

## The Man Who Subdued a Gift

*"The Journals of Jean Cocteau," edited and translated by Wallace Fowlie (Criterion, 205 pp. \$6), brings together the random ideas of one of the most intelligent living Frenchmen. Here it is reviewed by Henri Peyre of Yale.*

By Henri Peyre

JEAN COCTEAU likes to call himself the most misunderstood of men. He is indeed, and especially in this country. Yet few living writers have explained themselves more disarmingly, lifting all the masks or putting on grimacing ones in order to bring out their faults through caricaturing themselves. His recent election to the French Academy, at the relatively early age of sixty-six, failed to turn him into a pontiff of that weary wisdom which is abdication. He delivered one of the most courageous and unacademic speeches ever heard under the august cupola. His admirers continue to expect from Cocteau—probably, with Malraux and Sartre, one of the three most intelligent Frenchmen alive today—the supreme and polished masterpiece in which he would conveniently sum up for posterity his life's work and give unity to his Protean facets. Such a masterpiece, which Cocteau will not compose (for, like Picasso and Stravinsky with whom his name is linked, he is variety itself), might have been his memoirs.

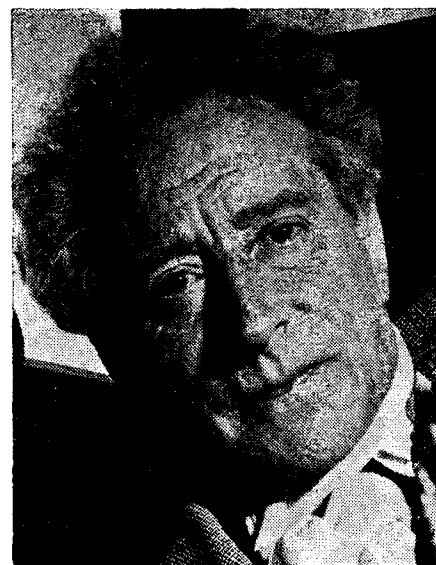
But he is too discreet, too aristocratic, and also too generous to indulge in confessions like those of Rousseau, whom he admires, or of Gide, whom he disturbed, for Cocteau effortlessly, unassumingly, surpassed the older writer in sincerity. He has given only several fragments of avowals, reminiscences, tributes to his friends, generous acknowledgments of influences submitted, elliptic and profound maxims on art. We are not likely ever to have bulky and often dreary journals of Cocteau similar to those of Gide.

The one slim volume in which, at the age of fifty-six, having suddenly discovered that he was probably "over the bridge," he related his career under the title "La Difficulté d'être" glides too expertly over abysses to afford us a true picture of Cocteau

by Cocteau. That "difficulté d'être" which Fontenelle, at the age of ninety-nine, confessed to a lady he was beginning to experience, has accompanied Cocteau throughout his life. He has always shunned habits and considered, with Stravinsky, that to spurn habits is the sole way to keeping art from stagnating. Non-conformity itself may become a habit and a trickery. Cocteau, who has written the most brilliant pages on Picasso's genius, well knows that only a Picasso can afford to surprise us unceasingly and to make a habit of spurning habits. He is more modest. But, to all the gift that playful fairies lavished on his cradle, Cocteau added that of self-discipline hidden under fantasy and humor. "To subdue a gift is the first duty of the man who finds he has that gift," he declares—and he has been true to his precept.

"The Journals of Jean Cocteau," excellently translated and interpreted in a subtle preface by Wallace Fowlie, are one of the most elegant and of the richest in content of the books from France to have been offered to the American public in years. The fragments of which the volume is made up are discontinuous; but, and wisely, they do not display Cocteau at his most versatile and stress the gravity of the moralist behind the *enfant terrible*. "New Yorkers and Parisians," appealed Cocteau in his "Lettre aux Américains," "is it my fault if you do not have my agility and if you treat me as an acrobat?" A number of revelations on his films, on his conception of the theatre, on his novels, on his ephemeral alliances with one or another Parisian group will be found in the volume. The pages on Diaghilev and the Russian ballets of 1911-1913, which made the true Cocteau become himself, on Stravinsky, and on Picasso (perhaps even on Radiguet, whom Cocteau overrated) vibrate with emotion.

The more general remarks on taste, on beauty, on life in general are no less precious and deserve the respect with which writers like Edith Sitwell have surrounded them. The man, whose myth has too often made him a fashionable playboy and an expert dressmaker of ideas, appears in this volume in his true stature: a superb intellect, but one that feeds on a tender and dangerously big heart.



Jean Cocteau—"... a superb intellect."

## Proust's Way

*"Nostalgia," by Milton L. Miller, M. D. (Houghton Mifflin, 306 pp. \$4), is a psychoanalyst's interpretation of the connection between the writer and his writing. Our reviewer is Professor D. W. Alden of Princeton's modern language department.*

By D. W. Alden

DR. MILTON L. MILLER, a practicing psychoanalyst with considerable professional prominence, has written a study of Proust entitled "Nostalgia" with the urbanity of a gentleman of letters, offering an example, only too rare in this country, of a man of science who has time for deeper literary perceptions.

At first one wonders what a psychoanalyst can tell us about Proust's nature which is not already known. For the past few years, after the revelations of Marie-Anne Cochet, Massis, Vigneron, and finally Maurois (Dr. Miller seems not to have read the first three), Proust has had no secrets left: his homosexuality is now a common subject of drawing-room conversation and it is an oft-repeated theory that he wrote his great novel as a vindication of himself because of a feeling of guilt towards his mother. Dr. Miller has no new facts to add to the case, and he is to be commended for not dramatizing the known facts.

His psychoanalytic interpretation is based on one other known fact which previously did not seem to have unusual importance: Proust's love for his brother Robert. The medical diagnosis

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## Our Changing World

AT THE beginning of a New Year, which as far as practical matters are concerned starts with the President's Address to Congress in the second week of January, it is difficult to resist the temptation to glance over one's shoulder at the errors we have committed, the dangers we have avoided, and to look forward with a little hope. Since we discovered in 1914 that we could not build a Great Wall around America, we have engaged in the leadership and defense of the whole Western world—also, now, the Middle East. Our domestic situation is a gigantic paradox, for both World Wars and the fear of a third have been stimulants to steadily increasing prosperity and military power. Max Lerner, in *The American Scholar*, writes that, "If man today is doomed for tomorrow, he shows a strange up-welling of energy and bounce. Surely history offers no parallel to the paradox of a prevailing sense of doom accompanied by a far-reaching ferment in new techniques and conceptions of our culture and society. If man is candidate for a corpse, then the about-to-be corpse is showing the most heterodox stirrings of vitality."

We are in the strange situation of having almost everything we have wanted and, indeed, more than we need—with the exception of a more tranquil life. Optimism, an admirable trait that is part of our legacy from pioneer ancestors, inherent in the American people in and out of depressions and world wars, was echoed by President Eisenhower's Message to Congress. "In the last year," he said, "this tide [the persistent search for the self-respect of authentic sovereignty] has changed the

pattern of attitudes and thinking among millions. . . . In the main, today's expressions of nationalism are, in spirit, echoes of our forefathers' struggle for independence." Another American characteristic is an eagerness to share our prosperity with poverty-stricken nations, whether our calculated generosity consists of sending abroad millions of tons of food or billions of dollars to bolster depleted treasuries in an attempt to help backward countries rise from medievalism to the abundance and ease possible in the twentieth century.

No one seems to be deeply concerned with the fact that we are also spending millions in shipping tanks, war planes, and other lethal weapons abroad to small nations in the hope that if war comes they will have the sense to aim them in the right direction. From this side of the fence it seems preposterous that any country lying between the gigantic armaments of the East and the West should join the Communist bloc at a time when the revolution in Hungary, and Poland's milder effort to gain some measure of freedom, have revealed the harsh rule in Russia's satellites.

There is another aspect of our situation which we should deal with during the New Year. There still are glaring contrasts between prosperity and poverty not only in the undeveloped regions of the world but also in our own country, where, according to Eugene R. Black, "There are still whole counties where a majority is undernourished and two-thirds without running water in their homes." There are appalling slums in our flourishing cities in the North as well as the South. Wealth, whether it is exported or remains at home, breeds

wealth. "In recent years," Mr. Black adds, "the tremendous growth of United States economy has also made this country a net importer of increasing quantities and an increasing range of raw materials vital to modern industry. It draws heavily on the resources of the undeveloped lands for such commodities as copper, petroleum, iron ore, manganese, and uranium. As a result, the products of Latin America, Asia, and Africa are now shipped to the United States to the value of about 6 billion a year, and in the first half of the last year they filled one-half of the country's import basket. . . . The importance of the undeveloped lands as a market for the industrialized countries is also great and can be expected to grow further."

It was obvious that during the last year there was a remarkable decrease in our fear of nuclear war, with the exception of that ominous week of the "invasion" of Egypt by Israel, France, and England, when it was possible to conceive that Russian armies might march into the Arab kingdoms or send "volunteers" to defend the Suez Canal. The outer world then had reason to be alarmed. We did not know until later that an American fleet, armed with atomic weapons, was sent into the Mediterranean. It is useless to invent nightmares, but there remains one alarming question: Will the Communist dictators in Moscow, faced in the future with revolution in the satellites and in Russia itself, prefer the risk of war to their own extinction?

NINETEEN fifty-six was not a memorable time for American fiction, for there were few if any novels which will endure, or even be remembered through the New Year. Often clever, amusing, slightly shocking, or satirical, like "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," they climbed up and down the ladders of newspaper best-seller lists with considerable agility. There were a few exceptions—for example, Mr. O'Connor's "The Last Hurrah" or Mr. Brinkley's naval comedy, "Don't Go Near the Water." There were no books by Faulkner, Hemingway, or James Jones, and few by the familiar post-war writers Elizabeth Janeway calls "reporters, come-outers, reformers."

If our novels have fallen by the wayside, the last year has brought us a flood of excellent non-fiction books, history, biography, technology, science, religion, travel, literary criticism, poetry, etc. Apparently, in a time of stress and vast changes in the structure of society, the American public still insists on knowing what kind of a world we are living in.

—H. S.