

KOESTLER

1964

"The act of creation"

envisioned by our predecessors, the government plans to involve every member of society in the educational process," says Austin McCaffrey, executive director of the American Textbook Publishers Institute. If the logistics of supplying this huge market for "culture" is shifting from the printed page to the spoken word, publishers would like to get cut in on the bounty.

I have the feeling, however, that publishers don't entirely believe their own arguments. The history of subsidiary rights has been one of tending to increase rather than diminish the market for the original product. A movie made from a book will often revive the sale of the book itself. Quality TV programs create readers as well as viewers. And since I have the unpopular notion that 10,000 words still tell us more than one picture, I'm convinced that viewers will eventually want to investigate the words. An expanded program of educational broadcasting is bound, in the long run, to stimulate reading.

The issue is a good deal more clear-cut in the field of xerographic reproduction. "The basic question is whether the owners of these mechanical devices should be given free use of the printed works which they utilize," the Publishers Council contends. "If such free use were allowed, obviously the number of purchasers of printed works would be so reduced that the incentive to create the published work would be virtually destroyed." An example: A school reproduces all the charts, maps, and reference data needed for a given course from a single source. The original market for thirty-five copies of the book, in this case, has shrunk to one. The effect on total sales is obvious. Publishers would like to see both computerized and xerographic material considered "a new use of literary property" and, as such, subject to copyright.

Under a plan put forth by a committee of librarians and publishers, photocopiers would be required to pay into a central office a monthly or annual fee based on the number of pages photographed, the fund thereupon to be distributed among the copyright holders. This is essentially what ASCAP does for musicians whose records play the disk-jockey and jukebox circuit, and it has proved a practical, not to say profitable, system.

The copyright revisions, which have not yet been voted out of committee, are attempts to resolve the conflict between the printing press and its electronic competitors. It is a difficult problem at best, but the public would do well to remember that authors aren't about to donate their talents to a machine, and that publishers are funny people when it comes to money. They like it.

—DAVID DEMPSEY.

## Man and His Strange Imaginings



—Camera Press (Pix).

Arthur Koestler—the "two cultures" question and reflect each other.

*The Act of Creation*, by Arthur Koestler (Macmillan, 751 pp. \$7.95), argues that all creativity arises from a process of "bisociation." Elizabeth Janeway's latest novel is "Accident."

By ELIZABETH JANEWAY

HERE is Arthur Koestler's magnum opus. No politics here from the author of *Darkness at Noon*, but instead the human mind and how it works, or, as the dustjacket puts it, "A study of the conscious and unconscious processes of humor, scientific discovery and art." It's a large order, certainly. How well is Koestler equipped to handle it? Some scientists (notably Britain's Nobel Prize-winner P. B. Medawar) answer, "Not very well." English reviewers on the humanistic side, however, were impressed, while philosopher-scientist Stephen Toulmin sums up his impressions in a recent issue of *Encounter* by saying that "a substantial amount of novel and illuminating material [is] flawed by the . . . aspiration to be all-embracing."

This seems to me to strike near home, and yet to give Koestler not quite enough credit for what he has accomplished. Leaving out Koestler's theory (I'll come to it in a minute), his book is a valuable compendium of psychological and scientific information for the

layman. Koestler has really undertaken to tie together C. P. Snow's "two cultures" and let them question and reflect each other. He's done it, moreover, without Snow's own pomposity, with a good deal of humor, and with an attractive common sense that will take the average reader a considerable distance with him. This is a readable popularization of a great deal of reasonably up-to-date material on man at work in studying and conquering his environment, and on the physiological bases for patterns of thought and action. It is a popularization, moreover, that is not a vulgarization. Koestler has digested a mass of material and he has no doubt oversimplified here and there, but he does not write down to his readers, and his own interest keeps the reader's curiosity alive.

As for Koestler's theory—well. Without the theory I suppose he wouldn't have written the book, nor, in fact, been able to write it, for such a compendium demands some thesis to organize it and give it a structure. In brief, Koestler is arguing that all creativity, whether physiological or psychological, whether that of the jester or the poet, the mathematician or the physicist or the salamander growing a new tail, arises from a process of "bisociation"—that is, of leaping outside the orthodox rules of functioning or thinking, and marrying together two hitherto separate techniques. A chimpanzee sees that a pole he has used in his play can become a tool to pull food within his reach. Gutenberg, watching the winepress, imagines a press that brings type down on paper instead of squeezing juice from grapes. Newton's apple turns into the earth forever tumbling around the sun. And finally (or perhaps originally), it is only by sexual union that new individuals, the product of a combination of genes contributed by mother and father, can be formed.

AT this point, one can hardly blame the scientists for feeling that Koestler has extended his theory so far that it has become meaningless, that truism has taken over from truth. And though I am too ignorant either to dispute or to agree to the application of Koestler's theory on the scientific side, I find his treatment of the processes of art unsatisfactory in rather the same way.

Koestler, that is, doesn't say anything untrue about the way the artist or writer or composer works; his generalizations are valid. But he seems to miss the point.



Why, for instance, is art important? What is the writer doing when he drops his plot and his intentions into the subconscious, trusting and knowing that his conscious ideals will "bisociate" there with memories and draw together past emotions, until new characters are born and valid and meaningful action weaves itself about his half-understood theme? What is the actor doing when, before our eyes, he is possessed by another personality? Why can the shape of a song or a symphony seem to illuminate the world? Koestler does not inquire.

And this lapse seems to me to reduce his discussion of art to a superficial level. If he wants to maintain that he is only talking about "how" the artist works and not "why," I must reply that one cannot judge nor even understand the "how" without considering the "why." (For readers who might like to listen to the artist on "why" he works as he does, I recommend Andrew Lytle's contribution to the symposium on "Myths and Myth-making," published first in *Daedalus* and then in 1960 as a book [Braziller], and Eugene Ionesco's article on "A Writer's

Problems" in the September *Encounter*.) Koestler, that is, writes about the act of creation without committing any such act himself. He tells us that creative thinking often begins with analogy (which is true); and then his own analogies limp, don't fit, are unilluminating or even misleading.

AND yet, though the scientists fault Koestler on science, though I can't help but point out his shortcomings in the field that I know most about, there is something here. "Jack of all trades and master of none" is an easy condemnation to make, but I think a wrong one. Koestler is master of the very difficult trade of synthesizing a mass of material, of pulling it into an interesting shape, of serving up to the general reader facts that he would otherwise never know, and—most important—of explaining why they matter and how they relate to each other. Experts may disagree, but no expert could have done this; at any rate, none has. Let the general reader go on to the experts if he will. Koestler has given him a fine place to begin.

Now I remember what I have the whole business. These poets, that is to say, people willing to take great pains in make a beautiful thing—going as self-abnegation or self-exposure the fanatic manner of their craft, made of their casual conditions, expresses, morally speaking, antithesis of their artists' ethic in their deepest selves and prayerfully for the word and re-examining, correcting, their utterance. Technically, that is called *The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren*, very close to the popular notion that is called a "happening," that occurs because it occurs, even an improvisation—for it demands a theme and a talent. It is as if Macbeth's hypocritical robes were adopted as a working method, chance will have me king, why may crown me, without my stir is not the way in which Mr. Van set to work when he wrote his fine lyrics or his splendid essays Shakespeare. Nor Mr. MacLeish he made the lines:

And strange at Ecbatan the tree  
Take leaf by leaf the evening, still  
The flooding dark about their  
The mountains over Persia change

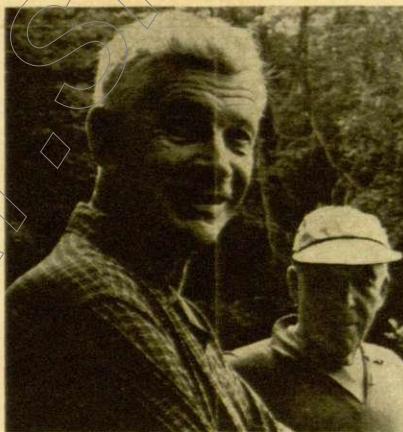
## An Exercise in Free Converse

*The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren*, edited by Warren V. Bush (Dutton, 285 pp. \$5.95), constitute a civilized conversation on poetry, nature, politics, and other matters. Emile Capouya's column "The Real Thing" is a regular feature of *Saturday Review*.

By EMILE CAPOUYA

THIS book is a selection of the conversations that were a feature of some unusual broadcasts in a program conceived by Mr. Warren Bush, a producer for one of the great networks. Mr. Bush proposed to Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren that they permit television technicians to follow them about during their stay at Mr. MacLeish's country place, and have their words and actions recorded and filmed. Mr. Bush promised that the technicians and their equipment would be unobtrusive. The two poets thought the matter over, then consented. The program was a success. Mr. Bush edited the conversations for publication in book form, and here they are.

It sounds dreadful, doesn't it? By all that's fair and foul, it should be dreadful, and sometimes it trembles on the brink—to be quite frank, in Mr. Bush's introduction it goes over the brink—but



—From the book.

Van Doren and MacLeish—civilized talk and an electronic eavesdropper.

the surprising fact is that on the whole the book is charming. Mr. MacLeish and Mr. Van Doren must be exceptionally nice people. They should never have done it, but they did, and by the time we have eavesdropped on their parting remarks, we have forgotten what principle it was that made us deprecate the enterprise at the beginning. The two men talk of poetry, nature, politics, and say many sensible and interesting things. They do not orate, they converse. The result is civilized talk, often stimulating, always pleasant.

in that poem worthy of its title, Andrew Marvell."

AS Mark Harris put it for a so that we must say it again and "Easy does it not." Of course, MacLeish expended both art and artifice on the project. But chiefly he watched his pen, and a part of my troglodyte refuses its assent. The book is so modestly produced; there are photographs of the two poets and they are fine men. But either of them could write a better series of dialogues with his left hand, and would be useful to us if he could not. So while I report that the result is fair even if I wish it were not so. For that variety lies, and I think we can do it all by ourselves, without aid from our poets.

### LITERARY I. Q. ANSWERS

1. *Hamlet*, I, i (Horatio).
2. *III*, V, iii (Ratcliff).
3. *Henry VIII*, II, i (Richard).
4. *Cymbeline* (Song).
5. *Romeo and Juliet* (Friar Laurence).
6. Sonnet XX (Richard II), III, ii (King Richard).
7. *Venus and Adonis*, 1. 853.
8. *9*.
9. *Ado about Nothing*, V, iii (Don).
10. *Romeo and Juliet*, III, v (Romeo).