

"K. O."

THE SET-UP. By JOSEPH MONCURE MARCH.
New York: Covici, Friede. 1928. \$2.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

THE American language has finally adopted "K. O." as a hall-mark of unqualified approval. In the argot of the prize-ring where it originated the initials tersely announce "Knock-out," finis, the last word, the final judgment from which there is no appeal. Use in the general vernacular has broadened it so that the abbreviation carries particular agreement, a twisted and emphatic form of "O. K." Mr. March's new verse is both. The verdict in the original sense is especially appropriate, for this is a condensed saga of the squared (and vicious) circle, a transcript of the dregs of pugilism as vivid and final as any of George Bellows's lithographs. Like "The Wild Party" (which, unfortunately, is not available to the public) it is brisk, dramatic, brutal, exciting, and vulgar in the cleanest possible way. Unlike its predecessor, "The Set-Up" shows the author more detached, less inclined to drop into sentimental interludes and asides; a narrator, *pur sang*, in complete control of his material.

The story is simple enough. Part One, the prologue, shows us Pansy Jones in his prime, black, "a jungle jinx with eyes like a lynx," battered, a Jack Johnson-like contender for the title. Then, sudden disaster: "a final hope-blast."

The brass-knuckled hand of the law
Hung a hot one on Pansy's jaw.
Dissection of his private life
Revealed he had an extra wife
And three scrawny brats
Living like rats.
"Not guilty," Pansy pled.
"Guilty," the jury said.

Elections were coming.
The judge was firm.
Pansy went up for a five-year term.

The rest of the story rushes on ten years later. Pansy Jones is now a has-been; he is slower, heavier, a mere plugger akin to Hemingsway's aging bull-fighter. His managers ("Cohn and MacPhail, the perfect gyps. Conscience? So has a snake got hips!") arrange to have him lay down to a possible champion. Instead of splitting with their victim, they figure that Pansy will be knocked out within two rounds and so say nothing of the set-up. Pansy, stolid and simple, is almost finished, stages a comeback, and dashes the hopes of Sailor Gray by dropping him with a lucky punch. The crowd goes wild. So do Sailor Gray's backers who, thinking the fight was "fixed," plunged heavily. They wait for Pansy, pursue him, track him down. There is a nightmare-movie chase. Pansy dives down the Subway stairs, the gang races after, there is a scuffle, Pansy spins, loses his balance, topples over the edge of the platform, the train strikes him.

The story, it will be seen, is of the crudest. But no recital of it can give any indication of the narrator's quality or, to be more accurate, his qualities. There is, first of all, the obvious exactness of detail and indubitable veracity of background. Mr. March's minute observation omits nothing that concerns—or offends—the eye, the ear, the nose. The scene in the dressing room of the Star Arena while the bouts are in progress is a masterpiece of counterpoint and contrast. The pounding feet of the spectators outside, the fever-heat of rising blood-lust ("They wanted action, they wanted gore: What had they paid good money for!") is pitted against the cool unconcern of the handlers, to whom heart-break and horror are so much tiresome "shop." The fight, which is the climax, is a series of tensions, almost too dramatic for print. The short rounds stretch themselves with the same terrific intensity of a feature bout; the words land with the impact of triphammer lefts and rights.

But Mr. March's manner is as individual as his matter. His style is, at first hearing, related to the rhythmic chants that sprang from "The Congo." But his idiom is more than a composite; "The Set-Up" has something of Masefield in terms of Lindsay tuned to Harlem. But this syncopation is a new thing in verse; the line is shorter, the rhythm brusque and clipped; the attack is almost unremittingly staccato. The mechanics are no less admirable. Mention has been made of the moving pictures, and analysis discloses the influence of the cap-

tionless cinema in which there is no comment but only a projection of actor and action. That Mr. March's metric, like his *métier*, is his own may be seen from such cinematographic flashes as this angle of Herman's bar:

Photos
Clipped from Sunday Rotos.
Boxing bouts.
Steeplechases.
Speed snaps from bike races . . .
Higher things were not forgotten.
Under a faded flag of cotton,
Woodrow Wilson's narrow face
Stared three-quarters into space.
Cold, austere:
A face above beer

or this jumble of talk in the prize-fighters' dressing-room:

" . . . Awright, Munsey.
Dat's awright, kid . . ."
" . . . Sure, he licked 'im."



A POET, FROM COOK'S "FREMONT."

From "Queer Books," by Edmund Pearson
(Doubleday, Doran.)

"Duh hell he did! . . ."
" . . . Say where duh hell
Is my hat gone to . . .!"
" . . . So he feints wid his left,
An' den he breaks through . . ."
" . . . A-ah, yuh're nuts. Dat fight was sold. . ."
" . . . If you hadn't of mixed,
You'd of had 'im cold! . . ."
" . . . What'll yuh bet?"
" . . . I know—
Dat's all . . .!"
The voices grew jumbled.
It was cold in the hall.

There is nothing uncertain in this speech. Mr. March's only inconsistency is in accent; his gutterals are arbitrary; he writes "you" "yo" and "yuh" on successive pages. He is even more indefinite about the definite article. On page 40 we find "d'hell," on 41 "t'hell," on 62 "the hell," on 63 "th'hell," and on the bottom of the same page it becomes "duh!"

But it is neither his language nor its speed that makes Mr. March a writer of proportion. It is, first and last, his power of propulsion. Without making a bid for the reader's sympathies, this young author enlists them; Pansy, for example, is unheroic, unromantic, altogether unlovely and yet lovable. Beneath the hard-boiled, twisted exterior, the toughness has the grace of the battling-machine it describes. One wonders what Mr. March could do with the machine itself or the huge business of war on which it is rumored he is engaged. Here, at least, the voice of the streets, raucous, high-pitched, incisive, has found utterance. And who, denying it beauty, will deny it eloquence?

The birth of Baron Münchhausen is to be commemorated by the erection of a monument at Bodenwerder, on the Weser. It will stand in the garden where the Baron used to entertain his friends with his fantastic stories.

Jules De Gaultier

BOVARYSM: The Art-Philosophy of Jules De Gaultier. By WILMOT E. ELLIS. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington. 1928.

Reviewed by BENJAMIN DE CASSERES

JULES DE GAULTIER, although seventy, like the three great thinkers from whom he stems, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, comes slowly into his own. He is already an immortal among the unofficial intellectuals of his own country, France, and in spots on the Continent. Havelock Ellis has been the one voice in England to greet him. James Huneker was tremendously influenced by him, although he never devoted an article to him. Mr. Ellis has long been a student of the great French thinker, who was one of the few intimate friends of Remy de Gourmont and the high philosophic light in that great constellation of independent spirits that founded and contributed to the *Mercure de France*. Next fall Harcourt, Brace will bring out an anthology of De Gaultier's work compiled from his nearly twenty volumes by Professor Houston Peterson. So the philosopher and inventor of the word bovarysm, which has already passed into the French language as a common noun, will, with the chapbook by Mr. Ellis and my own two essays on him in "Forty Immortals," be launched on his English-reading career.

The core-thought of bovarysm (a word coined from Flaubert's "Madame Bovary," the female Don Quixote of romantic love whose inherent and fatal will-to-illusion De Gaultier has universalized) is founded on the power with which every human being is dowered of being compelled to conceive himself as he is not (*se concevoir autre qu'il n'est*). From this law—the perpetually comic and tragic attempt to attain the truth and reality by walking into mirrors—flows the great paradox that the universe is an evolving lie, or illusion (the doctrine of Buddha and Schopenhauer and the meaning of the **symbol of Maya**), that ultimate Truth and Reality can only repose in the Absolute, which corresponds to Nothing. So long as consciousness is halved into subjective and objective man will be duped by appearances and, as Cabell (who has much in common with De Gaultier) says, compelled forever "to play the ape to his ideals." A lie, an illusion, whether it is physical appetite or a sublime ideal, is the *cause* of all movement whatever in the universe. Instinct and knowledge follow the bale of hay of the imagination.

All, then, is vanity? No, says De Gaultier; and it is just at this point that he parts company with Buddha, the Preacher, and Schopenhauer and throws in his forces with the Greek ideals of life and its two great modern re-announcers, Goethe and Nietzsche. God and Purpose may be a myth, but only weaklings cry for either. Life is the Great Adventure. Existence is a great tragi-comedy, and the Supreme Artist is Chance and Change. The highest man—De Gaultier himself, "artist-philosopher"—is both actor and spectator. Life is an eternally beautiful spectacle, the more tragic the more beautiful. Io! Evöhé! shouts De Gaultier, with Dionysus, Spinoza, Emerson, and Nietzsche as he weeps and laughs, dies and is born again in the recombination of souls and the war of wills and suns.

The esthetic principle in De Gaultier thus triumphs over the ethical judgments of humanity. He is not messianic, like Nietzsche, for he preaches no Superman to come. The Superman is here, has always been here. It is he who says Yea! to Beauty and Power and creates another gorgeous dynamic lie. De Gaultier is satanic only in the sense that Life itself is. He humorously says that in Paris even atheists make the sign of the cross before him. But so do all men before a new and daring thinker (and atheists are so orthodox and dogmatic!). De Gaultier's God is Beauty and Power, Chance and Change. The Apollonian—Dionysian artist-actor needs no other.

Jules De Gaultier is not only the greatest and most daring of living thinkers, of esthetic-aristocratic breed, but he is one of the greatest, clearest, most compact, and lyrical of prose writers. Of French ancestry on both sides for hundreds of years, he embodies the great French traditions of clarity and profundity, literary skill, tolerance, and gusto. Whether he is writing on bovarysm, manners, the intellect, "the mystical life of Nature," metaphysics, illusion, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Kant, Verlaine, or Baudelaire (all ideas and men in his brain circle

around the one seed-thought of his philosophy) he writes for those who love the romance of ideas with the dramatic power of a man telling a tragi-comic fairy-tale, as, indeed, the universe is.

In this chapbook Mr. Ellis has done a fine piece of work in condensing not only the philosophy of Jules De Gaultier, but of commenting on the evolution of the man's thought and expounding his relations with other thinkers of the time. De Gaultier has himself written for this book a fascinating account of his life, his philosophical and literary influences, and what he has done. It breathes the restraint, the modesty, and the human simplicity of this brave and mighty soul who has sacrificed all of this world's riches to put his great spiritual saga on paper. His name will some day rank with Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. He is the Prospero of thinkers.

Alas, Poor Yorick!

MATTHEW ARNOLD. By HUGH KINGSMILL.
New York: The Dial Press. 1928. \$4.

Reviewed by HOWARD F. LOWRY

WITH some disappointment one discovers that this book is not a biography at all. It is a series of "essays" and epigrams to prove how sorry a person Matthew Arnold was. Repelled by uncertain taste and pages of glitter without warmth, a reviewer may prefer to keep silent; but he has no choice when "emancipated" writers play with distinguished names.

For all his abandon, Mr. Kingsmill seems sincere. He pretends to no new material, except some first fruits of a research through *Punch*. Even gleefully he distrusts his own memory when certain books are no longer "by him." He knows nothing more about his subject than does the general reader of Arnold's collected works; nor, indeed, as much, since he could never bear to gaze on "Balder Dead." What the author does claim, however, is a startling thesis. He charges his poor Victorian specimen, not with a scandal, but with the want of one!

Solely upon the basis of the poems, where any fancy may roam, we learn that "Marguerite" was possibly a French governess of somewhat Gallic past, whom Matt's inherited Puritanism could never take in the grand manner. Stupified by inhibitions and regret over lost Aprils, he degenerated into a bad poet, an uncertain critic, and a joyless prophet to mankind. Bluntly stated, Arnold's tragedy was a thralldom to the moral law. Repeatedly recur both the logic and the temper of the book:

Had he made on her [George Sand this time] the effect of a Byron or a Bulwer, the mighty woman who had ravished so many weeping men of genius would have added Matt to the list of her victims, to the enrichment by ecstasy and remorse, rage and despair, of all his future work. . . . This purging and renewing experience was denied to Matt, and we must make the best of him as he is without wasting regrets on what he might have become.

Unfortunately this splendid stoicism fails. Mr. Kingsmill does not make "the best" of what remains. To sustain his thesis, he must belittle Arnold's prose, heightening long-recognized flaws beyond all reasonable perspective. Moreover, he must cut and arrange from the letters a mosaic of an awkward, embarrassed Arnold, not that "most genial and amiable of men," whom even the unhappy Mr. Sala honored and admired. To test the lack of authority in this new study one has only to reread the letters as they stand. Poor Matt has failed his biographer emotionally; and Mr. Kingsmill sorts him through much in the manner of a discarded lady seeking dire bits within a *billet doux*.

In short, a reviewer's only task is to protest a "microfier's" refusal to treat a fine intelligence and a disciplined spirit as such. Most men do not find felicity in their youthful Marguerites, and few would deprive Arnold of some romantic disillusionments. At the same time, his true critics have rightly fixed his primary "storm and stress" as intellectual and religious, the price of *un rare esprit d'ordre et de méthode* seeking in a confused time some center of belief. The tone of "Empedocles," of "Dover Beach," of "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" does not arise from pale regret over the unplied tangles of Neæra's hair. To tell the truth about his turn from poetry is easy enough. It is to recall in Arnold's earliest verse the critical, and to that degree, prosaic bent, heightened by the classics, stimulated by a lectureship at Oxford, and offered expression in six new national reviews; to remember his own pleasure in the larger audience prose gained him and in the whole new turn given

to his thinking by his French tour of 1859. Above all, it is to acknowledge that, from 1851 until his death, he labored as Inspector of Schools, at work foreign to poetry, at toil so wearying that the wonder is he did anything else at all.

But telling truth is drab business, and Mr. Kingsmill interprets even the Preface of 1853 as an impoverished soul's refuge in the classics! He forgets, of course, in his contempt for "Sohrab and Rustum," that, some ten years before, Arnold had begun a long and never completed drama on Lucretius, thereby escaping to antiquity from emotions withered before Marguerite had even put them into bloom.

The documents that best reveal Matthew Arnold are still unpublished. Mr. Kingsmill has not seen, for example, the diary of 1851, revealing the poet's deep love for Frances Lucy Wightman, though, to be sure, the devotion of a husband is not pleasing to biographers. Nor has he seen the note-books covering the years of Arnold's "decline." Only a fragment of these is in print. Until the whole is made known, men will never understand how great a man this poor prophet really was; how deep his roots were, how whole was his experience, how complete and rounded his religion; how all his desire for culture to relieve anarchy came, not as a presumptuous thing, but as the overflow of a renewing discipline he gave himself. More important still, these books show the folly of lamenting that Matthew did this thing instead of that. They suggest he will be necessary to us, not because he was either a poet or a prophet, but because he rebukes the mediocre and the trivial; because, above all those about him, he had a passion for excellence so rare as to be a holy thing.

Meanwhile, if Mr. Kingsmill's readers do not like his tone, they should hold their peace. He has his graces and restraints. Nowhere does he make the boat girl of "Thyrsis" responsible for "Essays in Criticism"; nor does he spoil "The Buried Life," a love poem as profound in its own way as the madrigals of those "enriched by ecstasy and remorse, by rage and despair." Finally, one may remember Arnold's own good temper, his delight in a hit at his expense, the fun he might now derive from the discovery that biographers, as well as poets, can give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. Even before the crude and the perverse he had a habit of recalling Homer's old assurance that "the destinies have appointed enduring hearts unto the children of men."

This book has no index, but Mr. Kingsmill does predict over eight pages what vast fault his reviewers will find with him. He too, like Matthew Arnold, is a prophet.

Riddles of Language

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE. By WALTER B. PILLSBURY and CLARENCE L. MEADER. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1928. \$3.

Reviewed by E. M. EAST
Harvard University

IN the early evolution of mankind, isolation was a factor of supreme importance. Natural selection, at work among groups of the human family separated by geographical barriers, built up the primary races. During historical times, the tendency has been to unite these long-separated offshoots by hybridization. The story of civilization has been the same. The dispersion of peoples was followed by the development of distinct cultures. To-day, even apart from the transfusion of customs by migration, the inventive geniuses who have harnessed wave motion have made it possible for each clan to know how the other clans live and to borrow any fashion worth borrowing. In a word, there is a general trend toward a fusion of interests. It makes one feel almost as if a general law of nature were at work. Perhaps no department of human affairs exhibits this trend in a more pronounced fashion than science. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, science tended to divide into compartments, each with its own language and method. Presumably, this was the best mode of proceeding until a semblance of order was set up in the various cubicles. But now the style is to cut doors into every apartment and to make more use of coöperative housekeeping. Institutions of higher learning set up laboratories of engineering chemistry and bio-physics. Individuals with apparently diverse specialties find a problem of common interest upon which to collaborate.

In the present instance, a psychologist and a stu-

dent of linguistics have matched efforts to show how the mind functions in the communication of ideas. Obviously, thought and its communication form the central pillar of the edifice built by psychologists; but, strangely enough, research has been confined largely to the anatomy of the speech organs and to the connection of particular ideas with specific sounds. Pillsbury and Meader have succeeded in making a real contribution to the solution of those riddles of language which have deeper meanings.

Their book is a compendium of information. Varied matters are treated, including the anatomy and physiology of the speech organs, the mental and motor processes involved in talking, the origin and diversification of languages, and the development of sound changes and syntax. But it is not the collection and tabulation of facts which marks the volume a work of scholarship,—it is the penetrating analysis of the facts.

The main thesis of the book is quite simple. We were not created primarily for talking machines. Had this been the case, the mechanism now employed in the radio loud-speaker undoubtedly would have been better and less complicated. Unfortunately, we are mammals, of the order Primates, of the family Hominidæ. That certain organs can be utilized in the production of conversation is a mere accident. The nose, the mouth, the pharynx, the larynx, the lungs, were formed for breathing and eating. The accessory organs are commonly involved in the separation of these two physiological functions, since the parts concerned had become somewhat mixed during the course of evolution, and it was necessary to prevent balls of food from going down the wrong way! Thus, our complement of engine-like valves! The result was that the primitive Homo could make various explosive and frictional notes while engaged in the process of grubbing out a living. Gradually, therefore, he became accustomed to making one sort of explosive sound when he was pleased and another when he was angry. And since he had enough mentality to classify these sounds and to develop and vary their production, he became the world's first talking animal. "Contrary to the current view," the authors maintain, "the complex movements of human speech are modifications and extensions of such primitive movements of the vegetative organs and should be studied as such." They even go so far as to conclude that all higher mental processes have had similar humble beginnings in which the endocrine glands have played a dominant part.

The reviewer searched in vain for a discussion of the rôle of the mating call in the development of speech. Since mating calls are common in widely separated groups of animals, including the invertebrates, this would seem to be a serious omission; but probably nothing can be said other than to call attention to this one fact.

The work should be submitted to the Fundamentalists to see whether the study of language, since language is an exemplification of evolution, ought not to be withdrawn from the public schools.

"Many authors," says the *Manchester Guardian*, "have grown tired of their own earlier creations but none, it would appear, more thoroughly than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He will write no more about Sherlock Holmes, so he has been telling an interviewer; but, worse than that, he is prepared to snuff the whole race of detectives out of existence. In the future, it appears, we shall have a clairvoyant in attendance at every police station and, to the confusion of the criminal, the story of the crime will be reconstructed by methods of psychical research. It seems almost an unfair advantage; even the criminal deserves some sort of run for his money, and might well complain at being detected by a gentleman in a dream and an armchair."

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