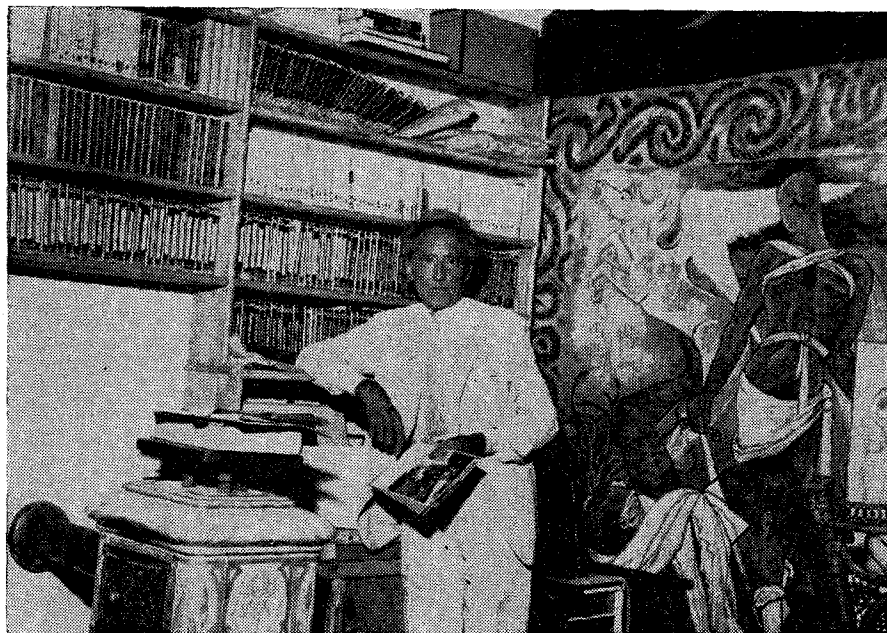


Apollo's Son Is Seventy



Jean Cocteau in his Cap Ferrat home . . . his private life, his masterpiece. —Pic.

"The Hand of a Stranger," by Jean Cocteau; translated by Alec Brown (Horizon Press. 187 pp. \$3.95), is a miscellany of reflections, from the famed Frenchman's vast storehouse of knowledge and experience. In celebration of Cocteau's seventieth birthday, SR has asked Robert Phelps, author of *"Heroes and Orators,"* to review the many-faceted career of one of this century's most versatile men.

By Robert Phelps

IF ARISTOTLE was right when he said that production is the artist's form of virtue, then Jean Cocteau is blessed. July 5th will mark his seventieth birthday; 1959 is the fiftieth anniversary of his first book. Therefore he now stands with half a century's output behind him, and an output, moreover, whose variety no other artist has ever approached. As Auden once pointed out, his collected works would require not only a five-foot shelf, but a warehouse. I cannot, off-hand, think of any expressive medium into which he has not ventured.

Certainly he has used every existing form of the printed word: verse, novels, diaries, criticism, biography, open letters, libretti, prefaces, aphorisms,

book reviews, newspaper articles of every kind. He has also written for the stage, the screen, the cabaret. He has etched, painted, illustrated; made sculpture, murals, tapestries; decorated houses, a chapel in Villefranche, the mayor's hall in Menton. He has made phonograph records, composed ballets, and designed everything from scenery and costumes to store windows and Christmas cards. In his own person, he has acted, sung, recited, improvised on lecture platforms, and delivered formal discourses to *l'Académie française*, *l'Académie belge*, and Oxford University. And though he has never entered the bull ring, he has sat with a matador's *montera* over his knees and written a lyric account of his empathy.

In addition to all of this, there has been his not very private life, which someone once called his masterpiece, and which Cocteau himself has resourcefully recreated in much of his work. He has never written a real autobiography, but the best, and most permanent core of his *oeuvre* is probably the auto-mythology which he has been composing since 1913. Other writers—for instance, Colette—have drawn intimately upon their personal lives, and worn literary masks modeled closely upon their own features. Cocteau has done something else. Out

of his successive crises and scandals—a quarrel with Stravinsky, the death of Radiguet, an opium cure, a flying visit to America—he has metamorphosed a sort of running parable about the Orphic vocation, the whole mystery, risk, and inner morality of being a poet.

Now, traditionally, a poet is the watcher and commemorator of others. It is the passion of Paris, or the wrath of Achilles, from which he makes his song. In Cocteau, we have Orpheus on Orpheus. His personal history as a Parisian Pied Piper and Jack-of-all-arts has been the raw material for a nimble and sagacious myth about all poets—even better, about any creature whose awareness and daylight self are at the service of an inner vision, a dark angel, that sovereign source which Cocteau calls simply *poésie*, but which might also be called the Kingdom of Heaven. His Orpheus can therefore enlighten not only other poets, but any innerly dedicated man.

In France this week Cocteau will be justly acclaimed and praised. He has even embossed the event with a new film of his own, about the life and work of Jean Cocteau. Unfortunately, all we have to celebrate with here in America is a doubtlessly well-meant, but deplorably poor translation of his *"Journal d'un Inconnu"* (*"Journal of an Unknown Man"*). Originally published in 1953, it is a characteristic miscellany of aphorisms, notes, mythic gossip, and self-avowal. In Cocteau's version, it embodies a vivid, wise, vulnerable voice, perhaps a little pettish here and there, but always passionate and alive. In the version, which Alec Brown has pointlessly called *"The Hand of a Stranger,"* it cannot be recommended to anyone. Apart from gross errors of meaning, it makes Cocteau utter a brutally ungainly English which wholly traduces the ariel verve his least sentence imparts in French.

READING it, in fact, made me wonder if maybe the best way to wish Cocteau a Happy Birthday this year might not be to ask for volunteers among our own best writers to act as a watchdog committee in matters of his English rendering from now on. Gide once said every serious writer owed his language at least one translation. I think he also owes it sentinelship against bad translations. To this end, I hereby nominate Miss Rosamond Lehmann of Great Britain, and Mr. Glenway Wescott of the U.S., to serve as transatlantic guardians of Cocteau in English, and earnestly urge publishers to consult one or both when any future translation is under consideration.

FICTION

"Ossian's Ride," by Fred Hoyle (Harper. 244 pp. \$3), written by a well-known astronomer, combines science fiction and suspense with the elements of a leisurely ramble through the Irish countryside. Poet and critic Padraic Colum, who edited "A Treasury of Irish Folklore," compares the story to Irish mythology.

By Padraic Colum

I HAD thought of Fred Hoyle as a scientific writer with a nostalgia for outer space. Hadn't he referred with a certain attachment (in "The Nature of the Universe," I think) to a white dwarf, unrecognized and unnamed, far out in the galaxy, that is the begetter of the earth and the planets, and that was once the companion of the star who is our sun? But when I open his latest book (non-astronomical) I find the pages strewn with names of villages in which I have refreshed myself with tea and home-made bread: Arvagh, Ballinagh, places around Lough Gowna. And I find our wandering hero passing "Tipperary" its west side with the intention of skirting the Galty mountains. My intention was to keep south until I reached a point a little below Fermoy and then at last swing sharply to the west." One could go on a hike through a great part of Ireland using "Ossian's Ride" as a guidebook. It is the Ireland of 1970 with the mysterious city, Caragh, in the southwest, and in the east an unrecognizably developing Dublin. But fortunately for the storyteller, these are the only modernistic impasses. In the rest of Ireland the roads are as they were for bards and tinkers.

Why this story of the attempt to discover the secret of an unprecedented productivity is called "Ossian's Ride" is something to guess at. Ossian or Oisín is the hero of an early narrative poem of Yeats's, "The Wanderings of Oisín." He rides over the sea to the land of youth in company with an immortal woman, Niav. Is Cathleen, who accompanies the hero part of his way to the wonderful Caragh, Niav? Or is it Fanny, who reveals the incommunicable secret of the I.C.E. (Industrial Corporation, Eire)? Frankly, I can't make out. I know that Caragh has been given the glamour of Ossian's island. "Something strange, but real, the city of the third millennium, the city of the future."

Science fiction, I realized as I read "Ossian's Ride," is bound to draw towards mythology: As the science-fictionist takes us away from the world and the elements we know, he is bound to evoke the transcendental that, by whatever name he gives it, is mythological. On the edge of a strand in Kerry, the young Cambridge scientist, Thomas Sherwood, shows Fanny that he knows her origin and hears her speak of catastrophe-encircled beings who could deal with a thousand million units of information. He has gone through a land that has still a coating of legend. He has been assailed by agents of an unprecedented industrial enterprise and by racketeers who are putting some of the formulae of that enterprise upon a black market. He wins through to the knowledge of the secret of the enterprise—but much good that knowledge will do the government that set him on the quest. It is because he is psychically attuned to a mysterious landscape that intuitions come to him that enable him to approach the knowledge of the secret that has baffled the scientific espionage of Britain, Russia, and the United States.

From the upper slopes of Mullaghbeg I lay on a rocky ledge watching the ever-changing swell of the sea breaking endlessly over richly colored rocks. My fingers touched the rough boulder and in an instant the memory of the appalling descent of the crags of Inishtooskert became alive again. Like the island itself, the solitary memory reared up sharp and clear out of a sea of oblivion. . . . I knew that in some subtle respect, one that I could put no name to, I had been changed. Something was different in me, and my agitation of mind was not decreased by a sense of mysterious uncertainty.

It is this curious blending of the psychic with the look of a countryside that has enabled Fred Hoyle to write science fiction that in "Ossian's Ride" is unusual.



ROMAN FEVER: The real hero of Alexis Curvers's odd but eloquent Belgian novel, "Tempo di Roma" (translated by Edward Hyams; McGraw-Hill, \$4.50), is the city of Rome. A North European named Jimmy wanders to

the Eternal City and waits at its threshold because chance has set him down there. His first bed in Rome is the front seat of an automobile in a garage. One morning he oversleeps and wakes up to hear the proprietor of the garage voice a need for someone who speaks German. Quickly pulling himself together, he starts the car, addresses a "Bitte schön. Danke schön" to its owner, and is hired as a tourist guide. As he learns his trade, he makes some strange acquaintances—a sixteen-year-old girl whom he wants to marry, her suspicious mother, a friendly chauffeur who wants to marry the mother, a blustering American, an eccentric marchioness, her gigolo, and an English remittance-man who nurses a smoldering passion for Jimmy. What passes for a plot makes few demands on these people because, like Jimmy, they have a way of tumbling into their destiny.

Fortunately, the novel is saved by its warm and enthusiastic account of the glories of Rome. This subject permeates the plot. Rome is the name Jimmy gives his girl; it is the only passion the Englishman has besides Jimmy himself. But, what is more important, Jimmy's job as a guide gives him every opportunity for a prolonged, rapturous study of the bright, spacious, well-ordered Eternal City. He takes his charges to the Colosseum, the Palazzo di Venezia, Trajan's Column, St. Peter's, the Sistine Chapel, and he comments on them more memorably and more personally than any guidebook. The city itself is infinitely more alive on these pages than anything the novelist has created.

—HENRY POPKIN.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 837

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 837 will be found in the next issue.

KCAFDHGL BG LEH

MKFDBPBAN CQ LEH

PBNEL CQ GCRHPHBNALT

OT RBKLCPT.

—ECOOHG.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 836

Take away the self-conceited, and there will be elbow-room in the world.

—WHICHCOTE.