

One of the century's leading novelists is the subject of a perceptive study by Andrew Wright of Ohio State



ANDREW WRIGHT

Wright appraises Cary

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JOYCE CARY: A PREFACE TO HIS NOVELS by Andrew Wright. Harper and Bros., 1958. Pp. 186, \$4.50.

JOYCE CARY, perhaps principally known as the creator of the robust and vital rogue artist, Gulley Jimson, in *The Horse's Mouth*, is an English novelist whose reputation has grown steadily during recent years both with the literary critics and reading public. Like Joseph Conrad, Cary's writing career had a late beginning and an even later flowering. Although he published ten short stories

in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1920 (Cary was born in 1888), he did not publish anything further until his first novel *Aissa Saved*, came out in 1932. And it was many years later before he was read at all widely in the United States. However, by the time of Cary's death in 1957, he was recognized as one of the century's leading novelists. We are fortunate in having so soon an evaluation as thorough and discerning as *Joyce Cary: A Preface to His Novels*.

Professor Wright, a member of the English Department of the Ohio State University, had the invaluable experience of working closely with Cary during the last year of Cary's life and "learned in a general way how to read his works better." The author, thus, "came to have a sense of the personality behind the novels" and tells us that "affection for

the man and understanding of his work have grown out of one another." This sympathetic relationship between the young American scholar and the older English novelist gives the book much of its particular flavor and value. "For nearly six months I went daily to his house in Parks Road. He gave me his study on the second floor to work in; he gave me permission to use anything I found . . . I have made a good deal of use of the literary and biographical materials which turned up; that I was able to use them freely is, I understand, not only unusual but almost unique: most people conceal or withhold some at least of the facts. Cary did not."

This study is very careful and thorough in covering the whole canon of Cary's published work with enlightening and just critical appraisals of his political writings, poetry, short stories, novels of Africa, novels of childhood, chronicle novels, and, especially, the two trilogies. There are also comments on the great amount of unpublished material which includes two plays, many short stories and essays, and "millions of words of novels and fragments of novels."

"Character First"

In a chapter titled *The World as Character*, there is stressed Cary's belief in the importance of character in the novel. Referring to his first trilogy (*Herself Surprised*, *To Be a Pilgrim*, and *The Horse's Mouth*), Cary wrote "the books had to be soaked in character . . . whether to stick to my scheme, or to stick to character, the character as felt and known in the book, I stuck to my rule, which was character first." Professor Wright shows that although Cary has often been called Dickensian because of

his richness of invention, Cary (unlike Dickens with his vast gallery of eccentrics) "portrays again and again the same three people." Thus, throughout his work we find "the man who rejoices in freedom" (Dick Bonser, Gulley Jimson, Chester Nimmo), "the man attached to the past" (Tom Wilcher, Jim Latter, Cock Jarvis), and the Blakeian female "mediating between these opposites" (Aissa, Sara Monday, Ella Venn).

The chapter *The Inevitable Style* is a brilliant and careful explication of the two famous trilogies and Cary's success in the use of first person narrative. "He can suit the words to the character so justly that in the novels of the two trilogies there are six styles: six metaphorical structures, six schemes of syntax, six kinds of interior monologue—indeed, six worlds." In the first trilogy, the interrelated and contrasting characters write or dictate their memoirs: the cook, Sara Monday, writes in jail the story of *Herself Surprised*; the lawyer, Thomas Wilcher, explains himself in *To Be a Pilgrim*; and the artist, Gulley Jimson, is dictating from a hospital bed his story in *The Horse's Mouth*. In the political trilogy, there are three *apologias* with Nina Latter giving her version in *Prisoner of Grace*, Chester Nimmo his in *Except the Lord*, and Jim Latter his in *Not Honour More*.

Professor Wright has modestly used the word "Preface" in his subtitle. The book is that, of course, but fortunately, it is a great deal more. This perceptive study is not only an excellent introduction to the reader who is just beginning the fascinating experience of reading Cary, but it also is a helpful guide to the Cary *aficionado* in his further reading.