

PLAYBOY AFTER HOURS



books

As we go to press, the spiritual leader of the Night People is looking for a sponsor. His name is Jean Shepherd, and he is (or was) the wee-hours d.j. of New York's WOR. "There's a great body of people who flower at night," according to Shepherd, "for night is the time people truly become individuals." Such folk, says he, "are embattled against the official, organized, righteous Day People who are completely bound by their switchboards and their red tape." Shaking the Day People from their smug complacency is the dearest joy of the Night People, and to this noble end, Shepherd and his night-owl listeners recently conspired in creating a mythical historical novel by a non-existent author. Bookstore clerks (archetypal Day People), when asked by Shepherd-inspired Night People for *I, Libertine*, by Frederick R. Ewing, consulted their all-powerful lists and haughtily informed the Night People that no such book or author existed. Their faith in Dayism was shattered when (a) requests for the tome poured in to bookstores in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Paris and Helsinki; (b) a Pennsylvania d.j. interviewed British-accented author "Ewing" over the air; (c) the title cropped up in the Books-to-be-Published section of *The New York Times Book Review*; (d) the Catholic Legion of Decency banned it; (e) a confirmed Day Person (sub-species Librarian) found a card for the book in the index of the Philadelphia Public Library (in the corner of the card appeared the strange device *Excelsior*, a favorite Shepherd battle-cry); and (f) 25,000 copies of the book

itself miraculously appeared in bookstores everywhere.

This crowning touch was the eleventh-hour brainstorm of late-listening publisher Ian Ballantine. As we understand it, Mr. B was fascinated by the hoax and recklessly confided to Shepherd that he'd publish the book if only someone would write it. Shepherd's crony, science-fictioneer Ted Sturgeon, said, "I'll write it!"—and he did, in 30 days. Shepherd, heavily disguised as Frederick R. Ewing, appears on the back cover of the hoax-that-became-reality, and although it unfortunately reads like the rush job it was, *I, Libertine* (Ballantine, 35c paper; \$2 hardbound) is a memorable collectors' item and a tribute to that cult of night-blooming non-conformists in which PLAYBOY proudly claims membership. Maybe by the time we hit the newsstands Jean will have found a sympathetic sponsor. We hope so, but if not, let's raise a cry to restore the High Priest of Nightism to office. All together, now: *Excelsior!*

A husky percentage of mad dogs and Englishmen may go out in the midday sun, but British critic V. S. Pritchett prefers the foggy days in London town. You can see for yourself in *The Sailor, Sense of Humour and Other Stories* (Knopf, \$4.50), in which the distinguished Pritchett wheels out a tram-full of bizarre, back-alley Jamesian-named blokes like Hubert Timberlake and Mr. Pocock. In this best of all possible worlds where people are "popping" in and out of the sack, Pritchett describes in his penetrating style the laughable Mr. Phillimore who "suggested the frantic, yelping disorganized expression of a copulating dog," a minister's daughter who asks "... when you've lived with someone for ten years, and he pays the rent and keeps you, he is your husband, isn't he?" plus a wide assortment of other fantastic fauna. Pritchett's slogan might well be

taken from the title of one of his own stories: *You Make Your Own Life*.

Among the paperbacks: the Army reminiscences of PLAYBOY cartoonist Shel Silverstein may be sampled via his cunningly-titled *Grab Your Socks!* for which Bill Mauldin wrote the intro (Ballantine, 35c) ... "The power to amuse and, if possible, to fascinate": this is the yardstick *New Republic's* stringent Eric Bentley has used in selecting five plays from *the American Drama* (Anchor, \$1.25). Saroyan and Wilder are included, but O'Neill, Odets, Miller and Williams are not: the chosen plays (among them Fitch's *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines* and Langdon Mitchell's *The New York Idea*) "move," according to Bentley, "with the swing of the American life-rhythm." Nicest surprise: the libretto of *Guys and Dolls*, picked because "possibly it is the best of all American musical comedies" and because "musical comedy is today the most lively part of the American theatre."

The cohabitative habits of the denizens of the deltas are reported in 21 *Gulf Coast Stories* (Little, Brown, \$3.50) by the old master, Erskine Caldwell. Here are 248 pages of adolescents and sex, suicide and sex, child brides and sex, etc., indited in the broad, stagey style that has become associated with the author of *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*. Two of the tales first saw the light of day in PLAYBOY.

To enjoy Margaret Crosland's *Jean Cocteau* (Knopf, \$5), a biography of the fiery darling of the fashionable arts, you don't have to be familiar with the galaxy of odd-ball talents that has kept the avant garde sky of Europe luridly lit these past 40 years—but it sure helps. It also helps, and may even be a requisite, to have some prior interest in Cocteau and his works, because this is a sobersides