way in which Britain held weaker nations in its crushing 'grip,' strangling the native economy. In other words, Farrell is primarily concerned with the politics of economic imperialism. Farrell presents the readers with enough facts about the economic reasons for the Japanese invasion of Singapore. From the British point of view, a war with Japan had begun long before the actual Japanese attack and it was being fought invisibly and in silence by means of quotas, price-cutting and a stealthy invasion of traditional markets. Since the end of World War I, there had been a steady 'deposit' of British commerce in the Far East. By 1934, the Japanese had begun to make inroads into British textile markets which resulted in the introduction of import quotas on cotton and rayon goods destined for Malaya. And the British merchants in Singapore, disconcerted at the possibility of losing their 'grip' on the market, had protested to the Colonial Office that if the British could not compete with Japan, the commercial interests of the imperial firms would be irreparably damaged.

From the Japanese point of view, the war was the ultimate battle for economic survival which depended heavily on silk and cotton. Forty percent of Japan's total export trade was silk. The disastrous effects of the slump at home froze their assets and forced them to look for foreign markets. At a time

when the average Japanese price for textiles was ten cents a yard, it was twenty cents for the same product in the markets in the Far East which were under the 'grip' of imperial Britain. After having conquered the markets of China and Manchuria, the Japanese began to extend their influence far and wide, an attempt at survival which gradually grew into the dream of an economic empire which was 'an excellent imitation of the sort of economic imperialism ...which Britain herself had been making in Asia since the 1880s' (*SG*, p.139).

In The Singapore Grip, Farrell undertakes to explore the ruthless politics of British economic imperialism through an excellent use of the rhetoric of the 'grip' and through a presentation of the vicissitudes in the life and fortunes of a British rubber tycoon and his family. Walter Blackett, the chairman of the multi-national rubber exporting company, named Blackett and Webb is a living symbol of the imperial 'impetus of avarice' while Matthew Webb almost functions as Farrell's ironic mouthpiece on the rhetoric of imperial power which almost invariably masked the harsh reality of economic exploitation.

The Blacketts lived in an old 'colonial house* and, for Walter, even the conduct of family life is 'based on commercial logic' (p.5). In his view, "sons are an asset, daughters a liability. This had always been ...axiomatic" (p.50). He considers his daughter Joan a good business proposition and he goes to preposterous lengths in finding her a husband who would further his commercial interests. While Walter's wife is deeply disturbed by the fact that her daughter had brought only 'romantic nonsense' from her school, Walter is evidently pleased with Joan's promiscuity. His rise from rags to riches is an inglorious history of inhuman manipulation and exploitation of the poor labourers. Joan is obviously warped by a Western education. After giving his readers an idea of the dominance of the impulse *to* be rich even in matters of

family life, or by showing how economic ruthlessness 'begins at home,' Farrell powerfully conveys a sense of the foretaste of things to come—the 'grip' that profit took on the imperial imagination.

For Walter, imperialism is a 'law of nature' and he tells Matthew that strong nations will take advantage of the weak: "...Weak nations go to the wall. That has always been the way of the world and always will be" (p. 140). But Matthew feels unhappy and unconvinced. When Walter adds that in real life people are guided by self-interests, Matthew almost bursts out: "But surely a government has a duty to act in the *moral* as well as the material interests of its people" (p. 132). But quite significantly, this 'assertion ... was received only with sympathetic smiles, The matter had already been settled to the general satisfaction' (Ibid).

Walter's merciless pragmatism is highlighted in the achieves his goals. He strongly believes that it is the 'misplaced idealism' and 'pacifism' of people like Matthew that has 'resulted in the decline of British prestige' and 'sapped the nation's strength' (p. 134) and therefore, he would never compromise his love for the Empire and its policy of economic aggrandisement. He is one of those blood-thirsty businessmen who would not hesitate to justify the imperial excesses. He believes that 'there comes a point when the justice of the matter becomes irrelevant' because 'justice is always bound to come a poor second to necessity' (p. 140). Like the Collector in **The** Siege of Krishnapur Walter, too, is a staunch proponent of the concept of superior civilisation. Though Walter also has a collection of 'artistic bric-a-brac' which he proudly shows every visitor to his place, his theory of the superior culture has more to do with financial acumen than with what Coleridge called 'the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our humanity.' For Walter, civilisation is almost synonymous with the dissemination of Capitalism in the Far East. According

to him, it is "unjust that history should only relate the exploits of bungling soldiers, monarchs and politicians, ignoring *the merchant whose activities were the very bedrock of civilisation and progress*" **(p. 157; Italics mine).** Fully convinced of 'the rightness of what he was saying' (Ibid) and of the great commercial exploits of the British Empire, he invariably finds himself in strong disagreement and deep dissatisfaction with Matthew Webb, the son of his dying partner who thinks that the rhetoric of progress and civilisation is a myth perpetuated in the economic interests of the Empire. Matthew is fully conversant with the economic conditions in the Far East and in other backward countries of the 'colonial Empire.' But Walter feels certain that such 'theoretical knowledge' [which stores 'the facts and statistics and ideas' in the mind in the form of 'Russian salad' **(p. 157)]** could be of no practical use whatsoever to the commercial interests of Blackett and Webb and fears that such awareness would lead only to the undoing of Britain's unquestioned economic superiority. Walter always speaks of the innumerable advantages offered by the coming of Western capital to the Far East. Walter's high rhetoric of power [according to which his company and a few other merchants transformed the British colonies from a country 'where unless a coconut fell off a tree, nobody had any supper' into a group of 'modern nations' **(p.** 172)] provides him with an appropriate camouflage for economic self-interests while Matthew considers such idle rhetoric sheer rubbish [and he contemptuously tells his friend, Ehrendorf: "I gather he delivers it to everyone he comes across" **(p.** 172)]. Matthew contends that the so called commercial exploits of the Empire could never be seen as progress from the natives' point of view and that with the coming of Western capital to the Far East, "[P]rofit took a grip on the country like some dreadful new virus against which nobody had any resistance" **(*SG*, p.** 172). Though the use of disease as a central metaphor is relatively limited in scope in the fictional structure of **The** Singapore Grip, Matthew continues to use the disease metaphor whenever he refers to the impact of the flow of Western capital into the Far East. Matthew

says: "The native masses are worse off than before. For them the coming of Capitalism has really been like *the spreading of a disease* " ( p. 174). In all his discussions of what he calls 'the colonial experience,' Matthew is indignant at the way in which the Empire amassed fabulous wealth in the name of progress and civilisation.

As the war looms large over the horizon, Walter decides to go ahead with his plans to celebrate the jubilee of his firm, Blackett and Webb which in Walter's words is 'the living diagram of the colony's economic growth' (p.249). Walter hits upon a slogan for the jubilee celebration—"Continuity in Prosperity." Against the backdrop of the grand plan for the jubilee celebrations, Farrell unfolds the grim tale of imperial exploitation. Walter tells everyone that the real purpose of the jubilee is to improve the sagging morale of the natives of Singapore while behind this ostensibly lofty purpose lies the actual aim of giving his business concern a face-lift, of tightening his company's 'grip' on the international rubber market because in recent years it has begun to face stiff competition from the Firestones, another name to be reckoned with in the rubber-exporting business. Walter's ridiculous attempt to run the jubilee show even in the thick of the Japanese offensive against Singapore parallels the decision of the Cricket Club not to put off the match under any circumstances: "No doubt cricket would continue despite the bombing; important matches could not be expected to wait until the Japanese had been dealt with" (p.224).

Walter's son Monty is ideologically a chip off the old block. His does not agree with Matthew on Britain's failure to fulfil the imperial mission. When Matthew says that 'one of the most astounding things' about our Empire ...is the way we have transported vast populations across the globe as cheap labour' and that 'it [imperialism] is not much better than slave trade' (p. 179), Monty retorts impatiently "it matters whether they [natives] work as

coolies or anything else as long as they have jobs" (p.179). This serious discussion on 'the colonial question' comes to an abrupt end in a very ironic fashion as Monty's invites Matthew to spend a month with a 'clean, young, broadminded' Chinese prostitute for less than eighteen pounds. Totally disturbed by the invitation, Matthew observes: "We [the British]have a rotten way of doing things when it comes to anything but making money" (p. 187). But finally, Matthew decides to go with Monty to the red-light area of Singapore so that he could see another of the imperial mission and this scene assumes great significance as one of the techniques whereby Farrell relates morality and economic development.

Matthew is dumbfounded to see a beautiful girl of fifteen and wonders about the circumstance which must have launched her on such a disgusting career: "...at what precise moment during the past ten years it had become inevitable that she should be uprooted from her village...and flung down on the streets of Singapore, obliged to sell herself (p. 188). Matthew quickly locates the cause of this state of affairs in British imperialism and remarks: "What chilled the blood was the thought that this girl's plight and a million other tiny tragedies had been brought about by suave, neatly barbered, Saville Row-suited genial, polite, cultured and probably even humane men in normal circumstances who would shrink with horror from themselves if they could be made to see the responsibility for what was happening!" (Ibid). Against the sordid backdrop of this red-light district, a serious discussion on the purity of the colonial enterprise takes place. If, as Fleury said in The Siege of Krishnapur 'civilisation denatures man,' the brothel scene in The Singapore Grip seeks to show how imperial economics dehumanises him. The meaninglessness of the abstract discussion which throws into bold relief the stark realty of the life of the downtrodden is parodically paralleled by a scene in which a Chinese prostitute tries to learn arithmetic: "The young Chinese girl ...had turned to arithmetic. Now she was sitting, stark naked, sucking her

pencil over a problem which involved the rate at which a tap filled a bath. What, she wondered, was a tap? And what, come to that was a bath?" ft). 195).

Walter himself compares imperial Singapore to a 'beneficial octopus' with its tentacles *encircling the necks of Shanghai, Hong Kong, Bombay, Colombo, Rangoon, Saigon and Batavia' (p.250). Walter is a bit displeased with the octopus image: "the snag is that the octopus does not have a very good reputation' (Ibid).

Despite the obvious thematic significance of Matthew in the novel, Farrell's portrait of this protagonist is not completely unironic—a fact which almost prevents the readers from taking Matthew as Fan-ell's mouthpiece on the question of imperial economics. Though Matthew is consistent in his attack on the imperial policy of economic exploitation of the native population, there are certain myths like the relative professional inferiority of the natives which Matthew also has imbibed from his imperialist ambience. Farrell introduces a powerful scene—a visit with a Chinese girl to the dying-house—wherein Matthew's idealism melts away in an ignominious fashion. Though the experience has the edifying effect of changing his views on the matter, just for once in the novel, he is reduced to the point of being a typical Briton with a bloated sense of unquestionable superiority. During his visit with Vera Chiang to the dying-house where a group of moribunds live waiting for death, the latent imperial strain in Matthew's personality surfaces.

The dying-house scene is crucial to the novel in terms of theme and technique [the technical aspect of this scene is discussed in the fourth chapter] because it is the only scene in which the protagonist comes into contact with 'the real roots of life in Malaya, not just its top dressing of Europeans' (p.342). When one of the dying old men accuse Matthew's firm of having

brutally swindled the native population, Matthew is deeply disturbed. He has always been an ardent advocate of the view put forward by the old man and has never been sparing in his attack on the ruthless politics of imperialism. But it is for the first time in his life that he becomes the target of the very same attack and consequently, he is caught off-guard. As the dying man who might suffer some 'terminal seizure' any moment begins to speak about the way the British estate owners 'stole money* from the native smallholders, Matthew's initial reaction is one of annoyance which quickly develops into intense displeasure. In the beginning, he doesn't even listen to the old man's complaint for until now he had never been complained against, that too by a 'skeletal' native. Farrell ironically remarks: "Matthew had discovered that he did not mind being critical of the British himself, but, when a foreigner was critical, that was different" (p.344)—a remark which sharply contradicts his own idealistic thoughts of a little while ago about 'a shared humanity' which 'with different nations and communities,' living 'in harmony with each other, concerning themselves with each other's welfare' (p.341). However, Matthew gradually overcomes this imperial mental block caused by the inherited rhetoric of power and begins to comprehend the situation in all its earnestness. As the dying man continues to reel off his 'litany of complaints' against the British Empire, surrounded by 'shadowy cadavers ...lying supine and 'displaying no signs of life,' Matthew realises that 'there was an aspect of the matter which, in spite of himself ...[he] did find interesting* (p.344). Until now he had not given much thought to native smallholders and the old man forces him into a realisation of the fact that though 'in most cases ... natives ... employed by Western enterprise ... lacked the knowledge, skill and capital to compete directly with it ... in the case of rubber ... it was not so ... There was nothing in the growing and tapping of trees ... or in the mangling and smoking of the resulting rubber sheets [that] could not be done as easily by an illiterate Malay or Chinese as by a graduate of British agricultural college" (p345). At the end, the dying man gives a piece of paper to Matthew who, flanked by

'skeletons and moribunds' manages to read it in the faint light of a match. It turned out to be a press cut-out in which the writer expresses 'the honest unbiased opinion of leading men' in the country that 'the less the smallholder has to do with rubber, the better it will be in the long run for himself and all others engaged in rubber production' (p.347). The scene ends as the flame dies out:

> All around in the semi-darkness, as if summoned by the last trump for a final dispensation of justice over the doings of this imperfect world, supine figures were sitting up and casting off their shrouds and bandages, while others were clambering down from the tiers of shelves on which they had been stretched (p.347).

After having lived in a country under the 'grip' of Empire where 'dispensation of justice' was quite unheard-of, the 'moribunds' return to their racks with the deep sense of fulfilment which accompanies an act of vengeance for the heinous outrages against the native population. Thus, in the dying-house scene, by giving his readers an irrefutable evidence of how the rhetoric of imperial power was ruthlessly employed to deprive the native population of their traditional sources of income, of how the imperialists tightened their 'grip' on native economy, Farrell unearths a new dimension of capitalist exploitation. Though described in an essentially Gothic terminology, the dying-house scene has a chillingly realistic dimension as a graphic picture of life situated on the 'cliff-edge' of death. Unlike the 'Cities of the Silent' [cemeteries] described in the opening pages of **The Siege** of Krishnapur, the dying-house presents a macabre world of ghostly voices expressing their profound antipathy to the dehumanising rhetoric of imperial economics.

Though the use of disease imagery is relatively limited in The Singapore Grip, Farrell does make use of it in a very effective manner. Walter Blackett, the rubber tycoon, begins to feel that, with the beginning of Japanese offensive against Singapore, the existing stock of rubber is a cancerous growth on his business careen

> It [rubber] seemed to him *like a tumour, disfiguring his career* in Singapore. And *like a tumour it continued to grow* because although diminished in quantity by Japanese advance and by the increasingly chaotic state of the roads in Johore, new consignments of rubber continued to arrive from across the Causeway (*SG*, p.399; Italics mine).

And to the natives, Walter's rubber industry is, in every sense, a cancerous abscess which takes its toll on the native economy and pushes the natives to the extremities of adversity. Considering the fact that the primary thematic focus in The Singapore Grip is economic imperialism, the comparison of the advent of British capital in the Far East with a dreadful disease serves to highlight the imperial hypocrisy.[11]

Farrell's description of the British General, Percival's shaving presents, in metaphorical terms, a hilarious picture of the failed tactics of British resistance and a comic portrait of the hare-brained General himself:

> He [Percival] stood poised, razor in hand, gazing at his lathered face in the mirror .... With due care he began *to* attack the fringes of the lather, driving it inwards from its perimeters at ears and throat with tiny strokes of the blade in the direction of the chin and moustache. Here, he would presently have it surrounded, if his experience was anything to go by, and would finish it off with a few decisive strokes .... Percival paused again, this time about to launch a flanking attack from the direction of his right ear ...Percival had been scraping steadily at his commanding, white-bearded face. Gradually as the razor advanced and the white

> beard fell away, the features in the mirror had grown more uncertain: a rather delicate jaw had appeared followed by a not very strong chin and a mouth not sufficiently assertive for the moustache on its upper lip (pp.450-52).

The whole passage reads like a biting satire on Britain's strategic pitfalls. The fall of Singapore which exposed the Empire's vulnerability as well as the emptiness of the imperial rhetoric of power parallels the fall of the beard which reveals *a rather delicate jaw' with 'a not very strong chin.' The General's thoughts on war tactics are presented against the backdrop of the shaving which very jocularly parallels the British mode of attack, with the moving razor standing for the indefensible advance of the Japanese force. A similar satire is implicit in the description of Dupingy's futile attempt to kill a cockroach by hurling a book at it—"a fat, ginger cockroach which was making its way, glistening with health and horribly alert, across the wall ... The book had missed, however, and the cockroach darted away at an unnatural speed" (p.330). But any earnest attempt at a metaphorical interpretation of such descriptions in Farrell would be to miss the whole point unless the attempt itself is not preceded by an awareness of the fact that Farrell's use of such rhetorical devices is motivated by both an ironic vision of imperial history and a metafictional desire to refer the reader to the production of such rhetorical practices. In other words, in making us laugh at the strategic inferiority of imperial Britain which led to the catastrophic loss of Singapore, Farrell foregrounds the processes by which language makes such subversive laughter possible. Thus, through a brilliant exploitation of the rhetorical potentials of various symbols and images, Farrell successfully attempts to resist and transcend the limitations of *the rhetoric of power* itself. *

### *Notes*

1. Jeffrey Meyers[1] Disease and the Novel presents a fascinating study of the subject.But all the writers discussed in the book—Tolstoy, Solzhenitsyn, Hemingway, Gide, Mann, Ellis and Checkov—have used disease imagery with different orientations.

2. Edward Said further remarks that the imperialists were controlled by notions that "certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination" (1991:8).

3. I am aware that J. G. Ballard's historical novel Empire of the Sun (1984) implies an interesting play on the title—apart from the fall of the British Empire upon which it used to be said that the sun would never set, the title refers to Japan, the Empire of the Rising Sun and also to the arrival of the atom bomb, the so-called 'second sun.' Alan Massie complains that Ballard's novels are characterised by a relative lack of "the force of imagination" (1991:41).

4. Brantlinger gives an illuminating discussion of "the Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent" in a chapter of that title (1988:173).

5. It may be noted here that Mill was no detractor of imperialism in a full sense of the term. Said writes: "He [Mills] always recommended that India *not* be given independence" (1991:97).

6. It is instructive to note the rhetoric of imperial power was not alien even to that Coleridge, that Coleridge, too, favoured the British policy of colonialist expansion: "Colonisation is not only a manifest expedient for, but an imperative duty on, Great Britain. God seems to hold out his finger to us over the sea" (In Brantlinger 1988:25).

7. It may be noted here that Manohar Malgonkar in his Author's Note to **The DeviPs** Wind, a novel on the Indian Mutiny, has commented: "It is fiction; but it takes no

liberties with verifiable facts or even with probabilities" (p.x). According to Fan-ell's concept of history, most historical facts are unverifiable and hence the need for a new outlook on historical fiction. Incidentally, a novel on the Indian Mutiny with the same title The Devil's Wind was written by Patricia Wentworth in 1912.

8. Binns believes that Dr. McNab is the fittest character to be considered the hero of The Siege—a belief which he bases on the fact that his is the most modem voice in the novel. On the basis of the frequency of appearance in the novel, the Collector and Fleury deserve to given the 'heroic' status. Though the present study assumes the utter irrelevance of such categories, the thematic focus of this chapter has made a concentration on the Collector and Fleury inevitable. And the uncertainty regarding the hero of the novel is a consequence of Farrell's attachment to certain postmodernist notions of fictional characterisation—a point fully discussed in the opening section of this chapter.

9. In this context, Susan Howe's remark about the Empire novels on India serves to underline the uniqueness of The Siege of Krishnapur : "There are few crisp, incisive, humorous books about India" (1949:33)

10. As Benita Parry has aptly put it: They [the British] saw in India vestiges of a primordial, dark and instinctual past which their own society had left behind in its evolution to civilisation" (1972:3).

11. In The Singapore Grip, Farrell, at times, uses disease imagery to describe the general state of affairs. As the war continues, the whole nation bears an air of depression: "Weariness was becoming a disease of epidemic proportions" (p.451) and "[A] momentary shift in the wind had peeled the smoke back from the river like a plaster from a wound" (p.541).

## *Chapter 3*

# *FARRELL AND THE FICTIVE IMAGINATION*

*History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement.*

Salman Rushdie, Shame

*Many texts have undoubtedly many possible senses, but it is still possible to decide which **one** has to be selected if one approaches the text in the light of a given **topic** ...*

**Umberto** Eco, **Semiotics and the** Philosophy of Language.

### *a) From Historical Fiction to Historiographic Metafiction*

> *... to see fiction as a move away from reality ... is to overlook its prime and greatest reality as art.*
>
> A. E. Dyson, Between Two Worlds

After a detailed analysis of the theme of imperial decay in Farrell's works in the foregoing chapter, a discussion of the various techniques employed by Farrell in his fictionalisation of imperial history and of their implications for a fundamentally postmodernist concept of historical fiction will be appropriate. But before such a discussion is undertaken, it will be worthwhile to try and briefly explore the current theories of historical fiction and to highlight Farrell's conformity to and departures from these theories, with a view to pinpointing the nature of Farrell's relationship to the postmodernist genre of historiographic metafiction.

The historical novel has been unanimously considered by theorists from Herbert Butterfield to Umberto Eco as an extremely complex genre which puts up strong resistance against any attempts at accurate definition. Joseph. W.Turner (1979) and Harry. E. Shaw (1983) have dwelt at length on the problems of defining the genre of historical novel. Butterfield, in his The Historical Novel: An Essay is the first to make the categorical assertion that the historical novel is a

"form of 'history,' a way of treating the past" (p.113). He contrasted the aims of the historian with those of the novelist:

> ...the historian will seek a different sort of synthesis and will try to reconstruct a world, to particularise, to catch a glimpse of human nature. Each will notice different things and follow different clues; for to the historian the past is the whole process of development that leads upto the present; to the novelist it is a strange world to tell tales about (1924:113).

Though Butterfield's The Historical Novel represents the first attempt at a serious discourse on historical fiction, Lukács's The Historical Novel (1937) is the most influential work on the subject to date and therefore, most critics are tempted to use this book as a starting point for their discussion of the historical novel.[1] Moreover, considering the fact that The Historical Novel was a book Farrell greatly admired (Binns 1986:27), an inquiry into the Lukacsian model of a good historical novel, with illustrations of how Farrell uses it in his works, is strikingly relevant[2]

According to Lukacs, a vital ingredient of historical fiction is the element of 'necessary anachronism' or the necessity of remoulding the historical basis while "preserving historical truth in its essentials" (1962:67). In other words, the historical novelist should establish by artistic means the relation of the past to the present in order to bring the past close to us in a way that allows us to experience its real and true being because as Lukacs aptly puts it: "without a felt relationship to the [resent, a portrayal of history is impossible" (57). But this relationship consists in "bringing the past to life as the prehistory of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it" (Ibid). Therefore, a real historical novel is "one which would rouse the present, which contemporaries would experience as their prehistory" (78).

Farrell fully subscribes to this Lukacsian formulation about the historical novel and his Empire fiction is firmly grounded on a clear understanding that "it

[history] is an uninterrupted process of changes" (20). Of the variety of elements which constitutes Farrell's concept of historical fiction, this Lukacsian principle of the novelist's use of history as a metaphor for the present is of great consequence- a fact which is illustrated in the following pages through an analysis of one of Farrell's Empire novels.

Farreirs highly imaginative use of history as a metaphor for the present or in Lukacsian terms, of "history as a concrete precondition for the present" is best illustrated in Troubles, the first volume in the Empire fiction. In Troubles, Farrell attempts to foreground the striking similarities between a past phase of history and the living present, with a view to emphasising the essential sameness of the human situation. Farrell himself has stated his intentions in no uncertain terms in one of his interviews:

> One of the things I have tried to do in Troubles is to show people 'undergoing history,' to use an expression of Sartre's. The Irish troubles of 1919-1921 were chosen partly because they appeared to be safely lodged in the past; most of the book was written before the current Irish troubles broke out, giving it an unintended topicality. *What I wanted to do was to use this period of the past as a metaphor for today,* because I believe that however much the superficial details and customs of life may change over the years, basically life itself does not change very much. Indeed all literature that survives must depend on this assumption (1977:219; Italics mine).

Thus, Farrell is, to borrow Dwight Eddins's phrase on Fowles "embarked on nothing more threatening than a field trip into the safely frozen past" (1976:219) in order to come up with the striking similarities between past and present. Moreover, a serious concern with history always implies an equally serious concern with the life of 'today' because "[A] reliving of past experience invariably evokes the life of the present, for historical life is understood only in its connections with present life, as a tradition of thinkers from Dilthey dow.1 has reasserted" (Fleishman 1971:xii).

Historically, there is an undeniable similarity between the years 1919-1921 during which Ireland was a seething cauldron of militant discontent and the year 1968 when Farrell was working on Troubles. Both the periods of history were characterised by an unprecedented outbreak of violence on a global leveL Those times were fraught with a wide variety of problems on a massive international scale. During 1919-1921, Ireland was not the only trouble-spot on the world map. Russia was painfully witnessing the ominous dissemination of militant Bolshevism; race riots were threatening to tear Chicago apart and the heartless massacre of innocent Indians at Amritsar had sent Shockwaves across the world about the Englishman's brutal potentials. There was rebellion in Mesopotamia and D'Annunzio had made a military advance against Fieume.

The year 1968 was no less cataclysmic—Civil War was raging in Nigeria, the May events had rudely shaken France, the Tet offensive had disrupted peace in Vietnam and Chicago was under ' siege.' In such a grim scenario, the disturbingly sinister prophecy of a Third World War was in the air. De Valera had given a profound warning that the Versailles Peace Treaty which nominally ended one war had created the possibility of twenty new ones. And quite ironically, fresh 'troubles' had broken out in Northern Ireland when Troubles was in the pipeline. As Farrell said in an interview:

> I would go up to the British Museum newspaper library to read the *Irish Times* for 1920 and came back, buying an evening paper on the Tube. It was uncanny: exactly the same things were happening again, sometimes in the same Streets in Belfast (Brock 1978:75).

This 'uncanny* similarity between the past and the present serves to underscore the historicity of Farrell's fiction in a unique manner. As Lukács puts it:

> if experiences ... are linked with the knowledge that similar upheavals are taking place all over the world, this must enormously strengthen the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, second that it is an uninterrupted process of changes (1962:20).

In Troubles, the history of Irish troubles is significant both in itself and in so far as it becomes an appropriate metaphor for the life of the present. Troubles, as Elizabeth Bowen [who herself has authored a novel entitled, The Last September (1926) based on Irish troubles] has remarked «,. is not a "period piece"; it is yesterday reflected in today's consciousness. The ironies, the disparities, the dismay and the sense of unavailingness are contemporary" (1970:59). Thus, in Farrell's historical fiction, "the past portrayed is clearly recognised and experienced as the necessary prehistory of the present" (Lukàcs 1962:78). Quite significantly, this Lukácsian principle is echoed by Umberto Eco when he says that historical novels should "identify in the past the causes of what came later" (1985:66).

A second defining characteristic of the historical novel, according to Lukacs, is that it demonstrates how "it [history] has a direct effect upon the life of every individual" (1962:20). The novelist portrays 'the broad living basis of historical events' in such a way that even minor characters "experience the smallest oscillations in this basis as immediate disturbances of their individual lives" (45).

In this respect too, Farrell conforms to the Lukacsian model and portrays the impact of history on the lives of individuals in society. Most characters of Empire fiction change with the changing history of their environment. The escalating violence of the so-called 'Shinners' disturbs the peace at the Majestic while the reality of the steadily weakening British resistance almost throws Edward Spencer off his mental balance. The strong Edward, the one-time boxer, is reduced under the stress and strain of history to a "slightly mad old English gentleman who drank too much whiskey and raved about the loss of Ireland" (p. 17). In The Siege of Krishnapur, characters allow themselves to be subordinated to meet the atrocious demands of Sepoy insubordination. As food *at* the Residency critically runs out under the stress of the Mutiny, the luxury-loving representatives of the coloniser are reduced to the point of eating anything at all. In The Singapore Grip, the unexpected Japanese attack disturbs every individual

life in Singapore. Thus, Farrell's Empire fiction relates how the history of the time affects the individual lives of his characters.

A third significant function of a historical novel, in Lukacs's view, is "to demonstrate by artistic means that historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way" (p.45). Closely related to this notion of 'the artistic demonstration of historical reality' is the relative unimportance of the use individual detail in the making of a historical novel. In other words, truth or accuracy of detail has no relation whatsoever to the question of "historical faithfulness" because in the "authentic reproduction of the real components of historical necessity, it matters little whether individual details, individual facts are historically correct or not" (p.65).

Though historical novelists like John Williams have vehemently objected to this aspect of Lukacsian theory (1973:12), Farrell accepts this formulation, though with a slight modification. Farrell's Empire fiction abounds in instances of inaccurate details—Binns' complaint against the historical lapses in The Siege of Krishnapur (1986:80) is a case in point. But Farrell never attempts to show that "historical circumstances and characters existed in precisely such and such a way". On the contrary, Farrell subordinates history to fit in with the requirements of his fiction—an aspect of Farrell's fictional technique which is related to the postmodernist streak in his treatment of the theme of imperial decay. Though Farrell's imaginative representation of historical actuality is based on a sound knowledge of the facts of history and also of the way in which these facts could be effectively appropriated into fiction, his concept of history and the in which history is to be made the subject-matter for a novelistic work of art are, in more ways than one, strikingly postmodernist Farrell is not interested in history for its own sake; nor does he try to rewrite history with the incorporation of any historical lapses. Farrell resorts to the use of various techniques in order to awaken the history of a vanished age. As in Fowles's masterpiece of historiographic metafiction, The French Lieutenant's Woman, the readers in Farrell's historical novels are constantly made to feel the presence of history throughout the novel by

means of the interpolation newspaper excerpts and introducing stray debates on the burning issues of the time; but still history stays basically behind the scenes. This is not to suggest that history is totally emasculated. On the contrary, history even rules the roost at times not directly but by its ominous presence in the background. The daily 'catalogue of crime* in the newspapers in Troubles, references to the sufferings and misery of the teeming millions of India in The Siege of Krishnapur and the occasional Japanese air-raids on the city of Singapore in The Singapore Grip serve to emphasise the novel's historicity in ways that are anything but conventional or Lukácsian.

In Troubles, for example, history is kept at a safe remove from the inert life at the Majestic, but still it is history which sets the tone of the novel and effects its denouement. As Binns has aptly put it:

> History is presented as a dimly understood force which moves sluggishly towards the incomprehending and indifferent inhabitants of the Majestic, only at the end engulfing their world, dispossessing them and driving them out (1986:52).

Finally, Lukacs felt that the historical novelist should fight "a specially strong temptation to try and produce an extensively complete totality" of history' (1962:43) and, instead should aim at a "concentration of characterisation" and "intensification of events." Such concentration and intensification can be achieved by the creation of an "important leading figure who embodies a historical movement" (Ibid). This leading figure should be a type who has to 'generalise and concentrate* the being of the age in an historical deed. Lukacs draws on Hegel's philosophy of history to clarify this important feature of a historical novel. According to Hegel, 'the world-historical individual' [the hero of history or the conscious bearer of the spirit of the time] and 'the maintaining individuals' [ordinary men in civil society] are equally important in the context of history because the broad basis upon which 'the world-historical individual' emerges is formed by the "personal, private, egoistic activity of individual human beings" (p.40). Lukács, while emphasising the need for 'a close interaction' and 'deep unity' between these two layers of the society of any

particular period, feels that it should lead the historical novelist not to present a "chronicle-like succession and juxtaposition of all the events of a period" but to effect an "intensification and dramatic compression of events" (p.41).

Farrell never attempts a 'chronicle-like succession and juxtaposition of all the events of a period,' but at the same time, his protagonist is never a type who synthesises in him all the "essential human and social determinants'* (p.43); nor does he make any conscious attempts at "compression of events" while it should be noted that even without this "dramatic concentration of events," Farrell's novels are distinguished by a high level of dramatic intensity. The so-called 'world-historical individual' does not figure in any of his novels, and the fictional emphasis falls almost exclusively on 'the maintaining individuals.' Most of his characters are not types but credible individuals in themselves who could have lived in any age. As Charles Palliser has pointed out, "Farrell's characters illuminate the particular historical context in which they are caught without ever being reduced to mere representative figures" (1979a: 14)—an aspect of historical fiction which Umberto Eco considers essential: "what the characters do serves to make history, what happened more comprehensible. Events and characters are made up, yet they tell us things ... that history books have never told us so clearly" (1985a:67). This is not to suggest that Farrell's novels are characterised by an absolute lack of 'types.' Farrell does create types in his fiction, but with an entirely different orientation. By creating types who have only a peripheral significance and are never raised to the stature of protagonists, Farrell seems to be subverting the very concept of fictional types. For example, Lucy in The Siege of Krishnapur represents the Victorian type of 'the fallen woman' while Edward Spencer in Troubles is a typical jingo-imperialist. Examples of several other stereotypes may be cited from Farrell's fiction but they are never protagonists who concentrate 'the being of the age' in any historical deed In fact, no character is directly involved in such a historical deed. Farrell creates types only as something to be ironically undercut which is an important feature of postmodernist fiction. Instead of attempting a 'close interaction' between the leading historical personage and ordinary human beings, Farrell creates no historical figure, yet

successfully captures 'the true being of the age' by a powerful portrayal of the complex and involved character of popular life.

History of any period, Farrell persuades us, can be encapsulated with justice in a couple of sentences while an artistic treatment of real life in the troubled moments of history calls for the powers of a febrile imagination, coupled with a sound sense of history:

> A raid on a barracks, the murder of a policeman on a lonely road, an airship crossing the Atlantic, a speech by a man on a platform, or any of the other random acts, mostly violent that one reads about everyday: this was the history of the time. The rest was merely the 'being alive' that every age has to do (*T*, p.93).

Farrell's main interest, ironically lies not in the dry recording of the factual statistics of the untoward incidents of a turbulent period in history but in the mere "'being alive' that every age has to do" or differently put, in the impact of history on the lives and characters of 'the maintaining individuals.' Fleishman, too, believes that "The ultimate subject of the historical novel is...man in history or human life conceived as historical life" (1971:11). With the help of a vigorous historical imagination, Farrell enters the psychic atmosphere of a distant period and portrays the pains and pressures of individual lives. Fleishman writes:

> As art is of the imagination, the historical novel will be an exercise of the imagination on a particular kind of object. It is an imaginative portrayal of history, that is, of past states of affairs affecting human experience. The historical novelist provokes or conveys, by imaginative sympathy, *the sentiment de l'existence*, the feeling of how it was to be alive in another age (1971:4; Italics mine).

A consideration of this formulation in the context of Farrell's fictional techniques brings to light an important dimension of his works. For, as Lukacs points out, "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" (p.40). Farrell's lack of interest in the creation of 'type-heroes' in his fiction is crucially related to a distinctly postmodernist technique of critiquing imperial decay in that "protagonists of historiographic metafiction are anything but proper types" ( Hutcheon 1988:114).

A fifth significant feature of the historical novel is the conscious marginalization of important personages of history. This relegation of historical figures to secondary roles constitutes, for Lukacs, the basic difference between the epic and the historical novel: "the most important figure should occupy the central position" in an epic while "in the historical novel he is necessarily a minor character" (p.48). this "great historical figure as a minor character" should be portrayed as a human being "with virtues and weaknesses, good and bad qualities" (p.47).

Farrell's technique of characterisation contests this Lukacsian principle in two different yet significant ways. First, not a single historical personage appears in the whole of his Empire fiction and characters in Farrell's historical novels are not modelled on any real-life figure in history as in the Waverley novels of Walter Scott [Mary Stuart in The Abbot (1820) or the Prince of Wales in The Fair Maid of Perth (1828), for example].[4] Second but more significant from a postmodernist perspective is the fact that Farrell's characters resist any concrete division or classification into the primary and the secondary.

Farrell's characterisation seems to be consciously aimed at demystifying the myth of the Empire-builders' racial and cultural superiority. The upholders of the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest tend to be male chauvinists in their personal life and the dominant male in a male-dominated

society is a recurring image in Anglo-Indian and imperial literature. But Farrell subverts this concept of male chauvinism in his Empire fiction in order to explode the myth of the superior civilisation. The world of his Empire fiction is peopled, not by noble characters with noble passions, but by anti-heroes and anti-heroines, bigots, eccentrics, weaklings and invalids. Farrell's fiction conjures up a strange world where almost every human being is the very picture of ambivalence itself. This is true of almost all the minor and major characters in Farrell's fiction— Edward Spencer and Major Brendan Archer in Troubles, Fleury and the Collector in The Siege of Krishnapur, Matthew Webb and Walter Blackett in The Singapore Grip. Each character is a mixture of opposites in his/her own way. Each has the defects of his/her qualities and, therefore, none manages to live up consistently to the conventional, realistic expectations of a hero or heroine. None is devoid of faults; yet none is a thoroughgoing villain. The protagonists of Farrell lack certain basic qualities. The Major and Edward are as heroic as they are anti-heroic. The Major is a diffident dreamer and lacks the tenacity and fixity of purpose Edward 'suffers' from while Edward lacks the basic honesty and integrity from which the Major ' suffers.* Edward is a jingo imperialist who, as insurgency gains momentum, turns paranoid and shoots an unarmed, innocent Sinn Feinner to boost his imperial ego. Edward ridiculously lies to the Major about the purpose of his visit to Dublin with Sarah and the Major, too 'weak-willed* to face out the pressures brought on by "Shinners" yields to unhealthy fits of depression ["Death is the only peace on earth" (p.340)]. The ongoing decay at the Majestic costs him his peace of mind while the other occupants are blissfully oblivious of their bleak future under the dangerous roof. The Major takes on the quality of a hero when he bluntly tells the Unionist Boy O 'Neil [who says that the Auxiliary terror squad will teach the 'Shinners' a hard lesson] that "the cure may be as had as the disease"(p.158). But a number of other incidents which reveal his 'officiousness' ['always trying to agree with people' as Sarah tells him in his face] neutralise his virtues. The Collector in The Siege of Krishnapur is an impractical character, always theorising on the greatness of the Great Exhibition. Fleury and the Collector are characters [whom the readers are at times tempted to accord a heroic status] who can be referred to as protagonists, not on the basis of their nobility of

character but only if frequency of appearance is an important criterion. The same problem besets The Singapore Grip too. Matthew goes weak and sweats profusely whenever he becomes alone in the company of Joan. Walter looks upon even his daughter's marriage as a good business proposition and is not bothered in the least about sexual norms as long as she marries into a family which promotes his commercial interests. And he makes no bones about speaking his mind openly to his daughter ["Joan dear, I 've no objection to you flirting with young men provided you are sensible about it .... In future, please be more discreet and hide your love-letters in some safe place" (p. 15)].

Farrell's heroines are equally anti-heroic; they are not the embodiments of the Victorian ideals of chastity and faithfulness. As Margaret Drabble has pointed out, [of course, without relating it to Farrell's critique of imperial civilisation], "Through most of the novels runs the sense that women are not at all the quiet womanly pure creatures of Victorian mythology and romantic love; they are dangerous trouble-makers, capricious and destructive" (1981:162). All female characters are 'dangerous objects' in Farrell and all male characters are either weak, bigoted or effeminate. Sarah, in Troubles, is a scandal-mongering, fickle* minded semi-cripple who makes a mockery of the conventional attributes of a woman of beauty, nobility and moral uprightness. She keeps up a mock love affair with the Major while secretly carrying on a liaison with Edward and finally runs away with an elderly man named Captain Bolton, leaving her dismayed suitors in the lurch. Joan, in The Singapore Grip, is another 'predatory' female whose main hobby is to trap men in love and make them suffer.

Farrell introduces heroism and other romantic elements in his novels chiefly to stress the necessity of their exclusion from fiction by foregrounding the relatively stronger presence of anti-heroic elements in real life, effecting in the process a 'sub-version' of the very concept of fictional realism and Realistic fiction- The technique of denying a heroic status *to* any particular character or marginalizing protagonists is an important defining characteristic of postmodern fiction, in general and historiographic metafiction, in particular: "the protagonists

of historiographic metafiction ... are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history*' (Hutcheon 1988:14). Thus, unlike any historical novelist before him, Farrell, through his characters who are loners and losers in a world of make-believe, subverts not only the entire body of myths about the culturally perfect coloniser but also the traditional notions of fictional characters... The heroes of Farrell's Empire fiction miserably fail to live up to the picture of a dominant-personality and Farrell's heroines are equally anti-heroic.

Even present-day theorists of historical fiction like Avrom Fleishman and Barbara Foley have largely stuck to the Lukacsian principles. Fleishman believes that the forms of nineteenth century historical fiction persist even today and speaks about the unique nature of the truth attained by the historical novelist Fleishman calls it 'the symbolic truth': "the symbolic truth of a historical novel may be an insight into the universal processes of history, a hypothetical explanation of an interstice in historical knowledge [usually a personal motivation], or a vivification of a shadowy period or lost past" (1971:xi). Farrell's historical novels certainly present 'insight[s] into the universal processes of history' but, as discussed in an earlier part of this thesis (p.69), they do not seek to explain any 'interstice in historical knowledge' while, at the same time, they do attempt 'a vivification of a shadowy period.' Farrell's novels provide invaluable insights into the secret recesses of human nature or, to borrow Howell's words on Findley's historiographic metafictions, "they are fictions that rewrite history in order to give significance to past events by creating patterns which reveal essential truths about human nature that can only be distilled through time and presented through art" (1984:49). These 'symbolic truths' of Farrell's historical novels were elucidated in the second chapter.

Foley's concise description of the traditional history historical novel throws into bold relief the fact that Farrell's concept of historical fiction is anything but traditional:

> Characters constitute a microscopic portrayal of representative social types; they experience complications

> and conflicts that embody important tendencies in historical development; one or more world-historical figure enters the fictive world, lending an aura of extra-textual validation to the text's generalisations and judgements; the conclusion reaffirms the legitimacy of a norm that transforms social and political conflict into moral debate (1986:60).

As discussed earlier on, Farrell's characters are not 'representative social types.' Though some characters in Farrell like Edward in Troubles, Dr. Dunstaple and Dr. McNab in The Siege of Krishnapur, Mr. Walter Blackett in The Singapore Grip and Mrs Forrester in The Hill Station 'embody important tendencies in historical development,' no 'world-historical figure enters the fictive world' of Empire fiction.

Farrell is more in agreement with the postmodern theories of historical fiction. Raymond. A. Mazurek speaks about "a new kind of historical novel that has emerged in recent years" (1982:29). Though Mazurek has in mind certain overtly metafictional historical novels like Robert Coover's The Public Burning, Farrell shares certain important characteristics with this kind of novel:

> The new historical novel differs from the traditional historical novel defined by Lukács , which aims to present a 'total' model of a society undergoing historical change, and which avoids reminding the reader of its limitations as a textual version of history (Ibid:29).

Again, in her penetrating study of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon gives a definition of historical fiction which closely corresponds to Fan-ell's concept of the same. Hutcheon defines historical fiction "as that which is modelled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force [in the narrative and in the human destiny]" (1988:113).[6] That Farrell's fiction is 'motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force* is quite evident from one of his own notes:

> It is a common misconception that when the historians have finished with a historical incident there remains nothing but a patch of feathers and a pair of feet; in fact the most important things, for the very reason that they are trivial are

> unsuitable for digestion by historians, who are only able to nourish themselves on the signing of treaties, battle strategies, the formation of shadow cabinets and so forth. These matters are quite alien to the life most people lead which consists of catching colds, falling in love, or falling off bicycles. It is this real life which is the novelist's concern [though, needless to say, realism is not the only way to represent it] (In Vinson 1978:399).

In this statement of the author's intentions, Farrell is attempting to explore the possibilities of a new brand of historical fiction which does not 'avoid reminding the reader of its limitations as a textual version of history.' The passage is illuminating in many was; it implies that Farrell has something new to say and a new way of saying it—a view expressed by an critic of Farrell. In his review of The Lung, Bernard Share boldly announced that the novel "confirms Mr. Farrell as a man with something to say and a highly skilful way of saying it" (In Binns 1986:25). The notion of history implicit in Farrell's criticism of the historian's selection and 'narrativization' of only the dominant trends in historical development and the parenthetical assertion of the need for formal experimentation in historical fiction are distinctly postmodernist in that "historiographic metafiction destabilises received notions of both history and fiction" (Hutcheon 1988:120). When Farrell says that 'trivial' things which are in fact 'the most important' are 'unsuitable for digestion by historians,' he is challenging a notion of history which is well articulated by the narrator of Rushdie's Shame: "History loves only those who dominate hen it is a relationship of mutual enslavement" (1983:124). This notion of history is beautifully summed up in a scene in The Singapore Grip where the tragic death of a poor wharf-coolie in Japanese bombing *is* graphically described. At the end of the scene, Farrell makes a significant comment:

> Later, when official estimates are made of this first raid on Singapore [sixty-one killed and thirty-three injured], there will be no mention of this old man for the simple reason that he, in common with so many others, has left no trace of ever having existed either in this part of the world or in any other (p.218).

Farrell seems to be saying that considering the degree of subjectivity involved in the historians* selection and omission of historical events, every writing of the history of a period engenders the possibility of writing another history of the period which inevitably lead to the extreme postmodernist conclusion that history is as much fictional as it is factual: "The history, then is more in the fiction than in the fact, more in the literary products of the age than in the factual documents of historians" (Kaplan 1973:111).[7] Farrell is seen to be in perfect agreement with the New Historicist idea that there is no single history of a period; there are only 'histories.' As he himself has stated: "Another reason why I preferred to use the past is that, as a rule people have already made up their mind what they think about the present. About the past they are more susceptible to clarity of vision" (In Vinson 1972:399). In referring to the textual nature of history, Farrell is again seen to adhere to the postmodern ideology of plurality and recognition of difference. Farrell stated this idea in an interview:

> My idea of the way things happen contains an awful lot of things historians never consider, because I can introduce things that are too trivial. The real experience is not composed of treaties being signed and pincer movements. It's smoke in your eyes or having a blister in your foot (Brock 1978:75).

By attempting to illumine certain dark corridors of history through his fiction, Farrell persuades us that, to borrow Hutcheon's words on certain metafictional historical novels like Fowles's The Magus and Timothy Findley's Famous Last Words, "there are only truths in the plural and never one Truth; just as there is rarely falseness per se, just others* truths" (1988:109). Thus, history, in Farrell's view, is never perfect and always remains potentially capable of being perfected. Significantly, this view is echoed by one of the characters in Ian Watson's Chekhov's Journey, a widely acclaimed work of historiographic metafiction: "Past events can be altered. History gets rewritten___Because history

is a fiction. It's a dream in the mind of humanity, forever striving ... Towards perfection" (1983:174).

In fine, while Farrell's conformity to the classical form of the historical novel reveals his ironic commitment to the Victorian values of fictional realism, his departures speak volumes for his conscious use of innovative postmodern techniques. Though Farrell's novel's may not be taken as purest examples of historiographic metafiction, the fact that they bear an uncanny similarity to the so-called 'metafictional historical novels* is indisputable. Farrell's Empire fiction *is* not strictly metafictional if one is to go by McCaffery's extreme formulation that the "defining characteristics of metafiction is its direct and immediate concern with fiction-making itself" (In Currie 1994:182). But at the same time, Farreli indirectly draws the readers' attention to the fictionality of his fiction through the use of a variety of metafictional techniques like parody, pastiche and intertextuality. As Malcolm Bradbury has aptly put it: "the conspicuous consumption within the text of its own means is not the only evidence of technical awareness" (1973:174). What such parallels between Farrell's fiction and historiographic metafiction suggest is that Farrell's historical fiction deserves a more serious treatment than it has hitherto received, a treatment which takes into account the traditional as well as the innovative dimensions of his works.

### *(b) Beyond Realism and Anti-Realism*

*Great art is not ... 'between two worlds'... When the soul of man quickens to creation, it produces symbols: authentic and durable intimations of truth.*

**A. E. Dyson, Between Two Worlds**

When Farrell started writing in the 1960s, fiction-writing was in the stranglehold of a crisis: while some critics talked about the 'crisis of the novel'; others floated the news of the 'death of the novel' (Waugh 1984:7-8). This widespread 'paranoia' on the part of both novelists and critics was primarily due to the rejection of realism as the most acceptable mode of representing reality in fiction, because , for the writers of the sixties, "the exhaustion and rejection of realism [was] synonymous with the rejection of realism itself (Ibid:45). As the readers' expectations that were based on the realistic novel began to be continuously frustrated by the highly experimental novels of writers like B.S. Johnson and Richard Brautigan, it generated the feeling the novel as a popular genre was certainly *in extremis.** In 1966, John Barth published his influential essay on 'the literature of exhausted possibility' and significantly pointed out that the exhaustion was 'no cause for despair' (p.70). Consequent on this growing dissatisfaction with the prevailing methods of novel-making, certain writers attempted to choose a median centre between die-hard conventionalism and experimentalism. As Shirley Toulson has pointed out, these novelists possessed "an awareness of the difficulties of realism combined with a strong moral attachment to its values, a formal need to comment on their fictiveness combined with a strong sense of the value of a habitable, imagined world, a sense that models, literature and the 'tradition' are ambiguous and problematic goods combined with a nostalgia for, rather than rejection of, the great works of the past (1979:29). This divided loyalty was chiefly a reflection of the experimental anxieties of the sixties when the opposing forces of a marked disposition towards

realism and an obsessive pre-occupation with formal experimentation were pulling novelists into two totally divergent directions.

Farrell, too, was not completely free from the anxieties of me age in which he lived, though the compulsive pull of its literary background was only one of the factors which led him to use experimental techniques in his fiction. Perhaps, the most important reason behind Farrell's appropriation of certain insights of problematical fiction was the fact that he wanted to be stunningly original in recording the colonial experience. Farrell obviously did not want to fictionalise history in a conventional manner; nor did he want to do a Forster, Kipling or Paul Scott, because in the light of the fact that his empire fiction is the product of years of painstaking research, it will be foolish to assume that Farrell was unaware of the stupendous fictional output on the theme of imperial doom. Whereas in his early fiction, Farrell sticks almost exclusively to the realist conventions of fiction-making. FarreH's Empire fiction represents a clear break with his early fiction in terms of theme and technique. Farrell's early work is largely about the living present while the Empire fiction is an evocation or fictional reconstruction of some crucial moments in imperial history. As discussed in the first chapter, Empire fiction is not just a happy fruition of the hopes and expectations stirred up by his early fiction; it is also a testimony to the fact that Farrell has gained tremendous footing in an alien ground—a powerful and unique way of fictionalising the imperial debacle. While the early novels depict the unreflecting realism of a conventional order, the Empire fiction, in several ways, can be seen as a reaction against the so called 'proper stuff of fiction* itself. In the Empire fiction, Farrell is equally alive to the demands of history and a shared reality. The Empire fiction does not merely represent a series of brief creative encounters with history; it is a judicious combination of fact and fancy, of history and historical imagination and above all, of realism and rich symbolism. Though apparently traditional in form and content, the Empire fiction is far from being so; it is realism all the same, but of an untraditional, self-conscious type. At a superficial level, the Empire fiction retains the realistic mode, yet at the same time draws abundantly on the insights of problematical fiction. As Farrell himself has

put it "...needless to say, realism is not the only way to represent it [real life]" (1978:399). Almost fully exploitative of the trappings of the nineteenth century historical novel, Farrell avoids the dry and direct recording of important moments in imperial history and is unusually rich in the use of experimental techniques of fiction-making. In other words, the Empire fiction flaunts the myriad possibilities of a self-conscious, reflective realism and vibrant symbolism as suggestively and powerfully as it flouts the cramping conventions of simplistic mimesis—a fundamental aspect of Farrell's technique which has been consistently ignored by all his critics.

Thus, Farrell may be situated somewhere between the extremes of tradition and innovation, of pre-modernist continuity and post-modernist discontinuity. In his book The Novelist at the Crossroads, David Lodge discusses the two important tendencies among novelists of the sixties:

> Realist novels continue to be written ...but the pressure of skepticism on the aesthetic and epistemological premises of literary realism is now so intense that novelists, instead of marching confidently ahead [on the realistic road], are at least considering the two routes that branch off in opposite directions from the crossroads. One of the routes leads to the non-fiction novel and the other to what Scholes calls fabulation (1971:29).

Farrell's novels are purely fictional and the non-fictional novels of, say, Truman Capote and Tom Wolfe share nothing in common with Farrell's Empire fiction. Farrell's fiction partakes of the elements of both realist fiction and Robert Scholes's fabulation [an extreme form of metafiction with which Farrell's works retains some affinity] and strongly resists all attempts at a clear-cut classification in terms of technique. But, in the process of this creative oscillation between the two extremes, Farrell gravitates more towards metafictional pole and goes beyond what Lodge calls "an aesthetics of compromise". By avoiding either the realist or the postmodernist tag, Farrell transcends the limitations of both 'isms* and aspires

to a unique position among the writers of historical fiction. Though Farrell is not avowedly metafictional like Fowles, as Bernard Bergonzi has argued, Farrell's "capacity to give life and conviction to unfamiliar modes of thought is extraordinary and in no way inferior to Fowles's" (1678:63).[A]

Fan-ell's historical fiction is not based on the extreme postmodernist view that "there is no presence, no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference" (Hutcheon 1988:114). the world of Farrell's fiction is resolutely fictive and yet unquestionably historical. In other words, Farrell employs the techniques of postmodern fiction on the one hand and communicates to the readers powerfully about political and historical realities, on the other. The immediate concern of Farrell's novels is not the problematization of the entire idea of reference, but at the same time, Farrell's fictional realism bears within itself a subtle critique of its own inadequacy as the only acceptable mode of fictional representation of real life. Farrell's belief that the representation of the real cannot be a substitute for the real itself leads to a strong sense of the relativism of historical interpretation—an important feature of Farrell's historical imagination which is summed up in the widely varying interpretations given to the word 'sun' in The Singapore Grip. The word 'sun' repeated several times by the dying Mr. Webb along with a number of other words, 'too garbled to be understood,' receives a variety of humorous interpretations. When Vcra Chiang says that Webb was trying to speak about 'Sun-Yat-Sen,' Walter retorts that the old man just wanted to go sunning in the nude while the author reminds that Mr. Webb could just be referring to his 'son,' Matthew Webb. Immediately after this event, "a grim thought came stealing after him[the Major] through the hushed garden and pounced on him before he had reached the safety of his own walls: 'This is how we all end up, mumbling rubbish to people who interpret it as they want !'" (p.95). The titles of the Empire novels ["troubles," "siege" and "grip"] and the variety of interpretations that they invite readers to make is a measure of Farrell's acute awareness of the fluidity of linguistic reference. Thus, delicately poised on flic shifting sands of differing interpretations about the meaning of words and of

crucial concepts [like 'grip'], the readers of Farrell's fiction are made to reflect on the way language asserts and denies the possibility of precise reference.

The categorical assertion by Farrell of the fact that realism is only one of the ways of representing reality in fiction is quite significant because it points to a fundamental assumption behind Farrell's idea of the craft of fiction—that there is a multiplicity of fictional techniques available to the writer of historical fiction. As Farrell himself has clearly stated: "There are, it is agreed, a hundred thousand ways of writing a novel and an equal variety of intentions that can be given substance in a novel. A writer may pick and choose as great a number as he wants (In Binns 1986:3). Farrell, in dealing with the history of imperial decline -on a rather massive scale draws on the variety of realist and experimental techniques available to the novelist and uses them in a strikingly Farrellesque manner.

Towards the end of his influential book The Metafictional Muse, Larry McCaffery speaks about a new kind of fictional model for the contemporary writer, a fiction which is " self-conscious about its literary heritage and about the limits of mimesis but yet managing to reconnect its readers to the world outside the page" (1982:264). Farrell's Empire fiction is a perfect example of this type. Thus, Farrell goes beyond what Umberto Eco calls a "quarrel between realism and irrealism" (1985:68) in that Farrell writes with a sound knowledge of not only the conventions of the realistic canon in fiction, but also the limitations of those conventions. Unlike the realists, Farrell does not subscribe to the view that realism is an eternally inexhaustible storehouse of fictional techniques and unlike the masters of postmodern fiction, this view dose not lead Farrell to lament the exhaustion of meaning or to arrive at any aporetic insights. For example, Farrell is in perfect agreement with the postmodernist idea "history as narrative account is unavoidably figurative, allegorical, fictive; it is always already textualized, always already interpreted" (Hutcheon 1988:143). Farrell's belief that history is, to borrow Frederick Jameson's phrase, "inaccessible to us except in textual form** (1981:82) is testified to by the detailed bibliography of historical sources given at the end of his Empire novels and also by his conscious use of the inteitext within

the texts of his novels, while Fan-ell's acute awareness of the relativity of the historical interpretation [which is discussed at length in the fourth chapter] points clearly to the idea that the past is available to us only through interpreted reports of it. But still, this idea of the intertextual nature of historical discourse does not lead Farrell to embrace the extreme postmodernist stance that "books always speak of other books and every story tells a story that has already been told" (Eco 1984:20). Again, though history may be discursively structured, it does not necessarily lead to the extreme idea that history is fiction . it is true that history and fiction resemble each other in that both modes of writing are subjective linguistic constructs which are largely dependent on certain narrative conventions (Hutcheon 1988:107). But still Farrell believes that in David Lodge's words, "history may be in a philosophical sense, a fiction, but it does not feel like that when we miss a train or somebody starts a war" (In Bradbury 1977:109). Thus, viewed from a broader perspective, realism need not be completely dismissed because it can recreate before us a world in which each one of us lives out our daily lives.

Farrell seems to be firm in his belief that the forms of nineteenth century realist fiction, despite their various limitations, continue to be unquestionably valid, because in most narratives realism is a fundamental mode. As one of Farrell's contemporaries has aptly put it: "Realism is necessary all the way, because it is only out of realism that myths grow—to be broken down again in time by more realism, thus keeping up the simulating flow of artistic progression** (Sillitoe 1961:211). Though Farrell conforms to this positive aspect of realism as a fictional mode, equating the logical flow of the progression of events in a realist novel with the 'flow of artistic progression' itself, Farrell was equally aware of the repressive element in the novelistic discourse of realism, of the tendency of realist writers to restrict the play of language. "Of the fact that reality changes, realism is more fully, more intelligently aware than any other literary mode: what it implicitly denies is that in this world there is more than one reality and that this denial is in need of proof (Stern 1973:54). Farrell's endorsement of the first part of Stern's proposition leads him to appropriate certain insights of realist fiction

while his complete agreement with its second part leads him to the premises and methods of historiographic metafiction and to recognise plurality and difference which is central to anti-realist fiction. As Hutcheon puts it: "What historiographic metafiction challenges is both any naive realist concept of representation but also *any equally naive textualist or formalist assertions of the total separation of art from the world*" (1988:125; Italics mine).

As discussed earlier on, two of Farrell's significant departures from the Realist mode of historical fiction are his total disregard for the introduction of 'type-protagonists' and actual historical personages and the use of innovative techniques like parody and pastiche. Now, it will be worthwhile attempting to inquire into the Realist dimensions of Farrell's fictional technique, with a view to bringing out the possible reasons for toeing the Realist line in certain respects.

Once its various limitations are recognised, realism can become a very useful device in the hands of the novelist. Stern defines realism as "a way of depicting, describing a situation in a faithful, accurate, ' life-like' manner; or richly, abundantly, colourfully; again mechanically, photographically, imitatively" (1873:43). The realist mode has far-reaching positive implications for the historical novelist chiefly because s/he is dealing with a period which existed in 'reality.' As Stern points out' realism may be *epistemologically naive' but still it "conquers oblivion by its unashamed assumption that yesterday's ephemera arc more alive than today's generalities" (Ibid). One of the important conventions of realist fiction which Farrell consistently draws on is the elaborate description of locale. As D. A. Williams points out, "the Realist pays close attention to the physical and historical setting ... There are detailed descriptions of the faces of several cities" (1978:275). And significantly, Williams refers to 'a widespread tendency' among certain novelists 'to exploit the symbolic potential of the physical setting' (Ibid). Farrell's Empire novels start with detailed descriptions of locales which clearly points ahead to the loci of the novels* action and to the heart of their symbolic structure. The similarity between the opening of Farrell's Troubles and Forster's A Passage to India has been hinted at by Bernard

Bergonzi who expresses the view that both the novels are 'masterpieces of realism and symbolism* (1978:58). In fact, all Empire novels, including the unfinished The Hill Station, have similar openings. A comparative study of Farrell's opening descriptions of the physical locations of the novels* action will help to throw some light on the descriptive techniques used by Farrell to recreate the authentic feel of a bygone era. Troubles begins thus:

> In those days, the Majestic was still standing in Kilnalough at the very end of a slim peninsula covered with dead pines leaning here and there at odd angles. At that time, there were probably yachts there too during the summer since the hotel held a regatta every July. These yachts would have been beached on one or other of the sandy crescents that curved out towards the hotel on each side of the peninsula. But now both pines and yachts have floated away and one day the high tide may very well meet over the narrowest part of the peninsula, made narrower by erosion. As for the regatta, for some reason it was discontinued years ago, before the Spencers took over the management of the place. And a few years later, still the Majestic itself followed the boats and preceded the pines into oblivion by burning to the ground—but by that time, of course, the place was in such a state of disrepair that it hardly mattered (p.7).

The opening is, of course, quite Forsterian in that it has the same knowledgeable, descriptive register, the calmly assured tone of A Passage to India: "Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary". The metaphorical centres in both novels [the Marabar Caves in the city of Chandrapore and the Majestic in Kilnalough] are introduced in the opening sentence itself. A sense of timelessness is established in both Farrell and Forster, though the use of the Biblical "In those days" adds a further dimension of permanence to Kilnalough. Moreover, it can be argued that Farrell goes a step further in his creative use of history by assuming a purely impartial and ironic narrative stance in the true-to-life depiction of the forces of history at work behind the gradual but steady disintegration of British imperialism. Forster's sympathies have been made clear in the course of his novel

while Farrell's narrative neutrality remains unpunctured throughout Troubles. Again, Forster's protagonist is a type who is "constituted by the concrete manifestation ... of the 'totality of socially decisive forces'" (Williams 1978:273). Forster maintains a certain sense of timelessness through his novel, while Farrell's opening creates not only a sense of timelessness throughout his novel, but also of a particular time. As Crane points out, Forster "is deliberately invoking cosmic time rather than historical time" (1992:77)-

Like most postmodern novels, Troubles begins by revealing *its* end. The opening paragraph offers a concise history of the Majestic from its grandeur 'in those days' to its final passage into oblivion 'years later.' This is a powerful technique which Farrell uses in his Empire fiction to distance the reader by pointing out at the very outset that he is attempting to evoke a vanished phase of history. The language has a touch of irony about it—an aspect which made Derek Mahon exclaim in superlative terms of eulogy. Mahon wrote:

> On the first page occurs the sentence, 'A few years later still the Majestic itself followed the boats and preceded the pines into oblivion by burning to the ground.' It was that 'preceded the pines' that hooked me. Here was a novelist who stood back, who took the long view. There is nothing meretricious or merely topical about Farrell's work; it has the detachment and repose of great art (1979:313).

Farrell does exploit the symbolic potentials of the physical setting because in the overall structure of the novel, the decaying Majestic becomes a powerful image of the decaying British Empire—a point which, exhaustively discussed in the previous chapter, is hinted at in the last sentence of the opening paragraph itself: "the place was in such a state of disrepair that it hardly mattered," implying that the British Empire left her colonies only after irreparable damage has been done to the native population. The Majestic and Kilnalough are pure figments of Farrell's imagination. As Binns reminds us: "The Majestic hotel never existed and Kilnalough cannot be found on any map of Ireland for the simple reason that

Farrell invented it*' (1986:47). But still, Farrell succeeds in making them vividly convincing.

The opening of The Siege of Krishnapur bears a closer resemblance to that of Forster's A Passage to India:

> Anyone who has never before visited Krishnapur, and who approaches from the east, is likely to think that he has reached the end of his journey a few miles sooner than he expected. While still some distance from Krishnapur he begins to ascend a shallow ridge. From here he will see what appears to be town in the heat-distorted distance. He will see the white glitter of walls and roofs and a handsome grove of trees, perhaps even the dome of what might be a temple. Round about there will be the unending plain still, exactly as it had been for many miles back, a dreary ocean of earth, in the immensity of which an occasional field of sugar cane or mustard is utterly lost .... Sometimes the village crouches in a grove of bamboo and possesses a frightful pond with a water-buffalo or two; more often there is just a well to be worked from dawn till dusk by the same two men and two bullocks every single day in their lives (pp.9-10).

A sense of timelessness is more powerfully communicated by referring to the immensity of the Indian landscape. At the very outset, almost every ingredient of Indian life is touched upon with extraordinary artistic skill—the in-built capacity of the land to bluff the stranger, the 'unending plain,' 'shallow ridges,* fields, the ubiquitous heat, bamboo groves, frightful ponds and poor labourers. This vivid description allows the reader to enter the psychic atmosphere of the place and the age. Like Kilnalough, Krishnapur, too is a place which does not exist outside the writer's imagination, yet once the reader is introduced to the city of Krishnapur, s/he gets the feeling that Krishnapur is a concretely real and historical place which is anything but fictionaL

The Singapore Grip, too, opens in a calm and detached tone:

> The city of Singapore was not built up gradually, the way most cities are, by a natural deposit of commerce on the banks of some river or at a traditional confluence of trade routes. It was simply invented one morning early in the nineteenth century by a man looking at a map .... Although people had once lived there, the island of Singapore, when he arrived, was largely deserted except for a prodigious quantity of rats and centipedes .... When you think of the city as it was forty years ago you should not imagine an uncivilised frontier-town of the jungle. You had only to stroll around wide avenues and lawns and look at the monolithic government buildings, at the luxurious department stores and at the marmoreal dignity of the banks, to realise that Singapore was the work of a civilised nation — But there is no denying it, certain parts of the city were tawdry and others were wretched, and becoming more so as the age advanced.

The 'prodigious quantity of rats and centipedes' reminds the reader of the ‘prodigious number of basins and lavatory bowls in Troubles. As Binns has pointed out, "some of the central themes of the novel are subliminally present in the two opening paragraphs" (1986:88). Here too, Farrell is seen, by his own admission, concentrating on 'an awful lot of things historians never consider*— the rats and centipedes, skulls and bones, droppings of local pirates and so on. The concluding paragraph of the opening description is worth quoting in full for a variety of reasons. First, it proves Derek Mahon's thesis that Farrell “had an X-ray vision of society" (1979:313), secondly, it presents Farrell at his metaphoric best and thirdly, it introduces an overtly metafictional technique of addressing the reader directly:

> Imagine a clock in a glass case; the hands move unruffled about their business, but at the same time we can see the working of springs and wheels and cogs. That ordered life in Tanglin depended on the same way on the city below, and the mainland beyond the Causeway, whose trading, mining and plantation concerns might represent wheels and cogs while their mute gigantic labour force are the springs, steadily causing pressures to be transmitted from one part of the organism to another ... and not just as that time or just to Tanglin, but further in time and space: *to you thousands*

> *of miles away, reading in bed or in a deck-chair on the lawn, or to me as I sit writing at a table* (Italics mine).

Like the postmodern novelists, Farrell, by engaging the reader in a dialogue about the book s/he is reading, forces us to consider the book we are reading as an artefact, undercuts the realistic impulses of the work and turns it into a self-reflexive creation. But still, as Farrell has stated in the 'Author's Note' to The Singapore Grip, "this novel depends very heavily on primary research conducted by others .... Nevertheless, the Singapore of these pages does not pretend to be anything but fictional" (p.7).

The Hill Station begins with a similarly detached opening: "Nowadays the railway goes all the way upto Simla, but before the turn of the century it stopped at Kalka." These opening words which immediately take us from the present to a nineteenth century past introduce us to an important technique employed by Farrell to underscore the historicity of his fiction, namely that of instituting direct comparisons between past and present By taking us back with an awareness of the present in our minds, Farrell makes us see the connections and disruptions between the past and present. In another scene in the same novel, Farrell uses this technique with powerful comic effect: "It is not at all easy to create the right impression if you are not quite an even keel; *she felt as someone would with aflat tyre in a motor parade today"* **(p.83; Italics mine).**

Thus, even when Farrell draws on the realist conventions, his interest in formal experimentation is invariably obvious. Though his fiction may not serve as a virtual casebook of fictional experimentation, it partakes even of the elements of the fabulatory novel. According to Patricia Waugh, a 'fabulation' is defined by its conscious use of "bizarre metaphors" and "highly obtrusive similes* (1984:17). Waugh cites an example of such a metaphor from Muriel Spark's fabulatory novel Not to Disturb (1971) where the lightning which instantly kills two people is compared to a 'self-stricken flash photographer' and to a 'zip-fastener ripped from its garment by a sexual maniac.' Farrell's fiction abounds in instances of such 'bizarre metaphors.* In A Girl in the Head, the protagonist's mind is compared to

a 'vacuum-cleaner,' 'collecting random and meaningless objects' (p.29). In **Troubles,** 'creepers' are compared to 'emerald intestines' (p.15), "the restrained laughter bulged like a giant abscess in the room'(p.80) 'eyes were racing to and fro across the carpet like terrified mice,' 'elated thoughts' sped through the mind 'like scared antelope' (p.226) and a mortally wounded soldier is described as sitting 'with his intestines in his lap like a mess of snakes* (p.317). In The Siege of Krishnapur, a good poem is called a 'hedgehog' (p.34). In The **Singapore** Grip, a phrase had whirled round Dr. Brownley's mind 'like a rat in a refrigerator' (p. 127). A splendid example of this 'metaphoric overkill' [to use David Lodge's phrase] appears in The Singapore Grip in a scene in which Farrell compares the cross-section of a moment in history to a severed leg of lamb, "where you see the end of the muscles, nerves, sinews and bone of one piece matching a similar arrangement in the other" (p.345). In examples of this kind, "the extreme polarity of vehicle and tenor implicitly reminds the reader of the way in which metaphor constructs an image of reality by connecting apparently disparate objects" (Waugh 1984:17). Moreover, these obtrusive metaphors not only foreground the fabulatory dimensions of Farrell's fiction but also testify to "the power of the imagination, which, combining the memory of gold with that of the mountain, can compose the idea of a golden mountain" (Eco 1983:220).

To conclude, Farrell goes beyond realism and anti-realism in that the self-conscious realism of his fiction indirectly leads to the creation of a seemingly unconscious level of metafictionality in his novels. Farrell uses several avant-garde techniques in his fiction; yet at the same time, he has vehemently attacked experimental excesses. Farrell criticised the non-fictional novels of writers like B.S. Johnson and thought that they were "uninteresting mechanical feats, like writing a novel all in one sentence or making it out of loose-leafed pages which can be read in any order" (Dean 1973:28). In his early novel A Girl in the Head, Farrell indulges in certain experimental excesses like typographical trickery and flippancy of tone *a la* B.S Johnson's Traveling People (1963) and the particularly hostile reviews the novel received partly forced Farrell to strike a balance between tradition and innovation with a view to transcending the limitations of both. As

Mark Curry has aptly put it, "whereas postmodern fiction can generally be regarded as conscious metafiction, postmodern readings can identify metafiction as an aspect of the unconscious level of the text, against the gram of realist intention, and therefore, *beyond any temporal boundaries which might apply to the term 'postmodern'*" (1995:17; ItaUcs mine). In the following chapter, an attempt will be made to articulate the seemingly 'unconscious self-consciousness' of Farrell's apparently non-metafictional fiction.

## *Notes*

1. Fleishman has remarked: "Though I have written this book "to fill a gap" in scholarship, I still cannot quite convince myself that there has never been a full-length critical study of the English historical novel" (1971 :xiv). But the books on the historical novel published before 1924 were, as their titles attest, basically in the form of study-aids—Jonathan Nield's A Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales (1902) and Ernest A. Baker's A Guide to Historical Fiction (1908).

2. The Historical Novel, by Lukacs's own admission, makes no claim to being an all-inclusive history of the genre of historical fiction because the principles he followed in the selection of historical novels and his interpretations of them are conditioned by a dialectical notion of historical process. But still, it is significant that Lukacs continues to be a constant point of reference for critics as well as novelists [of Marxist, non-Marxist and even anti-Marxist hues] of historical fiction primarily because he has been able to identify most of the essential features of the genre with unprecedented precision and. clarity of perception.

3. The only real-life figures in Farrell are the two army commanders, General Percival and Brooke-Popham in The Singapore Grip. But they cannot be called 'world-historical individuals' because they are very much marginalised and even comically portrayed.

4. However, Fleishman is very emphatic and totally uncompromising on this point: "There is an obvious theoretical difficulty in the status of "real" personages in "invented" fictions, but their presence is not a mere matter of taste. // *is necessary to include at least one such figure in a novel if it is to qualify as historical .... The historical novel is distinguished among novels by the presence of a specific link to history: not merely a real building or a real event but a real person among the*

*fictitious ones. 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"* (1971,3; Italics mine). Farrell's novels do retain 'a specific link to history* by centring novels on a significant 'real event.'

5. It may be noted that writers of historiographic metafiction like Timothy Findley and Robert Coover introduce a number of historical figures in their novels. Findley's protagonists are historical figures—Robert Ross in The Wars and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley in Famous Last Words.

6. Fleishman, too, recognises the vital significance of an active notion of history on the part of the historical novelist: "What makes a historical novel historical is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force—acting not only upon the characters in the novel but on the author and the reader outside it" (1971:15).

7. Conrad echoes the same sentiment: "Fiction is history, human history or it *is* nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas histoiy is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting–on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth. But let that pass. A historian may be an artist too, and a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience" ( In Fleishman 1971:16). The Goncourt brothers put the same idea with a more envious turn of expression: "history is a novel which happened; the novel is history as it might have happened" (In Lodge 1977:25). Perhaps, no other philosopher of history was as conscious as R. G. Collingwood about the striking similarity between the novelist and the historian: "Each of them makes it his business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole, where every character and every situation is so bound up with the rest that this character in this situation cannot but act in this way, and we cannot imagine him as acting otherwise. The novel and the history must both of them make sense; nothing is admissible in either except what

is necessary, and the judge of this necessity is in both cases the imagination (1966:245-246). But there have always been strong detractors of this formulation. In his essay *The Views of the Great Critics on the Historical Novel,* Ernest Bernbaum discusses the particularly hostile Victorian attitudes towards the fictionalisation of history. Carlyle always preferred fact to history ["History, after all, is the true poetry; ...Reality, if rightly interpreted, is grander than Fiction"]. Leslie Stephen was another Victorian critic who disapproved of the genre for its inaccurate portrayals of history (1926:342).

8. A similar atmosphere of anxiety prevailed in the 1940s too. Ortega remarked : "It is erroneous to think of the novel—and I refer to the modern novel in particular—as of an endless field capable of rendering ever new forms. Rather, it may be compared to a vast but finite quarry. There exists a number of possible themes for the novel. The workman of the primal hour had no trouble finding new blocks—new characters, new themes. But present day writers face the fact that only narrow and concealed veins are left there" (In Bergonzi 1970:14). In her perceptive essay *Modern Fiction,* Virginia Woolf uses a similar metaphor to highlight the superiority of the established masters of fiction: "With their simple tools and primitive materials, it might be said, Fielding did well and Jane Austen even better, but compare their opportunities with ours!** (1972:83). Significantly, at about the same time, Anthony Burgess lamented the dearth of talented historical novelists: "... one knows that there are many great historical novels that ought to be written; the difficulty is finding someone to write them** (1967:140).

9. Roger Sale makes a similar comparison: "The Siege of Krishnapur is, ... like Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman, a self-conscious effort to construct a full Victorian scene and tale with a modem idiom and tone, so that a reader is asked to be both inside a good old-fashioned tale and outside it, being ironic, taking its measure" (1974:18).

10. In his book The Modes of Modern Writing, Lodge, too, cites a few instances of such metaphoric flights from Brautigan's novel Trout Fishing in America as a significant feature of postmodern fiction (1977:236").

## Chapter 4

# *FARRELL, PARODY AND THE EXORCISM OF LAUGHTER*

*Perhaps the mission of those* ***who love mankind is to*** *make people laugh* ***at the truth to make truths laugh*** *the only truth lies in* ***learning to free ourselves from*** *insane passion* ***for*** *the* ***truth.***

Umberto Eco, **The Name of the Rose**

*In Heaven* ***there*** *is* ***no laughter; but there is no art in*** *Heaven either*

Gabriel Josipovici, **The World and the Book**

In Umberto Eco's **The Name of the Rose, a blind man named Jorge commits** seven horrible murders in seven days **and burns down 'the largest library in Christendom'** in order to prevent the Christian posterity from **laughing, in order to** destroy **a** book which could make **truth a 'laughing matter.* Eco's brilliant novel** which can be approached from **a** wide **variety of angles seeks to highlight an essential** fact about life and **literature—first, that extreme seriousness is not the only** way to

arrive at truth in life, that laughter can take us more 'easily' to the path of truth and secondly, that parody is perhaps the most powerful and dominant mode of creative expression in contemporary fiction. Eco's profound insights about life and literature are of especial significance in the context of an analysis of the metafictional dimensions of Farrell's fiction chiefly because parody is the central controlling technique that he uses with consummate skill in The Singapore Grip, arguably the most ambitious novel in the Empire fiction. And since The Singapore Grip is the most experimental of all his novels, the major focus of the following discussion would be this novel.

An important qualification needs to be pointed out before a discussion of the parodic strain in Farrell's fiction is undertaken. Farrell's novels are not extended parodies *a la* Cervante's Don Quixote or Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman or Italo Calvino's If on a Winter's Night a Traveller. Farrell uses parody in his works not as a genre but as a technique. As Hutcheon puts it : "...it is obvious that parts of a work may be parodic without the entire text being so labelled" (1985:18). Parody in The Singapore Grip is a dominant fictional technique like metaphor in Troubles and The Siege of Krishnapur Or, to borrow Ruthrof s words, parody in FarreH's works are not "structure-carrying" but remain within the texts as "covert parodistic elements" (1981:140). This aspect of Farrell's parody, far from imposing any strictures on his fiction, lends an added dimension to it in that this quality allows his novels to transcend the limitations which might apply to parody as a genre.

Perhaps, the foremost theorist of parody in fiction is Mikhail Bakhtin who has clearly elaborated in his writings that there has always been a tradition of writing which departs from the canonical forms—a hybrid literary form which is seen in the satyr plays of ancient Greece and carnival in the Middle Ages . Bakhtin defines parody as "an intentional dialogized hybrid. Within it, languages and styles actively illuminate one another" (1981:76). Bakhtin lays particular emphasis on the power of laughter to destroy hierarchical distance (Ibid:341). In other words, parody for Bakhtin is essentially subversive—it "is a writing which is always anti-authoritarian, satirizing and travestying the canonized genres and by implication the hierarchies of

power in society those canonized genres tended to reinforce" (In Haffenden 1985:166) and therefore, parody as the "laughing reflections of the direct word" (Bakhtin 1981:45) is immense in its scope and profound in its significance.[3]

Parody as a critical term is admittedly vague and it is often confused with pastiche which is a basically non-subversive mode of literary imitation.[4] As Fredric Jameson puts it:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which chat [sic] is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour (1992:167).

Though Farrell makes use of both these 'significant practices in postmodernism' (Ibid), it is the parodic mode which Farrell is more at home with. The presence of parody in a literary text can have a wide variety of implications, ranging from the purely aesthetic to the overtly ideological. In the former sense, parody is almost synonymous with metafictionality or intertextuality whereas in the latter sense, it has what Lodge calls "a very valuable hygienic cultural function" (In Haffenden 1985:166). Farrell uses parody in his fiction with both these orientations. In her book, **Parody /Metafiction,** Margaret Rose is primarily concerned with parody in the former sense i.e., the self-reflexive aspect of parody and defines it as "a form of metafiction and a higher-order activity" which "raises our awareness of *how* we receive the literary texts and *how* the world is represented in them" (1979:90). As every parodic text implies a parodied text, the reader needs to be competent enough to notice the presence of a parent text to comprehend the full significance of the parody. To use Rose's own terms, every parodic text incorporates within itself two 'textworlds' which she calls 'TW1' and 'TW2' and a failure on the part of the reader to enter into the complex web of dual or multiple textuality would lead to gross misreading.

Parody is, thus, essentially intertextual. Hutcheon coins the term "transcontextualization" to refer to the literary practice of inserting one text into another textual context and points out that parody works through "transcontextualization" (1985:7) and the reader's capacity to understand the difference between the parodic foreground and the parodied background is of crucial significance. As "parody is, in its ironic "transcontextualization", repetition with difference" (Ibid:30), the readers who fail to see both 'repetition' and 'difference' will tend to conclude that the work in question is either a lifeless imitation or a case of blatant plagiarism. Though Farrell's novels in general and The Singapore Grip in particular presuppose a high level of literary awareness, it is the ideological function of parody that receives major focus in his works.

Both Rose and Hutcheon speak about the 'exorcising' function of parody.[6] Through the parody of an earlier mode of discourse or style, the parodist seeks to go beyond its rigid confines. In German, 'Zitieren' which means 'to quote' also describes the evocation of ghosts. In other words, parody is a form of writing in which "the ghosts of the past are quoted in order to be overcome" (Rose 1979:63). In this sense, parody serves the writer "in the task of freeing himself from earlier models, giving his liberation concrete form in the parody text and in the liberating effect of laughter implied in it" (Ibid). Hutcheon echoes the same view when she says that "the ironic distance afforded by parody makes imitation a means of freedom [even] in the sense of exorcizing personal ghosts" (1985:35). These reflections on the uses of parody arc of particular relevance in the context of a study of Farrell's parody. The liberating effect of laughter is central to Farrell's parodic technique and the process of exorcism takes on a distinctively different aspect in the Empire fiction. For Farrell, parody of a style is not limited to a personal exorcism of the evil spirits of literary influence but is extended to cover his passion for a freedom from the conventional ways of thinking about the colonial enterprise. Farrell's Empire fiction attempts to invoke, in a subversively parodic fashion, the ghosts of the imperial legacy in order that his readers may be liberated from the hackneyed rhetoric of power which was purposely perpetuated for the preservation of imperial hegemony. By incorporating within his texts the obsolete conventions of certain genres like the romantic adventure novel and

pulp fiction, Farrell persuades us that the imperialists were nurtured on illusions that retain no links whatsoever with the world of work-a-day experience. Parody involves "both a personal act of supersession and an inscription of titeTary-histoncal continuity" (Hutcheon 1985:35) and Farrell's Empire fiction not only 'inscribes' the continuity of the literary heritage of imperialism but also 'supersedes* the earlier fictional literature on the imperial theme. Farrell uses parody in his Empire fiction in order to 'quote' the ghosts of imperial literature so that they may be successfully 'overcome' through laughter. In other words, Farrell's parody seeks to 'exorcise' his readers of the ideological ghosts of Empire and of the vast body of pro-imperialist literature, effecting in the process a cultural exorcism through laughter.

Laughter is a fundamental element of Farrell's style. Perhaps, the only clear assertion in Fan-ell's criticism of laughter as an essential feature of Farrell's work was made by an anonymous reviewer of The Siege of Krishnapur who aptly pointed out that Farrell's "perception is distinguished above all by style—a style which ...delights in uncovering the opposite of what it purports to say and is sometimes so blunt as to stop the reader in his tracks. Happening by sheer felicity on a turn of speech, Mr. Farrell contents himself with an outrageous laugh or carries the phrase to an unexpected and totally original conclusion" (1973:1074). But this reviewer was referring basically to Farrell's parody of cliched phrases [which is discussed in a later part of this chapter]. Farrell juxtaposes the extremely serious with the perfectly ludicrous in such a way that his readers comprehend profound truths in the merry moments of laughter. Like Umberto Eco, Farrell seems to believe that ". .. the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, *to make truths laugh** the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth" (1980:598) and also that significance and insignificance do not inhere in any situation—it is all a question of perspective. By alternating seriousness and levity in the Empire fiction, Farrell enables his readers to laugh their way to truths.

In Farrell, [intertextual] parody is basically of two kinds Firstly, Farrell's novels make parodic references to various modes of literary discourse as part of a conscious accentuation of not only the obsolescence of literary styles but also of the

ideological formations those discursive modes imply. Secondly, Farrell interpolates newspaper cut-outs or journalistic intertexts into his novels so as to highlight the ironic difference between the facts of history and their fictionalisation in his novels. These two kinds of intertextual parody relate the historical or the real on the one hand and the literary or fictional, on the other.

Fan-ell's parody of the genre of romantic adventure fiction and imperial Gothic is steeped in ideological overtones. The principal difference between an actual adventure story and its parody is that the former allows the readers to be deeply involved and absorbed in the illusory world of the story while the latter forces us to analyse the differences between the two worlds—of fantasy and reality—with a mind to improving our own. The colonial romance as an expression of imperial chauvinism has always projected an image of the British as the most adventurous and courageous of the entire human race and has quite frequently glorified British military superiority. In other words, the scintillating stories of superhuman adventures in the mysterious and exotic spaces of the earth have always been a hallmark of the genre of adventure fiction. In the adventure fiction and imperial Gothic, "Africa, India and the other dark spaces of the earth become a terrain upon which the political unconscious of imperialism maps its own desires, its own fantastic longitudes and latitudes** (Brantlinger 1988:246). Farrell presents the fighting British heroes in an absurdly comic light and an air of parodic levity hangs about every scene of adventure in the Empire fiction. The 'veteran assault force* in The Siege of Krishnapur is a glorious parody of not only the so-called "Black and Tans" of imperial force and the hare-brained strategies of war but also the genre of romantic adventure fiction. When the Collector finds that his defences against the Sepoys are weakening, he decides 'to play his last card':

> All this time he [the Collector] had been keeping a reserve force waiting in the library. This 'veteran assault force' [as he called it] was composed of the only men left from the cantonment community whom he had not made use of, the few elderly gentlemen who had managed to survive the rigours of the siege. Their joints were swollen with rheumatism, their eyes were dimmed

> be taking part in the French wars, another that he was encamped before Sebastopol. But never mind, though their blue-veined old hands might be trembling their fingers could still pull a trigger. It was this force which the Collector now threw into the engagement, though he had to shout the order more than once as their leader, Judge Adams, was rather deaf. From the library they staggered forth with a querulous shout of 'Yah, fconey !.' Shotguns and sporting rifles went off in their bands. The hall chandelier crashed to the ground and shots sprayed in every direction. For a moment, until the old men had been dragged back to the barricade, all was chaos. The veteran assault force had not been a success (*SK*, p.327).

The veteran assault force is a parody of the "Black and Tans" who were notorious for their brutality. Recruited from among English ex-servicemen and ex-officers, the "Black and Tans" were a special division of troops organised to quell *tbc* Irish insurrection by any means whatsoever. As Thomson puts it: "They ['Black and Tans'] were not expected to be gentle or just in their methods. They were meant *to* meet terror with counter-terror, and they did not fail in their duty" (1965:71). *By* presenting them as models of strategic disaster and physical *infirmity, Farrell* demystifies the concept of British military superiority.

In The Hill Station, Farrell parodies the genre of adventure fiction in a typically postmodernist fashion. Teddy Potter's narration of the dangers of the road to Simla reads like a brilliant parody of the adventure fiction:

> Teddy Potter, meanwhile, was explaining to the ladies and especially to Emily that the road to Simla was positively infested with hostile tribesmen, with thugs and dacoits of every shape and description who were, moreover, particularly interested in making away with fair young English damsels ... yes, it was jolly lucky that he and Woodleigh and Arkwright, under the 'awe-inspiring command' of the 'universally dreaded* Captain Hagan, should be on hand 'in the nick of time,* to prevent Miss Anderson being carried off to become the unwilling bride of a hook-nosed Pathan chieftain with a dagger in his belt Why most likely the rascal

> was already watching them from behind those very trees! (p.44).

Again, Farrell presents the love affair between Emily and Teddy Porter from an essentially parodic angle. Farrell self-consciously draws on the parodic potentials of the cliched rhetoric of romantic relationships. Emily's thoughts, after having been deeply angered by Teddy Porter's mingling with other women even before she professes her love for him, are presented as follows:

> His only sin was that he had lingered chatting with other young women, unaware that Emily's imagination, galloping on as usual far ahead of the reality, had snatched him up on to her saddle and made off with him, hoofbeats drumming, as a prize of her very own. He could hardly be blamed for not behaving towards the new proprietor of his heart in a way that acknowledged the change of ownership when he had still to learn of it (p.135).

The rhetorical figures used in the passage serve to awaken the readers to the critical ironic distance which Farrell achieves through a conscious inversion of the generic conventions. Some early reviews of The Singapore Grip point to the fact that traditional expectations of the imperial romance *did* remain as a stumbling block to the proper understanding of Farrell's fiction. John Mcllors described the novel as "an exciting adventure story, with powerful descriptions of air-raids, fires on the docks and fighting in the jungle" (1978:410). Farrell assaults the reader-expectations almost consistently in his Empire fiction. And one important feature of literary parody is its emphasis on the frustration of reader's hopes: "...parody functions as a means to evoking the reader's expectations for a certain text, genre, style or literary world before then destroying or disappointing these expectations 'step by step* (Rose 1979:114). By parodying the style of adventure fiction [of novelists like Kipling, R. L. Stevenson, Reider Haggard, John Masters and other masters of this genre] from which the conventional reader-expectations have originated, Farrell mocks the beliefs and

prejudices of the reading public who favour such unrealistic fictional isations of imperial history. As David Lodge puts it:

> the idea that the novel draws on discourses which are not those of high literature ....provides a rather impressive theoretical case for the comic mode, which I think is not just entertaining but performs a very valuable hygienic cultural function: it makes sure that institutions are always subject to a kind of ridiculing criticism (In Haffenden 1985:166).

The dying-house scene in The Singapore Grip reads like a powerful parody of the literary features of a special genre of adventure fiction which flourished at the climax ofEmpire-the imperial Gothic. The dying-house which is filled with old men with a foot in their coffin [who are brought there to spare the family the bad luck that was supposed to accompany a death] is described in terms that are overtly mock-Gothic. The house which is scattered with ‘skeletons and moribunds,' and ‘shadowy cadavers' is reminiscent of the fantasy landscapes of imperial Gothic of novelists like Rider Haggard and R. L. Stevenson. Vera's and Matthew's descent from the bustling world of the fair ['The Great World'] into the subterranean dungeon of a dying-house with 'shelves of expiring people' recalls images from Haggard's novels in which heroes and heroines are temporarily entombed in tunnels, crypts and caves. When a 'quavering voice* piped at Matthew's elbow, Matthew 'start[s] violently and peer[s] into the gloom where another of the shadowy cadavers, hitherto lying supine on the lowest rack and displaying no signs of life, had now collected up two sets of bones and thrown them over the side of his tray; after dangling uncertainly for a while, they anchored themselves to the floor and proved to be legs; then with a further scraping of bones, their owner levered himself politely to his feet and stood swaying beside Matthew' (p.345). The description of the return of these 'moribunds' to their respective racks [quoted *in toto* in the second chapter in a different context ] is extremely suggestive in its wonderful mix of jest and earnest The dying-house scene, on the whole, reads like a parody of the Place of Death in Rider Haggard's King Solomon's Mines (1951). When Brantlinger's observation

that '[I]mperial Gothic expresses ...the larger gradual disintegration of British hegemony' and 'the narrowing vistas of the British Empire at the time of its greatest extent before its fall' is taken into account, it becomes evident that in scenes in which Farrell parodies the genre, he seeks to explore and expose the basic causes of the Empire's ultimate debacle.

In The Singapore Grip too, Farrell attempts an ironic inversion of certain stylistic conventions of pulp fiction. Vera Chiang's lustful reflections on the admirable attributes of Matthew's physical beauty is a parodic attack on such light literature of romance:

> 'How attractive he is!' Vera was thinking. 'How stooping and short-sighted! What deliciously round shoulders and unhealthy complexion!' She gazed at him in wonder, reflecting that there was no way in which he could be improved. Indeed, she could hardly keep her eyes off him. For the fact was that Vera had been brought up, as Chinese girls had been for centuries, to find stooping, bespectacled, scholarly-looking young men attractive (*SG*, p.340).

Again, the shockingly funny scene in which the uneducated Chinese girl, Vera Chiang gives 'a basic but hasty education' to Matthew Webb, a public school product, on how to make love, on the 'Five Male Overstrainings' and the 'Five Revealing Signs' which should be manifested by the partner represents a parody of all such scenes in the literature of romantic adventure. Vera's 'naming game'—she begins to give names like 'jade-flower stem,' 'head of turtle' etc., in a manner reminiscent of the 'missionary who had taught her English'—place similar scenes in pulp fiction in parodic contrast which serves to establish an ironic rupture with such light literature.

Thus, through a parody of the conventions of the novel of romantic adventure, Farrell satirises the mindset of those millions of readers who were nurtured on such low forms of literature. In other words, Farrell's parody seeks not only to explode the myth of the adventurous Briton but also to undermine the myth with contradictory

knowledge —that life in those turbulent days did not consist of "the signing of treaties and battle strategies" but "of catching colds, falling in love, or falling off bicycles" (Farrell in Vinson 1978:399). The ideological function of the adventure genre lay in its ability to feed on and, at the same time, bolster feelings of cultural superiority in the reading public. Thus, this parodic dimension shows how certain ideological preferences engender certain generic conventions and stylistic mannerisms and in so doing, unearths a cunningly contrived attack on the wonted culture of imperialists. If, as Martin Green pointed out, the romantic adventure form was "more influential than the serious novel" (1979:49), Farrell's parody of the form implies that it had laid siege to the popular imagination during the imperial regime and that consequently, the popular view of history was a distorted one. In laying bare the devices of the adventure novel, Farrell seeks to lay bare the pretensions and 'idealised' values of imperial culture. Brantlinger says that "in the nineteenth century English novel, a season of imperial adventure in an exotic setting can cure almost any moral disease" (1988:12). Farrell, on the other hand, seeks to do something similar through a parody of such 'imperial adventure[s] in an exotic setting.' Differently put, by using the rhetoric of power with a view to highlighting its own pathetic inadequacy to represent colonial reality, Farrell goes beyond it.

The incorporation of newspaper snippets is of crucial significance in the context of an analysis of Farrell's intertextual techniques in that it is a powerful way of addressing the marked differences between the 'official' version of history and its possible variants. The journals and newspapers of the time serve to provide the readers with the 'official' versions of history while the world of Farrell's historical fiction not only seeks indirectly to question the authority of such 'official histories' but also unearths the 'unofficial' versions of history that have never been propounded. For instance, Farrell inserts a newspaper cut-out [entitled *Amritsar]* on the Hunter Commission report of the Amritsar massacre:

> The findings of the Hunter Commission in regard to the disturbances in the Punjab in the spring of last year were issued last night as a Blue Book ... General Dyer's career as a soldier is over. All the members admit that firing was

necessary. Even the Indians recognise that the riots could not have been quelled by any other means .... No doubt, General Dyer acted rashly; but he probably had about two minutes in which to make up his mind. He was confronted with a fanatical Oriental mob, fired with anti-European frenzy. He knew that hundreds of white women and girls were dependant on him for their safety. Rightly or wrongly, he believed that the fate of India was at stake .... General Dyer was neither a politician nor a moralist. He was a soldier, and moreover, an Anglo-Indian. He thought of the *memsahib* who had been assaulted, and in India the *memsahib* is sacrosanct. The Hunter Report will have far-reaching consequences in India. We are not at all certain that they will lighten the task of the Indian Government...(T, p. 170).

This snippet from a newspaper of the time proves that the journalistic reports, far from giving an accurate rendering of events, vitiate history into partial and biased documents which offer a warped view of reality or in other words, mythologise history according to the ideological demands of the time. This snippet throws light on a variety of issues like Farrell's distinctive angle of historical vision and an original technique of articulating it. The fact that the cut-out is inserted after a scene in which the Major and Edward discuss the future of 'tattered' Irish children 'dragging aimlessly through' Edward's fields 'in a doleful search for something edible: a little corn that had seeded itself from last year's harvest or a stray potato plant' (T, p. 170) is quite significant. When the Major tells Edward: "I sometimes wonder what would happen if one caught one of those little brats young enough, taught him how to behave, sent him to a decent public school ..," Edward curtly replies: "You might just as well dress up a monkey in a suit of clothes"(Ibid). The fact that Edward, the fanatic loyalist of the Empire who would go to any extent to exterminate the Irish to retain the colony bears an exact resemblance to General Dyer accentuates Farrell's technical originality[9]. The 'official' history of the time offered by the cut-outs is counterpointed by an 'unofficial' version of the same history which Farrell offers in his fiction. Newspapers and novels are traditionally held to be two entirely different discursive practices, one a factual record and the other its imaginative and/or imperfect reconstruction. Hence, Farrell's extrapolation of newspaper snippets, apart from foregrounding the textualisation of history, also represents an attempt to contest th boundaries that traditionally separate the two modes of discourse—the fict

fictional. Moreover, such press accounts serve to throw what Farrell calls 'the bricks* of fact into focus, to give the readers the feeling that such periods of turbulence have actually come to pass, producing in the process a Brechtian effect of alienation which prevents the readers from plunging headlong into the hallucinatory world of fiction.

Farrell's parody of historicism is equally imbued with ideological implications. This traditional mode of historical discourse implied an attempt to project a nation's history as an expression of its evolving 'spirit' and to impose a false notion of immobile harmony and uniformity upon our conception of a historical period. By parodying this idealised mode of historical thought, Farrell persuades us that historicism cannot provide us with an absolute or objective interpretation of history and that the concept of a uniform and harmonious culture is a myth imposed by the colonial appropriators on the expropriated natives of the colonies. In The Singapore Grip, the scene in which the imperialist Walter finds himself 'brooding on what makes up a moment of history' is worth quoting in its entirety for the important reason that it throws sufficient light on FarreH's use of rhetorical figures to powerful comic effect as well as on Farrell's essentially absurdist vision of history:

> ... if you took a knife and chopped cleanly through a moment of history, what would it look like in cross-section? Would it be like chopping through a leg of lamb where you see the ends of muscles, nerves, sinews and bone of one piece matching a similar arrangement in the other? Walter thought it would, on the whole. A moment of history composed of countless millions of events of varying degrees of importance, some of them independent, others associated with each other. And since all these events would have both causes and consequences they would certainly match each other where they were divided, just like the leg of lamb. But did all these events collectively have a meaning?
>
> Most people, Walter believed, would have said 'No, they are merely random.' Perhaps sometimes, in retrospect, we may stick a label on a whole stretch of events and call it, say, 'The Age of Enlightenment' the way we might call a long hank of muscle a fillet steak, but we are simply imposing a meaning on what was,

> unlike the fillet steak whose cells are organised to some purpose, essentially random. Well, if that was what most people thought, Walter did not agree with them (5(7, pp.434-35).

Farrell's perspective seems to be quite New Historicist in that every historicist interpretation involves 'imposing a meaning on what was ... essentially random.' Farrell continues:

> Certainly, it was not easy to see a common principle in the great mass of events occurring at any moment far and near. But Walter believed that that was because you were too near to them. It was like being a single gymnast in a vast stadium with several thousand other gymnasts: your movements and theirs might seem quite baffling from where you stand whereas viewed from an aeroplane, collectively you are forming letters which spell out 'God Save The King' in a pattern of delightful colours (Ibid).

Apart from stressing the essential precondition of distance for the attainment of objectivity in historical analysis[10], Farrell awakens his readers to the mysterious process whereby the rhetoric of imperial power originates and gets disseminated. Farrell seems to imply that the Empire-builders who never succeeded in going 'too near' the subject races [in the sense of socially interacting with them] always had to base their administration on their own biased interpretation of the colonial situation. Consequently, for them, the colonised people, at a sharp remove from their own lives, 'collectively' formed letters which spell out 'God Save the Queen.' Farrell continues to denounce the notion of this 'spirit of the times:'

> Well, what was this organising principle? Walter was vague about that. 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.* If a Japanese bomber had opened its bomb doors over Singapore in the year 1920 no bomb would have struck the city. Its bombs would have been lodged in the transparent roof that covered Singapore like a bubble, or bounced off it into the sea.

> This transparent roof was 'the spirit of those times.' The spirit of these times, unfortunately allowed the bombs of an Asiatic nation to fall on a British city (Ibid),

Through a parody of the naive concept of a 'spirit of the times* and by showing how the process of historical interpretation itself can have a variety of interpretations, Farrell implies that traditional historicist interpretations cannot be a substitute for historical truth, that provided the limitations of historicism as a methodological tool are recognised, it can extend and refine our understanding of certain moments of history and, finally that the idea of a uniform and harmonious culture which existed in the heydays of Empire is nothing short of a myth imposed on history by the imperialists to further their own political interests.

One of the most interesting ways in which Farrell affirms his endorsement of the values of postmodernist fiction is his parodic use of extended metaphors and cliched rhetoric with tremendous comic effect. Farrell's parody of cliched metaphors and usages in the Empire fiction serves to unveil the unmistakable self-reflexiveness of his fictional consciousness. A careful reading of Empire fiction would bring to light how Farrell's acute dissatisfaction with cliches and hackneyed expressions leads him to parody them in his works. Farrell makes certain trite linguistic mannerisms available to parodic treatment in two ways—firstly, by introducing characters who can express their ideas and feelings only in a language composed primarily of worn-out idioms and usages and secondly, by using these very cliches to such an excess that they are burlesqued in the process. Malcolm Dean specifically refers to Farrell's Uncompromising contempt for cliches: "Any cliche which passed one's lips would be pounced on and one would be mercilessly mocked with it" (1981:181)[11]. In what is a clear case of blatant misreading, an early reviewer was mightily displeased with Farrell's love of cliched expressions. He wrote: "His [Farrell's] characters "sink their teeth" into "weighty problems," accept things "lock, stock and barrel" and come to clanging conclusions like: "The old order of things was as dead as a doornail". After an hour or two of this, who could be blamed for edging away ...?" (Porterfield 1979:72). The excessive use of such rhetorical commonplaces in Farrell's texts serve

not only to draw attention to their own modes of production and reception but also to the hollowness of their ideological baggage,

In The Singapore Grip, Walter, the imperialist, harangues Matthew on the greatness of the imperial enterprise in a language which mocks itself and its user:

> Over this great area of the globe, covered in steaming swamp and mountain and horrid, horrid jungle, a few determined pioneers, armed only with a little capital and a great creative vision, set the mark of civilisation, bringing prosperity to themselves, certainly (though let's not forget that *the crocodiles of bankruptcy and disgrace quietly slipped into the water at their passage, ready to seize the rash or unlucky and drag them down into their watery caverns*), but above all, a means of livelihood to the unhappy millions of Asiatics who had been faced by misery and destitution until their coming! (*SG*,p.156; Italics mine).

The idea of a 'a few determined pioneers, armed only with a little capital and a great creative vision' setting 'the mark of civilisation' over a 'great area of the globe, covered in steaming swamp and mountain and horrid, horrid jungle' depends for its effect on its parodic ability to recall the high-sounding rhetoric of power which had always been a formidable weapon in the dissemination of the mystique of imperialism. The 'crocodile image' almost verges on the preposterous and contributes to a deliberate effect of bathos which exposes the emptiness of the rhetoric itself. This description of the glory of the imperial mission is followed by an interesting reflection on the nature and usefulness of Walter's rhetoric which with 'some fanciful touches' here and there had grown more 'solemn and impressive': "if they [fanciful touches] earn their keep, he [Walter] allowed them to stay; otherwise they were discarded" (p. 156). Walter uses a handful of trite metaphors in his reflections on 'the spirit of the times' [in the long passages quoted above in the context of Farrell's parodic attack on naive historicism]: 'a moment of history' is compared to 'a leg of lamb where you see the ends of muscles, nerves, sinews and bone of one piece matching a similar arrangement in the other,' and the obtrusive metaphor continues in the following paragraph too, being in a state of inability to comprehend 'the spirit of the times' is

compared to 'being a single gymnast in a vast stadium with several thousand other gymnasts* and a little later, 'the spirit of the times* itself is compared to a 'transparent roof.* By using such silly metaphors to express a profound philosophy of history, Farrell succeeds in parodying the traditional notions of history as well as the cliched manner of their articulation.

In another scene in the same novel, Farrell compares, in a bitingly satirical vein, 'the Western manner' of love-making to 'a pair of drunken rikshaw coolies colliding briefly at some foggy cross-roads at the dead of night' (p.293). Even in his early fiction Farrell indulges in such metaphoric overkill. In A Girl in the Head, Boris reflects on his past in terms of a cliched metaphor:

> I don't pretend to have remained uaffected [sic] by all the shattering events of my life. They have clearly left their marks on me, *like footprints in wet concrete.* But in the last few years *the concrete has dried and hardened.* So now at last, *though covered in footprints,* I am able to meditate impassively on my life (*GH*,p.23; Italics mine).

The parodic impulse becomes overt in a scene where Smith, an army official takes recourse to a trite metaphor 'to speak plainly': "It was as if, to speak plainly, on life's ladder some unseen hand had all but sawn through a number of the more important rungs" (*SG*, p.453). The merchant house of Blackett and Webb which epitomises the imperial greed for gold is ironically compared to "an oasis of virtues in a desert of less scrupulous businesses" (p.453). Smith describes Communism as 'seeds in a pod': "The way I describe it, which many people have been kind enough to find illuminating, is that they are like millions of seeds in a pod. If we allow that pod to burst in India, say, or even in Australia, why, they will be scattered all over the Empire in no time" (p.467). A general air of depression is described with use of such a 'fabulatory' metaphor: "an air of melancholy settled over the table like a gentle fall of snow on an avenue of statues in the park, collecting in white drifts on heads and shoulders and blurring individual features" (p. 134). Again, the life of the moribunds in the dying-house gives Matthew the feeling that 'it would not take very much to

capsize the frail craft in which the old chap was trying to navigate the final stages of his life's voyage* (p.343).

Though similar instances of this type of imagery can easily be multiplied from the Empire fiction, the above citations must be sufficient to justify the rationale behind this enquiry—which is to reveal how Farrell employs metafictional techniques in his critique of imperialism. Thus, by deliberately taking rhetorical strategies to excess, Farrell parodies them in the process of using them and in so doing seeks not only to escape from their tyranny but also to go beyond them.

Another element of technical uniqueness in Farrell's vehement critique of the economics of imperialism through laughter in The Singapore Grip is the presentation of very serious events and discussions from a highly comic perspective. Matthew, walking through the fair, ponders the weighty problem of the politics of imperial economics: "Was a colony like Malaya, as the Communists claimed, a mere sweatshop for cheap labour operated in the interests of capitalism by cynical Western governments? ...Or was Western capital, as Walter insisted, a fructifying influence bringing life and hope to millions by making hitherto unused land productive? Or was it both the things at the same time? [Had not Marx himself suggested something of the sort?]" (*SG*, p. 163). Immediately after this, Farrell introduces a scene in which a Chinese girl accosts Matthew and 'on an impulse' flicks open a button of her frock and slips his hand through the opening. And "one moment Matthew was standing there, *immobilised by the question of colonial welfare and progress*, with the damp palm of his hand neatly moulding a young woman's naked breast" (p. 165; Italics mine). The whole scene which can also be interpreted as a parody of pulp fiction serves to highlight the irrelevance of armchair speculations in actual life. During a serious discussion with Matthew about the 'colonial question,' Walter's son Monty invites him to spend a weekend with a prostitute (*SG*, p. 180). A little later, a similar discussion on the political unconscious of imperialism goes on against the sordid backdrop of a brothel (Ibid). Again, Matthew's perceptive analysis of the failure of the League of Nations is ironically undercut by a dispute by a drunken Scandinavian over the doubtful virginity of a prostitute (pp. 194-5).

Farrell was profoundly aware of the infinite potentials of language, of the way in which language asserts and denies the possibility of precise reference—an aspect of his work which is significant in that it confirms his postmodernist identity as a self-conscious experimenter of form. Though Farrell does not declare like certain postmodernist novelists that "the treachery of words is notorious" (Vidal 1989:46), his novels can be cited as instances of the virtual celebration of such 'treacheries.' In his concise overview of Farrell's works, James Vinson writes: "In the best Anglo-Irish tradition, he [Farrell] is *master of language,* combining eloquence and humour, but keeping a firm control over "the beautiful tragic cadences" which so many have found seductive" (1976:427; Italics mine). As pointed out in the previous section of this chapter, Farrell does not attempt to apotheosise uncertainty in the manner of American deconstructionists or postmodern novelists like Thomas Pynchon and Richard Brautigan. Farrell's aim is primarily to show that history is textualised and that this textuality can be quite destabilising. In his personal memoir, Malcolm Dean remarks that in his real life too, Farrell never allowed 'solecisms, misnomers, and malapropisms, to pass uncriticised: "The misused words would be caught [by Farrell], repeated with mock brutality, and the offender asked if he really meant what he had said" (1981:181). And this anxiety regarding the instability of linguistic reference finds joyous expression in his Empire fiction. On the one hand, Farrell invites us to establish strong connections between *his* fiction and *our* facts and on the other, deeply disturbs *our* dogmatic faith in the reality of represented worlds. Farrell accomplishes this dual objective through a self-conscious play on the titles of his Empire novels which reminds one of the masters of contemporary postmodernist fiction.

The titles of FarreU's novels lend themselves to a multiplicity of interpretations. In Troubles and The Siege of Krishnapur, though the meanings are not fixed, they are fixable. The titles of these two novels have primarily two interpretative dimensions—the historical or the actual and the individual or the metaphysical, and the texts of the novels enact a vibrant oscillation between these two poles of possible reference. Both the titles–the"troubles" and the "siege"–activate these dimensions so powerfully and consistently that these terms remain in a state of creative oscillation from one pole to the other. While an examination of the historical

dimension of the titular significance of these two Empire novels brings to light FarrelPs ironic vision of the past, an enquiry into its metaphysical aspect reveals Farrell's concern with what life was like in those violent days of imperial expansion and finally, with man and his predicament. A close attention to this dual character of the titles illumines, in Lukscian terms, the ways in which Farrell portrays 'the broad living basis of historical events' in such a way that even minor characters 'experience the smallest oscillations in this basis as immediate disturbances of their individual lives' (p.45) while in Barthes's terms, it activates the 'hermeneutic code.' In The Singapore Grip wherein the 'hermeneutic code' is employed, the meaning of the title is neither fixed nor fixable; it remains in a state of becoming, of creative instability. An exploration into the hermeneutic code helps towards a resolution of the enigma of the title because the reader is led to ask, as Barthes puts it in his reading of Balzac's novella Sarrasine *"What is Sarrasine?* A noun? A name? A thing? A man? A woman?" (1970:19). When the reader hits upon this code in Farrell's novels and legitimises its signs, it also throws sufficient light on the metafictionality of Farrell's Empire fiction.

In Troubles, the word 'troubles,' ominously repeated a number of times in the text of the novel and in a variety of contexts, lends itself to a broad range of interpretations. Historically, 'troubles' refer not only to the Irish troubles but also to troubles on an international level. Troubles accepts a global perspective and shows the readers that the period of Irish troubles was actually a point of time in history when British colonies and other nations across the world seethed in troubles, external or internal or both. In Troubles, Farrell succeeds in presenting the Majestic as a microcosm of the troubled Ireland while Ireland is masterfully projected as a microcosm of the trouble-ridden world at large.

Metaphysically, 'trouble' constitutes an essential ingredient of the human situation in which man is fated to enact a continuous process of being caught in one trouble after another. In this sense, the title 'troubles' refers to the way in which Irish militant nationalism 'troubled* the 'living stream,' to use Yeats's well-worn phrase. Troubles in various parts of the world act as a background against which Farrell

foregrounds the troubles of Ireland. And from this grand perspective, Farrell narrows and intensifies his focus on the troubles experienced by real flesh-and-blood people, the novel's characters who are the 'ex-centric' figures of history. Once Farrell zeroes in on these living victims of 'troubles,' the word begins to acquire a variety of meanings which may be quite irrelevant, though not insignificant, to the Irish troubles. It becomes an accurate word for the problems which the protagonist Major Brendan Archer experiences when he comes to the Majestic to claim his fiancee, Angela. What follows the Major's arrival at the Majestic is a series of extremely disheartening events which Farrell describes as the Major's 'troubles.' For Edward Spencer, the 'trouble-shooter' of the Empire, his own children constitute the major troubles of his life while the three children consider their imperialist and imperious father 'a storehouse of troubles.' Most characters are troubled by variously diagnosed diseases. Though Sarah is constantly plagued by illnesses, she is the prime source of troubles for most characters in Troubles. Even as she is in love with the Major, she carries on secret liaisons with two older men, one of whom she finally manages to elope with. The Irish insurgents are troubles in the eyes of the occupants of the Majestic while these English people represent the cause of the turbulence in their own lives. The old imperial order and the Irish promise of a new one are, in a sense, troubles for 'the maintaining individuals' among both the colonisers and the colonised. Both these forces—the rebels who dream of founding a free Irish republic and the British who want to retain their sinews of power—are equally harmful from the standpoint of the common run of 'maintaining individuals.' In addition to these external troubles, there are internal troubles caused by religious prejudices. The rift between the Catholics and the Protestants deepens as Irish troubles continue to escalate. Sarah is a Protestant and therefore, not a 'member of the quality' and as a result, the ladies at the Majestic give her a wide berth. The Catholic boy Ripon [Edward's son] falls in love with the Protestant girl Marie Noonan and has finally to elope with her—an event which, even as the Irish troubles rage outside, unsettles life at the Majestic. Thus, it is troubles which threaten individual lives and imperial fortunes alike. In short, Farrell implies that living in the period of Irish troubles was like living in 'troubles,' with no hope of peace from any quarter—inter-personal, regional, national or international.

In its immediate historical context, the ' siege' of **The Siege of Krishnapur** refers to an event widely known as 'the Siege of Lucknow' in the first Struggle for Indian Independence during which a group of Englishmen and women were besieged by the rebellious sepoys. By inventing a fictitious place called 'Krishnapur* [meaning 'the place of Lord Krishna'], Farrell consciously activates other dimensions in the title. Farrell has clearly pointed to the metaphorical overtones of the 'siege' in **The** Siege of Krishnapur In an interview, he remarked that a siege "is a microcosm of real life and [the] human condition—with hostility all around you with the individual in a rather temporary shelter" (Dean 1973:31). Viewed from this perspective, the siege of the novel becomes a profound lesson in British psychology as the Britons fail to withstand the rigours.of the siege with grace. The besieged English people are 'sieged' by various fears and prejudices—this aspect of the novel is elaborately discussed in the last chapter.

It is in The Singapore Grip that FarreH's metafictional awareness of the instability of linguistic reference finds its most joyous expression in that he transcends the restrictive poles discussed above.. The 'grip' of the title is so bandied about in the novel that the readers lose their 'grip' on the referential axis of the word. Farrell's evocation of the illness-ridden life of the poor colonised in Singapore concludes with the grim observation that 'it will take high explosive...to loosen the grip of tuberculosis and malaria on them' (p.217). Singapore is described as an octopus holding other trading centres in 'a friendly grip' (p.250). Walter wants to get Matthew in his daughter's 'grip' (p.527). In its halcyon days, Blackett and Webb had a firm '*grip* on the destinies of individual companies' (p.314) while, due to the Japanese war, the company begins 'to lose its *grip* on the country and its own destiny' (p.528). Dupingy speaks about 'the national vanity which at intervals *gripped* nations like France and Britain' (p.320; Italics mine).

Another sustained use of the term 'grip' occurs in authorial comments on the unreality of the fictional world of the novel. The characters of **The Singapore Grip** lose their 'grip' on reality very frequently. The world of the novel alternates between reality and dream so much so that the readers find themselves delicately poised on the

uncertain territory between logic and magic. Matthew loses 'his hold on the passage of time* (p.533) and is at a loss to decide whether he is dreaming or not (p.254). Walter feels that 'his *grip* on reality had loosened' (p.365). Sinclair is '*gripped* by [a] sense of unreality' (p.365). The fictional world of The Singapore Grip is full of ' ghostly voices, speaking gibberish which, however, sometimes held a queer sort of significance' (p.503). At the end of the novel, General Percival feels that people, whether historical or living, "had no real substance, that they were merely phantasms...incredibly life-like but no more reality than the flickering images one saw on a cinema screen" (p.553). Almost every significant event in the novel tends to loosen the characters' 'grip on reality.' This technique of 'dis-realising' the fictional world of his historical novel is part of a conscious attempt by Farrell to discourage notions of dogmatic clarity of perspective in judging the colonial experience. The novel's dreamy texture, by implication, seeks to highlight the unreality which pervaded the imperial enterprise, obscuring issues and confounding perception.

But it is with reference to the concept of the 'Singapore Grip' that the meaning of the title is irretrievably disseminated and destabilised. When the first two times Matthew broaches the subject of the 'Singapore Grip,' it "proved a failure as a conversational opening. Nobody replied or showed any sign of having heard him" (p. 108). A little later, Matthew receives an explanation from Dupingy who thinks that 'grip' derives *from la grippe* [the French word for influenza] and says that 'Singapore Grip' is a 'grave tropical fever' (p. 146); but, when Matthew speaks to Ehrendorf about "The Singapore Grip' as a fever, he is taken aback and says that "it was a suitcase made of rattan, like a Shanghai basket" (p.200). Joan immediately adds a "further element of confusion to a scene which Matthew had already found sufficiently puzzling" (p.200) by saying that 'Singapore Grip' was actually "a patent double-bladed hairpin which some women use to curl their hair after they had washed it" (Ibid). Matthew is not satisfied with any of these interpretations and comes to think that 'Singapore Grip' refers to a peculiar handshake of the Chinese (p.389)—which again is promptly disproved. He comes to think that it is the name of a 'secret society'(p.389). But when he asks Vera Chiang if the 'Singapore Grip* is a secret society, she finds the question "so entertaining that her impatience with Matthew

melted away" (Ibid). towards the end, when the expression the ‘ Singapore Grip’ is discussed for the last time in the novel, Ehrendorf gives an interestingly new version which comes as an anti-climactic digression in the scene in which Matthew is seriously engaged in an angry attack against the self-interested West corrupting human affairs across the world: "... the expression the ‘Singapore Grip* refers to "the ability acquired by certain ladies of Singapore to control their autonomous vaginal muscles, apparently with delightful results" (p.498). this interpretation shocks Major Brendan Archer's sense of modesty and immediately Matthew, perhaps, having comprehended the acute instability of the expression gives a final interpretation of the 'Singapore Grip': "it is the grip of our Western culture and economy on the far East ... it's the stranglehold of capital on the traditional cultures of Malaya, China, Burma, Java, Indo-China and even India herself. It is the doing of things our way ...I mean, it is the pursuit of self-interest rather than of the common interest!" (p.498). but this final explanation, far from being generally acceptable, forces Ehrendorf to think that "The Singapore Grip was about to be pried loose," though, significantly, within the text of the novel, the expression is never fully pried open[12]. Whatever may be the meaning of this well-known expression for the specialists of history, the readers who confront the term for the first time from FarreH's novel The Singapore Grip will only be confused about its actual import. Though the explanation provided by Matthew might sound politically more acceptable than others, the fact that other characters refuse to accept it as the final word on the meaning of the expression points to Farrell’s self-consciousness about the fluidity of linguistic reference.

The last chapter of The Singapore Grip (pp.566-68) is overtly metafictional. The whole chapter, in a sense, is an attempt to give full expression to Farrell’s fictional self-consciousness. At this point of the novel, the narrative is ruptured to such an extent that the novel almost writes itself. In a manner reminiscent of the multiple endings of A French Lieutenant's Woman, Farrell unearths the processes whereby the novelist controls the world s/he imaginatively re/constructs. Farrell supposes that years and years after Japanese invasion of Singapore, “Kate has a pleasant, kindly, humorous look [as *characters tend to have when their author treats them well]"* (p.566; Italics mine). Farrell creates a spring scene in which a cat is trying

to catch butterflies in a garden and immediately shows how the author, if the whim takes him, can 'de-create* the spring and make it winter: "Let us suppose that it is winter. Rub out the cat, erase the butterflies and let us move back inside where it is warmer" (p.566). Then, it “is suddenly summer again and a cat is trying to catch a butterfly" (p.568). Farrell relates this changeability of the fictional worlds to the constantly changing nature of human life and history: "Malaya is no longer even called Malaya. Things that once seemed immutable have turned out to be remarkably vulnerable to change" (p.567). And the novel ends with a direct address to the reader:

> In any case, there is really nothing more to be said. And so, if you have been reading in a deck-chair on the lawn, it is time to go inside and make the tea. And if you have been reading in bed, why, it is time to put out the light now and go to sleep. Tomorrow is another day, as they say, as they say (p.568).

In fine, it is important to note that Farrell’s metafictionality is not only an attempt to assert his experimentalism but also to go beyond what Edward Said calls "the textual attitude”—an attitude based on the fallacious assumption that “the swarming, unpredictable and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say” (1978:93). This ‘textual attitude' has always characterised the imperial discourse. By suggesting the possible variants of fictional history of the Empire precisely at the point where his fiction ends, Farrell conveys the idea that "to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin" (Ibid).

*Notes*

1. Other prominent critics have also expressed the same idea. Malcolm Bradbury remarked in an interview: "I think that most of the great twentieth century novels are comic and in an essential tradition of comedy which has tended towards "the great without" (In Haffenden 1985:42). Bradbury has in mind Wyndham Lewis who attacked certain novelists for their undue focus on inward psychology. Fredric Jameson writes: "It is obvious that modern literature in general offers a very rich field for parody" (1992:166). Horst Ruthrof shares this view: "... literary parody ought not to be viewed simply as a clever linguistic exercise addressing itself to an esoteric circle of literati, but as a mode which is present, overtly or covertly, in all literature" (1981:140).

2. In his essay *From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse*, Bakhtin cites numerous instances from "the ancient world's literature of laughter" (1981:25) in order to prove his thesis that "the importance of parodic-travestying forms in world literature is enormous" (Ibid).

3. Linda Hutcheon expresses some serious reservations about practising the Bakhtinian theory as it is: "To *adopt* slavishly Bakhtin's specific statements about parody [that is to imitate his practice] is to fall victim to the arbitrary and monolithic... in those statements; to *adapt*, on the other hand is to open up one of the most suggestive Pandora's boxes this century has produced" (1985:70). My aim here is just more to invoke the insights of the great theorist than to adopt or adapt his statements.

4. The present study does not attempt to present all the taxonomies of this genre. Gilbert Highet lists seven types of literary parody: epic, romance, drama, didactic poetry lyric, prose: non-fiction, and prose: fiction (1962:103-147). Horst Ruthrof identifies four strata of the parodic discourse: "It seems that the parodistic impulse is always specifically aimed at one or more of the following strata: (a) print [or sound], (b

linguistic formation, (c1) the presented world and (c2) the presentational process, and (d) the stratum of high-level interpretative abstractions" **(1981:143).**

5. To **a** great extent, this aspect of **Farrell's fictional** technique explains the early critical responses to **The Singapore Grip.** Most critics have described the novel as belonging to the tradition of romance.

6. In an interview with BBC, David Lodge speaks about his parodic novel **The British Museum is Falling Down** in similar terms: **"The British Museum is Falling Down** ... is partly an effort to exorcise the enormous influence that any student of literature feels, the influence of the major modern writers. It is a kind of joke on myself in **a** way."

7. An early instance of similar parody occurs in a scene in **Troubles** where Farrell's describes the tragic death of the heroine, Angela through a parody of the literary conventions of the idealised portrayal of death: "Gone to the **angels....And** now Angela had gone to join the ancient **pre-Raphaelite** poets and the steady-eyed explorers who had shed their earthly envelopes (as the saying goes). She had gone to join the dead rowing blues (they were most probably among those blurred chaps on Edward's War Memorial) who had quaffed pre-war champagne out of her slippers. She had gone to the place where all the famous people go, and the obscure ones too for that matter" **(*T*,p.94).** By self-consciously referring to the obsolescence of certain rhetorical devices in describing death in **a** work of fiction [Hardy's **"the** President of Immortals ended His sport with poor Tess" comes to mind as an obvious example of the parodied background], Farrell makes his readers accept the fact that death is nothing to be idealised, that it simply takes us to **a** place where people, irrespective of their stations in life, must go and that there is no point in worrying about it

8. Farrell inserts newspaper **cut-outs** in all his Empire novels except **The Hill Station** but it **is** only in **The Singapore Grip** that Farrell dates **them.**

9. There are a number of such extrapolations which assume great significance from the standpoint of technique. Another example appears at the beginning of the second section of Troubles entitled *The Tuam Murders:* "Preaching in the Roman Catholic Cathedral, Tuam, on Sunday, the Most Rev. Dr. Gilmartin said that he came to sympathise with the people of Tuam in the sickening horror and terror of last week. A foul murder of two policemen was committed within three miles of the town on the previous Monday morning. Had no reprisals been taken, he said, there would be a great wave of sympathy with the police. Commenting on the wrecking of the town, His Grace said that he need not add that one crime did not justify another ... in this case police had taken a terrible revenge on an innocent town. No matter from what quarter the encouragement came, the policemen committed a fearful crime in gutting a sleeping town with shot and fire. The town was vengefully and ruthlessly sacked by the official guardians of the peace, and if the Government did not make immediate compensation and reparation for the damage done, the sense of crying injustice would remain as a further menace to peace and goodwill" (p. 195). This press report on police reprisals shocks the readers into an awareness of the blatant abrogation of human rights during the imperial years, of the fact that the so called civilised imperialists, whenever their authority was questioned, behaved in a manner that will put even the worst savages to shame.

10. This seems to be one possible explanation of the fact that most historical novels are set in a period which is not too recent. In the introduction to his novel The Go-Between, Hartley writes: "Someone, perhaps writing to please me, pointed out that many of the greatest novels had been written about time forty years before the date at which the novelist was writing—and this is roughly true of War and Peace, Vanity Fair and Wuthering Heights. Their authors found it was the point of time—not too near and not too far away—on which their imaginations could most easily focus" (1953:2).

11. Dean goes on to describe how Farrell mocked him: "Years I foolishly used the phrase in an unguarded moment, he [Farrell] was still introducing me to new people as 'This is Malcolm ... he was educated in "the university of life" (1981:181).

12. In his brilliant metafiction Trout Fishing in America, Richard Brautigan, in a strikingly similar fashion, makes the title a site for the endless proliferation of meaning. Trout Fishing in America' can be anything in the novel: a person, a corpse, the name of a hotel, a pen nib, or an adjective. Commenting on this play on the title, Lodge remarks: "by presenting the reader with more details than he can synthesise into a whole, the discourse affirms the resistance of the world to interpretation" (1977:237). One is also reminded of the comically protracted metaphor of rocket as phallus in Thomas Pynchon's metafictional masterpiece, The Gravity's Rainbow (1973) and also of the mystery regarding the precise meaning of V in his novel, V (1963).

## *Chapter 5*

# *CONCLUSION: FARRELL AND INDIA*

> ***[I]magination, taking up the thread of thought, shot its swift shuttle back across the ages, weaving a picture on their blackness so real and vivid in its detail that I could almost for a moment think that I had triumphed over Time, and that my vision had pierced the mystery of Time.***
>
> **Rider Haggard, She**

**The present chapter attempts to explore the full implication of Farrell's sustained engagement with India and to show how Farrell fictionalises the British-India encounter from a fundamentally post-modernist perspective, thereby claiming an important niche in the Anglo-Indian canon of imperial literature. Most critics have played down Farrell's significant contribution to the post-imperial fictional discourse on British-India. Dinshaw. M. Burjorjee is the only critic who has made at least a token attempt to include Farrell in the Anglo-Indian tradition through his essay *The Indian Mutiny in Anglo-Indian Fiction Written after the Second World War*, Burjorjee's main focus is not on Farrell's fiction; he goes on to make an assessment of eight post-Independence Mutiny novels and concludes that "the best Mutiny novel to date is J.G. Farrell's The Siege of Krishnapur" (1982:42). Apart from the reference in the title of the essay, Burjorjee does nothing to prove that Farrell should be placed alongside the**

great masters of **Anglo-Indian** fiction. Frances. B. Singh's article on **The Siege of Krishnapur** focuses on **Farrell's** use of the concept of progress and history and makes **no** case for a place for him in the Anglo-Indian canon. Years after these two essays, **in** his full-length study of Farrell, the only one of its kind, Ronald Binns emphatically stated the view that Farrell "lies outside the broad tradition of British fiction about **India"** and his broad tradition included writers like Forster and Paul Scott. It is true that Farrell is not an Anglo-Indian novelist in the manner of Forster or Paul Scott; nevertheless, he is an Anglo-Indian novelist in his own distinctive way.[1] The present chapter departs from Binns's position and attempts to place Farrell in an Indian perspective .

Farrell towers above the rest of his ilk by employing innovative fictional techniques in his presentation of colonial India. The fact that **Farrell's** fictionalisation of British India is unique in several ways underscores the need for, and justifies the relevance of, a study of Farrell's Indian connection. India has captured Farrell's imagination in a way that no other colony of the empire ever managed to do. **Farrell's** first historical novel Troubles is set in Ireland and his third novel is set in Singapore while the backdrops for his Booker-prize-winning The Siege of Krishnapur and the unfinished The **Hill** Station are provided by India. The very fact that Farrell intended to write a sequel of sorts to **The** Siege **of Krishnapur** is a clear indication of his overriding interest in the subcontinent. In addition to **The Siege of Krishnapur** and **The Hill Station,** Farrell has written a record of his impressions of India titled ***The Indian Diary. The Indian Diary*** was written when Farrell was travelling in India in 1971 as part of his background research for **The Siege of Krishnapur** ***The Indian Diary,*** **a** remarkable account of Farrell's immediate reactions to India, conveys a strong sense of the country. And surprisingly, writers on Farrell have virtually ignored **The Hill Station** and ***The Indian Diary.***[2] Therefore, the present chapter gives a fairly detailed analysis of all the three **works—The Siege of Krishnapur, The Hill Station** and ***The Indian Diary*** **in** order to put Farrell's career in perspective and link it to the Anglo-Indian fictional **tradition.**

The Siege of Krishnapur assumes a place of no mean distinction in Anglo-Indian literature. Within just twenty years of its publication, The Siege of Krishnapur has been widely acknowledged as the best novel on the Indian Mutiny. The magnitude of FarreH's achievement becomes obvious when one considers the fact that more than fifty novels had already been written on the subject. This stupendous fictional output on the Indian Mutiny has been studied by British and Indian writers alike

The only full-length study of Mutiny fiction Novels on the Indian Mutiny by Shailendra Dhari Singh was published in the same year as Farrell's The Siege of Krishnapur and includes analyses of a few post-Independence Mutiny novels like John Masters's Nightrunners of Bengal (1951), M. M. Kaye's Shadow of the Moon (1957) and Richard Collier's The Sound of Fury (1964). In addition to The Siege of Krishnapur, six more Mutiny novels were published in the 70s, but as years went by, these novels, written as they are by "a succession of inferior writers" passed into oblivion.

Ever since the Mutiny began to set literary imagination on fire, the question of historical objectivity was much debated. While the novelists loyal to the empire fictionalised the Mutiny as a life-and-death struggle between British civilisation and Indian barbarism, the Indians primarily looked upon it as a rebellion against the white colonisers (Tracy, 1907:75). While M M Kaye and John Masters perpetuate many of the myths which have surrounded the British portrayal of the Mutiny, Manohar Malgonkar in The Devil's Wind sets out to tell the story of the Mutiny from an Indian point of view. All this points to Farrell's unique achievement in objectively fictionalising the Mutiny. R J Crane remarks:

> Nightrunners of Bengal was enthusiastically described by one reviewer as "the best historical novel about the Indian Mutiny." This was arguably true at the time of writing; however, [Bhupal] Singh was moved to write, "it must be said the best novel on the Indian Mutiny is yet to come." I would argue that

> with the publication of J. G. Farrell's The Siege of Krishnapur that novel has finally been written" (1991:14).

In his attempt to pinpoint the uniqueness of Fan-ell's The Siege of Krishnapur in comparison with earlier masters of Mutiny fiction, the author of the above passage implicitly states that Farrell deserves a pride of place in the canon of Anglo-Indian fiction

Perhaps, Farrell's The Siege of Krishnapur is the only historiographic metafiction among the Anglo-Indian fictional output on the Mutiny. With the postmodernist re-discovery of the use of history in fiction in the 1960s and 70s, giving birth in the process to what has now come to be called 'historiographic metafiction,' the writers of historical fiction began to employ stunningly original techniques in their novels. While all the Mutiny novelists of the 60s and 70s stuck to the conventional mimetic mode, Farrell's fictional representation of the Mutiny is postmodernist in the sense that his language/technique is fundamentally metaphorical and subversive.

Farrell's technique in The Siege of Krishnapur is subversion. Using subversive techniques of fictional recreation of the Mutiny, Farrell succeeds not only in subverting the hallowed concepts of British race superiority and the Empire's vaunted invincibility but also in throwing fresh light on the horizon of newer possibilities of fictionalising the Mutiny. When one considers this disruptive component of Farrell's fictional technique, most of the charges levelled against The Siege of Krishnapur fall wide of the mark, as those charges are made on the simplistic assumption of Farrell's fictional mimeticism. Roger Sale's complaint that Farrell does not take much interest in his characters (1974:18) and Byron Farwell's charge that 'women do not change at all' (1974:19) are quite untenable from the postmodernist viewpoint. As Hutcheon argues, characters, including protagonists of postmodern historical fiction are "the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history" (Hutcheon 1988:14) whose lives are not worth anyone's special interest and who do not undergo any major transformation daring their

life. As for Binns's lament over the historical absences in The Siege of Krishnapur, the postmodern concept of historical fiction

> refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity (Hutcheon 1988:93).

In an interview with Malcolm Dean, Farrell said that the Mutiny was 'a traumatic event ... destroying the myth of the grateful and obedient natives being led onwards and upwards by the paternal white ruler' (1973:.43). The Siege of Krishnapur captures the real trauma of the British when the natives, offended beyond endurance, suddenly started behaving like 'paternal rulers,' leading 'the whites onwards and upwards.' By imaginatively reconstructing the turbulent days of the Mutiny, Farrell attempts to show that the period of the Siege of Lucknow was a time when the British population was forced to live (for the first time in imperial history) just like the teeming millions of Indians who have been living for decades under foreign rule. Thus, Farrell's novel gives, in metaphorical terms, a subversive account of the Mutiny. Viewed from this perspective, the Residency under a siege of sepoys becomes a metaphor for India which has long been under British siege. The Siege of Krishnapur offers illuminating glimpses into the hearts of the British at their most unassuming and least romantic. Deromanticising the 1850s in The Siege of Krishnapur, Farrell shows that the superior race of Britons, shorn of all pretensions and pushed to the extremities of a life of the most penurious of Indians, are at heart far more ill-equipped and incapacitated then the natives to face the harsh realities of life. Once this argument that The Siege of Krishnapur is implicitly a fictional treatise on how the British would conduct themselves if they find themselves unexpectedly colonised by the colonised is accepted and amply illustrated through a critical reading of the text, Crane's charge that Farrell's lack of knowledge of Indians is reflected in the novel (1992:26) begs no answer.

**The Residency which houses a group of frightened Englishmen and women who, as the siege progresses, make no bones about stooping to the lowest depths of human indignity in their brazen struggle for existence becomes a microcosm of the British India where millions and millions of frightened Indians appear to the British eyes to be barbaric and inhuman in their efforts to remain alive. Fear is certainly one of the dominant emotions in the occupants of the Residency just as it has always been in the minds of Indians under British rule:**

> **...The dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear, pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police,... The fear of the official class, fear of laws meant to suppress, and of prison... fear of unemployment and starvation (1956:75).**

**And the beleaguered community at the Residency pins its hopes on the possibility of a relief force which will make them fearless. Brought up on the myth of an 'original purity,' the siege uncovers the ingrained impurities and baser instincts of the occupants and the entire community teeters on the brink of collapse as they are forced to taste the bitter fruits of defeat, dishonour, and poverty for the first time during the siege. This unique angle of historical vision gives Farrell's treatment of the mutiny a universality of appeal which all other Mutiny novels are found lacking in and links Farrell firmly to the tradition of Anglo Indian fiction.**

**In what follows, an attempt is made to interpret The Siege of Krishnapur on the line of arguments proposed in the preceding pages. The Siege of Krishnapur, divided into four parts, pictures the progress of the white community from a state of dreadful complacency, resulting from political and individual security, through periods of acute stress and strain, brought on by the unexpected insubordination of a conquered race, to a state of utter helplessness, poverty and constant fear of imminent extinction. With meticulous attention to detail, Farrell has successfully shown that the real significance of the Sepoy Mutiny lies in the fact that it gave the haughty British colonisers a taste of what it is to be colonised and subjected to abject states of misery and indignity.**

**The first part of the novel focuses on the luxurious lifestyle of the English expatriate community Farrell comically portrays the English making conscious effort to be unlike Indians in their everyday life. The Collector, like the others, finds it hard to believe that one was in India at all (p. 17). But, ironically as the siege begins and progresses, they are pushed into situations in which they become like the most desperate and helpless of Indians. The Collector, with his faith in the 'superior culture' of his own country, fails to forge any meaningful ties with India. Harry Dunstaple's knowledge of the Indian language is 'limited to a few simple commands, domestic and military' (p.43), the Magistrate is too 'rational for Indians and cannot see things from their [Indians'] point of view' (p.98). The English ladies have only a hearty contempt for the natives. And most characters in The Siege of Krishnapur, including the Maharaja's son, Hari, have been brought up on the express instruction that anything Indian is despicable and therefore should be shunned like the plague. In the first five chapters, the Englishmen and women live as though they were in England, throwing lavish parties, going out for picnics and arranging balls in the typical English style. Farrell throws in sharp focus the gluttony of the well-fed colonists which indirectly leads to their adaptational breakdown under "the apocalyptic stress of the siege.' During sumptuous dinners and parties, they glut themselves with ham oysters, pickles, cheese, tongues, chickens, fried fish, curried fowl, roast kid, creamy mango fowl, chocolate and other delicious items of food. The full stomachs of the British are sharply contrasted with '[T]hose hundred and fifty millions of people living in cruel poverty in India' (p.223). But, as the siege begins, the white community is forced to forgo one luxury after another. As most punkahs become defunct, the ladies 'fight polite but ruthless battles' for a place under the working Punkahs. As flies and mosquitoes begin to torment them, they long for a fall in the temperature to stay away from the unbearable heat. The pitiable state of these women, herded together in extreme contiguity and robbed of the luxury of servants, looks quite similar to that of poor Indians. These white ladies were *"having to look after themselves for the first time in their lives.* They had to fetch their own water ...They had to light fires for themselves ...and to boil their own kettles for tea ...*delicate creatures accustomed to punkahs and***

*khus-tatties*, now exposed all day long to the hot wind....*No wonder they were in such a poor frame of mind*" (p. 172; Italics mine).

Even the fair Louise begins to look 'like some consumptive Irish girl.' During his rounds at the Residency, the Collector is deeply disturbed by a distressing scene in which women weep due to the discovery of lice in their hair: "Yet, the sobbing of the unfortunate women who had found lice in their hair had been easier to endure than the malicious pleasure of those who had found none. Why, in such wretched circumstances, faced by such great dangers, did they still prosecute these feuds?" (p.261). The Collector lectures them on the need to help each other through difficult times and live as a community but his efforts to keep them in harmony suffer a serious setback in a scene which becomes an ironic comment on the proverbial public-school morality of the British: "A row has developed because Miss Lucy had felt justified in keeping her maid occupied exclusively with her own comfort, while the other ladies believed that the girl's services should be shared" (p. 173).

With their consumptive appearance and lice-infested heads, the colonisers are forced to live the life of Indian untouchables. Farrell pokes fun at the Englishman's class-consciousness which throws into ironic contrast the British condemnation of untouchability among Indians. 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 worse, rations were issued collectively a fact which had undoubtedly hastened this social stratification" (p. 173).

Deprived of the English style cuisine they are accustomed to, the English at the Residency begin to eat the common food of the poor Indian, "*dal* and *chapati*" (p.219) of the type which ironically had earlier filled the Collector with adumbrations of an

impending epidemic. As days go on, the demand for food begins to exceed the supply but even in such adversities, some of them try to take shameless advantage of the situation. The Magistrate holds an auction of the private stores which had accumulated due to the deaths of people during the siege. But at the end of the auction, it is found that almost all the food items are bought by Mri Rayne who employed a number of servants to bid for his sake. When he was asked why he bought such large quantity of food, he says that he intends to sell them again to the famished occupants of the Residency at an exorbitant rate of profit because, as he puts it, "...It's a question of fortune....one has to make the best of a situation" (p.287). This, by implication, is Farrell's ironic comment on the Empire's ruthless instinct for economic exploitation. Witnessing such instances of barbaric selfishness, the Magistrate loses his 'interest in humanity' and concludes that 'the poor [are] just as stupid as the rich' (p.285).

As the pressures of the siege continue unabated, Farrell describes the rattled English citizens in Indian terms. As poverty strikes, the dhobis hike their prices and even the Collector begins to wash his own clothes 'like a low-caste dhobi' (p.260). When the shortage of food becomes very acute, the white community 'spent more time watching the native princes eating their banquets than they did watching the enemy lines' (p.305-6). As their life is reduced to that of the poorest Indians, "the wealthier natives brought picnic hampers in the European manner and their servants would unroll splendid carpets on the greensward" (p.305)—an event which is an ironic counterpoint to the white community's lavish picnic in the Botanical Gardens described in the first part of the novel. In their search for food, the British resort to desperate and barbaric remedies. An old horse was captured, and put to death and the meat was distributed as rations: "Any piece of rotten meat that would still be found in the enclave was slipped over an improvised fish hook, attached to a rope and hurled over the parapet in the vain hope of .. catching a jackal or a pariah dog that might swallow it" (p.306).

Gradually, they are reduced to the point of being savages, eating anything that came their way. The Collector spots a black beetle on the stairs, catches it between his fingers and pops it into his mouth and crunches it 'with as much pleasure as if it had been a chocolate truffle' (p.314). Finally, the Collector rallies the defenders 'like a *muezzin*' [p. 315] and when the relieving troops arrive, the General is disturbed to find them looking like 'poor devils:' "he had never seen Englishmen get themselves into such a state before; they looked more *like untouchables* (p.340; Italics mine).

Thus, Farrell, by presenting the Mutiny as a reversal of British fortunes, subverts the concepts of British courage and *sangfroid* and explodes the myth of the perfect coloniser. In other words, Farrell has demythologised the 1850s. He has successfully-recreated the feelings of that time while stripping it of romanticism and adding truths not found in the literature of the day. In a perfectly unique manner, Farrell has debunked the myths of the Raj.

The Siege of Krishnapur evokes India through a cluster of powerful images and symbols. One such image is that of the tennis court: "[P]icture a map of India as big as a tennis court with two or three hedgehogs crawling over it" (p. 102). This typically Farrellesque image of India as a tennis court beautifully conjures up a picture of the way the British saw or treated India in the 1850s. By a metaphorical extension of this image, it could also be argued that Farrell is suggesting that the British are as out of place in India as hedgehogs are on a tennis court.

The image of 'the vast and empty plain' recurs throughout the novel. As Ronald Binns has pointed out, "FarreU's India, like Conrad's Africa, is portrayed as a vast, incomprehensible land that makes the pretensions of the white man seem puny and absurd" (1986:68). The indifference of the vast expanses of India to the affairs of the British is suggested in many parts of the novel. The Collector delivers a declamatory speech on progress and civilisation, but his 'shouts rang emptily over the vast Indian plain which stretched for hundreds of miles in every direction' (p.81) when the occupants

of the Residency contemplate flight from the enclave, "the vast plains of Indian sap their confidence and courage. Even if they succeed in breaking through the sepoy lines, where would they go? where did safety lie on that vast hostile plain?" (p.248). Later when the Reverend Hampton sermonises in high-pitched tones about 'the mysteries of the Indian plains* (p. 147). This indifference of the Indian subcontinent is reflected in the Indian character, the prime minister to the Maharaja, who even after a month in British captivity remains, to the Collector's surprise, totally unaffected by and indifferent to the stresses of the siege: "the siege simply had made no impression on him whatsoever" (p.232) while, Farrell ironically remarks, "the siege can be very dull to a man of culture" (p.203). Looking at the Prime Minister, the Collector "realised that there was a whole new way of life of the people in India which he would never get to know and which was totally indifferent to him and his concerns" (p.232). And finally it is the vast plains of India that enlighten the Collector about the siege, India and life itself. "Crossing for the last time that stretch of dusty plain which lay between Krishnapur and the railhead, the Collector experienced more strongly than ever before the vastness of India; he realised then....what a small affair the siege of Krishnapur had been, how unimportant, how devoid of significance" (p.343). The 'terrible days of the siege' which were 'the dark foundations of [his] civilised life' (p.343) in Krishnapur give him a poignant awareness of the reality of India, its people and its life. The naked ugliness of the poverty which struck the 'superior culture' during the siege awakens him to the tragic significance of the starving millions of India. He resigns from Fine Arts communities and progressive societies, disposes of his art collections, feels a "cautious contempt for the greedy merchants of England for whom the Exhibition had been an apotheosis" (p.332) and believes that "culture is a sham" (p.345). He takes to "pacing the streets of London, very often in the poorer areas, in all weathers, alone, seldom speaking to anyone but staring, staring as if he had never seen a poor person in his life before" (p.344). By portraying this complete transformation of the protagonist under the effect of the siege and the utter changelessness of the Indians in the novel, Farrell persuades us that while the Mutiny exposed the spiritual and physical chinks in the British armour, for the Indians it was just another painful episode in a dull

routine of painful life, thereby stressing the permanence of India in contrast with the transience of imperial glory.

Farrell uses another Indian image to portray the inscrutable permanence of India. The very description of the village in the opening pages of the novel connotes the ominous potentials of a country whose various aspects remain shrouded in mystery .... "the village crouches in a grove of bamboo and possesses a frightful pond with a water buffalo or two; more often there is just a well to be worked from dawn till *dusk by the same two men and two bullocks every single day in their lives"* (pp.9-10; Italics mine). After the siege which effects significant changes in the British characters as well the political life of imperial Britain [the Queen Victoria was declared the Empress of India in 1857), the Collector is struck by the permanence of India which is symbolised in the two men and two bullocks." When he thought of India in later years he would always see these two men and two bullocks" (p.343) Again, soon after his last meeting with Fleury, "he was thinking again of those two men and two bullocks, drawing water from the well everybody of their lives. Perhaps, by the very end of his life, in 1880, he had come to believe 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" (p.345). These closing lines of the novel, juxtaposed as they are with an inscrutable component of Indian life read like a profound commentary on the imperial folly.

Farrell makes marvellous use of the billiard room as a powerful symbol of the serene British India before the siege and its turbulence during the siege. As a symbol of the luxurious component of British life in India , Farrell's billiard room evokes the English countryside with its greenery, peace and tranquillity. Its "ceiling very high for the sake of coolness, bore elaborate plaster mouldings of foliage in the English fashion** (p. 170). In the days before the siege, the billiardroom was "like some gentle rustic scene ..., the green meadows of the tables, the brown leather of the chairs, and the gentlemen peacefully browsing amongst them. Then there had been no other sound but the

occasional click of billiard balls or the scrape of someone chalking his cue. Above the green pastures the bellowing blue clouds of cigar smoke had drifted gently by beneath the ceiling like the sky of a summer's day" (p. 170). But, as several rooms of the Residency fall into disuse due to the sepoy offensive, the billiard room becomes filled with the ladies living in close proximity. Gradually the billiard room gets transformed into a Indian bazaar and the Collector 'dreaded to enter there' (p. 170). The room which used to tranquillise the British senses begins to have an oppressive effect on them. Farrell's description of the Collector moving through the billiard room during his rounds evokes the picture of a British citizen moving through one of the bustling bazaars of India: "alas, the ears were rolled by high-pitched voices raised in dispute or emphasis; the competition here was extreme for anyone with anything to say: it included a number of crying children, illicit parrots, and mynah birds" (p. 170). Thus, Farrell uses the billiard room as a strong symbol of the strife-torn British India of 1857.

The English characters in the siege never try to understand the Indians probably because Farrell wants to stress the fact that the mutiny it self was the tragic result of British indifference to the Indian way of life which led to a profound misunderstanding between the two people. but Farrell's knowledge of the country and its people and the British perception of both are clearly reflected in the siege. To Fleury, India is *a mixture of the exotic and the intensely boring' and yet 'irresistible' (p.31). As Farrell describes the Indian towns, he captures every single detail of Indian life with great perspicacity. He talks about the bunniahs and the inevitable bystanders one finds every where in India, idly looking on , wherever there is anything of interest of happening (and even where there is nothing) because they are too poor to have anything better to do, and the least sign of activity or purpose, even symbolic (a railway station without trains, for example) exerts a magnetic influence over them which nothing in their own devastated lives can counter" (pp. 130-131). When the Collector describes the character of the rich natives to Fleury, Farrell puts into his mouth some highly realistic observations about the affluent Indians the 1850s who wasted their lives in delicious indolence. They "were brought up

in an effeminate, luxurious manner. Their health was ruined by eating sickly sweet meats and indulging in other weakening behaviour. Instead of learning to ride and take up manly sports they idled away their time girlishly flying kites. Everything was for show with your rich native ...he would travel with splendid retinue while at home he lived in a pigsty" (p.77).

In the light of the forgoing discussion of The Siege of Krishnapur, it can be argued that Farrell deserves a place of no mean distinction in the Anglo-Indian canon of Mutiny fiction. Farrell's novel is both a reading of all the textual histories of the Indian Mutiny and an invention, an extension and a supplement to it. Farrell is undoubtedly the only postmodernist Mutiny novelist in Anglo-Indian literature. By successfully breaking away from the shackles of the romantic adventure tradition of Mutiny fiction, Farrell has been able to demonstrate that the popular picture of the Mutiny was a distorted one.

The Hill Station opens in a typically postmodernist fashion by making a direct comparison between the past and the present: "Nowadays the railway goes all the way upto Simla, but before the turn of the century it stopped at Kalka." Farrell sets the 1870s—the period when the Empire was in a perfect state of health and security—and fictionalises the manner in which the raging doctrinal debates of the Church of England jolt the foundations of social life in distant Simla. In a time of political well-being, the two sides of a doctrinal controversy which broke out in England are almost violently debated by a tubercular clergyman named, Kingston and his Bishop in Simla. At the very outset of the novel, Dr. McNab gets a foretaste of things to come when he, on his way to Simla with his wife and Emily [his niece], finds Kingston reading Keble's Christian Year. Mr. Lowrie, the owner of Lowrie's Hotels in Simla and Kalka, gives McNab the details of the doctrinal battle: " ... there have been certain difficulties at Saint Saviour's in the past few weeks. The parishioners have been upset by certain rituals of what one would have to call ... a Puseyite cast, quite unknown to our Protestant traditions. Kingston is thought to be ... going 'over the Tiber'... Do I make myself clear?" (*HS*,

p.35). Thus, for Farrell, the so-called *Period of the Great Game' was not totally from anxieties about the disruptions of civil peace. Had Farrell lived to complete this novel, perhaps he would have delineated, more effectively than he does in the completed volumes in the Empire fiction, the manner in which 'the broad living basis of historical events' makes even minor characters "experience the smallest oscillations in this basis as immediate disturbances of their individual lives" (Lukacs 1962:45).

Farrell introduces a "fallen woman"· in both the India-centred novels [Miss Lucy in The Siege of Krishnapur and Mrs Forrester in The Hill Station] not only to stress the real character of the Victorian milieu but also to show how the British social structure bore a close resemblance to the Hindu caste system. In Victorian society, the two groups of women–the pure and the fallen–was almost an absolute category. As George Watt has pointed out, "the fallen woman had no power to assert herself; she had few rights, if any*' (1984:4). The manner in which the 'fallen' Lucy is treated at the Residency by her own compatriots is exactly similar to the way an Indian untouchable is treated by the Brahmins.

> Lucy Hughes provided a problem which the Collector was unable to solve. She was ostracised even by the members of the lowest group, in fact, by everyone except Louise. The charpoy in which she had spread her bedding had been pushed to the very end of the room, beneath the over blast of the open window. It was the only bed that had any space around it, for even Louise's bed, which was next to hers, stood at a small, but eloquent distance (p. 173).

Farrell appears to be suggesting that the inherent hypocrisy of the British assumes respectable forms in times of normalcy and peace while the Mutiny revealed it in all its naked ugliness.

In The Hill Station, Dr. McNab is surprised when Mrs Forrester invites Emily to go with her due to "the rigid caste system among the British in Simla which prevented

social contact between the official and non-official classes" (*HS*, p.36). And Farrell's description of the manner in which Mrs Cloreworthy snubs the 'fallen' Mrs Forrester when the latter extends a courteous greeting is chillingly ironic:

> The lady [Mrs Cloreworthy] turned her face resolutely and quite deliberately to look in another direction, where, as ill-luck would have it, one tattered mongrel had just mounted another and was pumping vigorously, unaware that ladies were in the vicinity (*HS*, p.84).

Perhaps, Farrell's disease fetishism would have found its most fruitful expression in The Hill Station; but, unfortunately it is an unfinished novel. Binns points out that "[T]he real thrust of The Hill Station would seemingly have been less concerned with either religious ritual or social satire than with a development of Farrell's interest in the theme of sickness" (1986:83).[5] In this novel, we find Farrell grappling with a serious attempt at an explanation of the incontestable nexus between human disease and social developments. Throughout this novel, Dr. McNab explores the possibilities of this link:

> McNab had come to sense that there was another dimension to sickness than the one he had considered until now in his writings on specific diseases: this was a moral or a social dimension, he was uncertain even how to define it If you had insisted that he explain to you what he meant and show you his evidence he would have had to admit that all it amounted to, this 'moral dimension', was a conviction based not on objective evidence of the kind he had hitherto always cherished, nor on experiments which could be repeated, not even on experiments of any kind, repeatable or not, but simply on an instinct that *all things were one, that everything was connected, that an illness was merely one of many fruits of an underground plant in the community as a whole. The illnesses propped up, here and there like mushrooms, apparently individual growths but all in fact the fruit of the same plant* (*SH*, p.66)

Again, a little later on, he feels convinced "that just below the surface of what was evident in sickness there lay this moral or social or even spiritual aspect to it which if he could grasp it, would permit him to understand medicine in a more fundamental way" (p.62). And when the consumptive but very austere Bishop Kingston gains a facile victory over the Reverend Grenville [who is 'a good deal heavier and thirty years younger'] in arm-wrestling, Dr. McNab feels certain that it proves his theory "that physical strength is in some way connected with moral strength" and that "illness was all one, its apparent variety being merely the fruits of his 'underground' plant" (p.69). Thus, in The Hill Station, Farrell almost succeeds in locating the essential link between physical illness and external reality.

*The Indian Diary* was written during Farrell's tour of Indian in connection with his researches for The Siege of Krishnapur in 1971 and it contains a series of candid reflections on various aspects of Indian life and of Indian cities, towns and villages. Landing in Bombay, Farrell gets a breath of that *smoky, rubbishy smell' which seemed to be all over Bombay city (*ID*, p. 187) and notes that "the main feeling I had after my first twenty-four hours in India is one of great security due, I think, to the lack of aggressiveness in the people" (Ibid).

*The Indian Diary* is characterised by Farrell's meticulous attention to the minutest of details which is a significant feature of his Empire fiction. Just as The Siege of Krishnapur powerfully evokes the India of 1850s, *The Indian Diary* presents a mirror-image of the India of 1970s where "one sees horrors frequently, in the course of a few minutes—an Anglo-Saxon hippie in a dhoti, arms covered in scabs, stoned out of his mind and really *in extremis*" (p. 188) and "naked children and babies squatting in the dust" while in "the Tea Lounge of the Taj Mahal a group of young Indians [were] talking very loud and possessively about Europe" (Ibid). Farrell is also struck by the beauty of Indian girls in saris: "how wonderfully feminine they look" in comparison with "the

occasionally frost-bitten begum in Knightsbridge or a too pale English girl** (Ibid). Thus, India in *The Indian Diary* is a country where apparent irreconcilables peacefully coexist

Farrell's perception of the ubiquity of heat and dust in India is brilliantly assimilated into the craft of his fiction in the form of recurrent images of heat and dust in The Siege of Krishnapur and The Hill Station. On the train journey to Jaipur, Farrell says that he had 'eaten a bucket of dust' (p. 190). Though the Jaipur bazaar is "not so depressing as in Bombay, there too, plenty of destitutes are huddled in dusty encampments and wasteground" (pp. 190-1).

Critics of Farrell have commented on the affinity between the style of the diary and Empire novels. Spurting writes: "...in the diary one can see ... [Farreirs] sympathies and antipathies, self-doubts, hesitations and moments of atavistic impatience ... so sensitively and humorously explored in fictional characters like the Major in Troubles, Fleury in The Siege of Krishnapur and Matthew in The Singapore Grip" (1981a:ix). Binns also speaks about the "striking parallels between Farrell's fiction and [this] diary, with its comic anecdotes of undignified personal discomfort, its eye for the grotesque and bizarre, and its sense of the diarist's perplexity, frustration and compassion as he moves through a strange, alien and sometimes horrifying land" (1981:30). Farrell gives a graphic description of a Parsi burial:

> A cloud of birds circles over the Towers of Silence where the Parsis expose their dead to be eaten by vultures. The ... bigger vultures can be seen heaving themselves in and out of trees which hide the racks on which the bodies are stretched. In the park it is very pleasant The Indian families stroll in the evening sunshine. In England or America a huge crowd would have formed and someone would be selling tickets (p. 189).

And later when Farrel 1 meets a fat Parsi girl, he finds it "strange to think that she is likely to end as a meal for the vultures in the Towers of Silence" (p. 191). Similar evidences of structural organisation in *The Indian Diary* links it to the fictionalisations of India in The Siege of Krishnapur and The Hill Station. Farrell also touches on those aspects of India that make her *exotic in Indian terms' (p. 194); he describes his 'encounter with a sinister fortune-teller (p. 192) with a touch of playful irony: "He [the fortune-teller] said as a trailer of the coming feature that three ladies were interested in me, one foreign ... When I finally escaped his clutches, he was quite angry and spat ... but perhaps for purely bronchial reasons" (Ibid). Despite the apparent misery of their life, Farrell thinks that "people here don't actually look unhappy. People in England, including Indians, look much more desperate" (p. 193).

Thus, *The Indian Diary,* though it runs only to thirty pages, recaptures an authentic smell of the India of the 1970s. Travelling through the cities of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Patna, Banares, Hardwar etc., Farrell sketches an India where roads and streets 'are constantly crammed' (p. 188), where people organise themselves even in misery (Ibid), where people spit betel juice all over the pavements of cities (p. 189), where swarms of bicycle tongas try to persuade people to ride (p. 192), where tourists are tolerated in the same way as dogs and cows (p. 193), where crowds of maimed or half-blind children peddle their deformities (Ibid), where 'Germans come and go in great busloads' (Ibid), where one has to live with 'the appalling recklessness of the driving' (p. 196), where unscrupulous Europeans use their 'European-ness to scrounge money* from foreigners (p. 197), where superior officers reprimand their subordinates in abusive terms (p. 198), where angry verbal battles on political issues are fought without malice (p.202), where buses go unexpectedly on strike (p.203) and, in short, an India where 'anything is possible' (p.214). *The Indian Diary,* thus, becomes a journey through the heart of India, traversing its edges and centres with equal comprehension and alacrity.

To conclude, Farrell is a great novelist of Empire who has been consistently ignored by critics after his death. His fictional recreations of the decline of imperial power are distinguished by a unique style which is markedly different from the earlier masters of imperial fiction. While the *rhetoric of power* latent in novelists like Kipling, Conrad, Orwell, Forster and Paul Scott was profoundly capable of dismantling the apparent anti-imperialist 'structure of feeling' in their works, Farrell has been able to resist and go beyond the pressures of this rhetoric of power. Farrell's distinctively eclectic fictive imagination fruitfully exploits the realist and anti-realist notions of fictional theory and successfully transcends the limitations of die-hard traditionalism and narrow experimentalism, birthing in the process novelistic masterpieces which are characterised by a judicious blend of realism and symbolism and of history and historical imagination. Farrell's masterful use of the rhetoric of disease to critique the imperial rhetoric of power is undoubtedly unprecedented in the entire body of the literature of imperialism. No other novelist of Empire before Farrell has attempted, in a fundamentally postmodernist fashion, to make the subject of imperialism available for parodic treatment Each volume in the Empire fiction is unique in its own way—**Troubles** is the only experimental novel on the Irish troubles, The Siege of Krishnapur is the only postmodernist novel on the Indian Mutiny, The Singapore Grip is the most ever comprehensive fictional critique of economic imperialism to date and The Hill Station represents the first attempt at writing a non-adventure novel set in the period of the Great Game.

While Farrell successfully goes beyond the Kiplingesque rhetoric of power, it is important to note that his critique of imperialism never degenerates into what Edward Said calls a "rhetoric of blame" (1993:19). In other words, Farrell's novels do not represent direct tirades against the British Empire; they are artistically perfect laughing reflections on the folly, cruelty and indignity of the imperial encounter. Despite his strong antipathy to the imperial enterprise, Farrell's treatment of the disintegrating Empire is fijN of compassion and sympathy. As Victoria Glendinning has aptly put it:

> His [Farrell's] dislike for the tyranny and distortions of colonialism is always apparent, as is his respect for the most hopeless individual .... he has sympathy for those caught up in good faith in a decaying system of Empire—such as the Major in Troubles. Maybe it was this compassionate ambivalence that made him such a good writer (1981:18).

Living in an age where post-colonial rule puts even the colonial exploiter to shame, Farrell's diagnosis of the imperial malaise does not end on a clear note of rosy optimism. At the end of the most ambitious novel in the Empire fiction The Singapore Grip, Farrell discusses a piece of news about underpaying millions of plantation workers even years after the end of British imperialism and significantly, voices his dark misgivings about the independent nations: "... if even after independence in these Third World countries, it is *still* like that, then something has gone wrong, that some other, perhaps native elite has merely replaced the British" (*SG*,p.567) and immediately, Farrell recalls a remark "about King William and the boatman who asked who had won the battle ['What's it to you? You will still be a boatman.']" (p.568). Though Farrell felt that it was still too early to see the fruits of freedom from imperial domination, his Empire fiction clearly expresses the hope that the end of British Empire would be ultimately beneficial to humanity at large because, as the dying novelist, Reagan says in A Man From Elsewhere, "the relationship between master and servant is a crime against the liberty and dignity of man" (p.55).

Viewed from a contemporary global perspective, though a span of fifteen to twenty years has passed since its writing, Farrell's Empire fiction still holds a significant relevance to the realities of the present. Despite the high-sounding rhetoric of international peace, the fact that the unprecedented proliferation of conventional and nuclear arms continues to hold the world in a constant threat of war for economic and political power and the consistently unashamed use of the rhetoric of power by neo-colonialist countries like America has become more alarmingly widespread than ever serves to make Farrell's

critique of the rhetoric of power exceedingly pertinent today. As Said puts it in the context of his analysis of Conrad's Nostromo:

> Much of the rhetoric of the 'New World Order' promulgated by the American government since the end of the Cold War—with its redolent self-congratulation, its unconcealed triumphalism, its grave proclamations of responsibility—might have been scripted by Conrad's Holroyd: we are number one, we are bound to lead, we stand for freedom and order and so on. No American has been immune from this structure of feeling ... Yet it is a rhetoric whose most damning characteristic is that it has been used before, not just once [by Spain and Portugal] but with deafeningly repetitive frequency in the modern period, by the British, the French, the Belgians, the Japanese, the Russians, and now the Americans (1993:xviii-ix).

Viewed against the backdrop of this global scenario, exposure to and study of Farrell's fictional discourse on imperialism would not only improve interaction between different cultures but also help to stem the tide of aggressive neo-colonialism. It is this profound concern with abiding issues of universal significance that gives Farrell's Empire fiction its characteristic tone and appeal and perhaps, ensures that a future of peaceful co-existence based on timeless principles of human dignity and equality will ultimately come to pass.

## *Notes*

1. In his book **Inventing India (1992),** R. **J.** Crane's **primary** concern is to show how India has been invented and re-invented by novelists of Empire from Kipling to Farrell and Manohar Malgonkar.

2. Critics like Margaret Drabble, Malcolm **Dean,** Elizabeth **Bowen,** Timothy Mo, Julian **Symons** and John Spurling have considered **Farrell's** completed novels. However, it may be noted that **R.J.Crane** has devoted some pages to the discussion of **The Hill Station** in **Inventing India: The History of India in English-Language Fiction (1992).**

3. Bhupal Singh's **A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction** (1934), Allen. Greenberger's **The British Image of India** (1969), Patrick Brantlinger's **Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914** (1988), **Avrom** Fleishman's **The English Historical Novel: From Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf (1971)** and more recently, David Rubin's **After the Raj: British Novels of India Since 1947** (1987), D.C.R.A **Goonetilleke's Images of the Raj: South Asia in the Literature of the Empire** (1988) and Sujit Mukherjee's **Forster and Further (1993)** are the most important studies of British historical fiction.

4. Burjorjee has left out Manohar Malgonkar's novel on the Mutiny **The Devil's Wind** (1972) and consequently his description of ' inferior writers' applies only to the other five novels: Norman Partington **Flow Red the Ganges (1971),** William **Clive Dando on Delhi Ridge (1971),** James Leasor **Follow the Drum (1973),** Lesley **Blanch, The Nine-Tiger Man (1975),** and **George McDonald Fraser Flashman in the Great Game** (1975). **It** is interesting to note that two of these Mutiny novels were published in **the** same year as **that of The Siege of Krishnapur** while two other were published two years after it

5. Critics have expressed widely varying views as to what would have been the central thematic thrust of **The Hill Station** had **Farrell** lived to complete **it** Paul Theroux argues that social and religious ritual would have been the main theme of the novel **(1981:42)** while Spurling holds that **"religion** was to have been the main burden of the **The Hill Station" (1981:154).**

6. Crane writes: "It was only in the 1980s, with the publication of J. G. **Farrell's,** sadly, unfinished novel **The Hill Station,** that this period [between 1858 and **1900]** was treated in a way which transcends the romantic adventure tradition with which it has so long and almost exclusively been associated (1992:56).

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