



Jean Cocteau (Critical Lives)

James S. Williams

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From the magical *Beauty and the Beast* to the surreal *Orpheus* films, Jean Cocteau is renowned as a leading figure in European cinema as well as a creative force collaborating with artists as diverse as Picasso, Diaghilev and Edith Piaf. Yet Cocteau's work and life have rarely been examined together. Evaluating Cocteau's career and his fascinating personal life on equal terms, James S. Williams offers here a groundbreaking analysis that sets them both within highly revealing historical and artistic contexts. James S. Williams' biographical investigation of this poet, dramatist, novelist, designer, and filmmaker centres around Cocteau's constant self-questioning and how it permeated his work. From Cocteau's work in fashion and photography to his formal experimentation, to his extensive collaborations with male friends and lovers, the book charts the complex and unpredictable evolution of his work and aesthetic. Williams argues that Cocteau's body of work is best viewed as an ethical, erotic project of aesthetics that carries important ramifications for our contemporary understanding of being and subjectivity. An engaging and wholly accessible account, "Jean Cocteau" is essential reading for all those fascinated by the man and his unforgettable work.

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