



Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic

Michael Scammell

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From award-winning author Michael Scammell comes a monumental achievement: the first authorized biography of Arthur Koestler, one of the most influential and controversial intellectuals of the twentieth century. Over a decade in the making, and based on new research and full access to its subject's papers, **Koestler** is the definitive account of this fascinating and polarizing figure. Though best known as the creator of the classic anti-Communist novel *Darkness at Noon*, Koestler is here revealed as much more—a man whose personal life was as astonishing as his literary accomplishments.

Koestler portrays the anguished youth of a boy raised in Budapest by a possessive and mercurial mother and an erratic father, marked for life by a forced operation performed without anesthesia when he was five, growing up feeling unloved and unprotected. Here is the young man whose experience of anti-Semitism and devotion to Zionism provoked him to move to Palestine; the foreign correspondent who risked his life from the North Pole to Franco's Spain, where he was imprisoned and sentenced to death; the committed Communist for whom the brutal truth of Stalin's show trials inspired the superb and angry novel that became an instant classic in 1940. Scammell also provides new details of Koestler's amazing World War II adventures, including his escape from occupied France by joining the Foreign Legion and his bluffing his way illegally to England, where his controversial novel *Arrival and Departure*, published in 1943, was the first to portray Hitler's Final Solution.

Without sentimentality, Scammell explores Koestler's turbulent private life: his drug use, his manic depression, the frenetic womanizing that doomed his three marriages and led to an accusation of rape that posthumously tainted his reputation, and his startling suicide while fatally ill in 1983—an act shared by his healthy third wife, Cynthia—rendered unforgettably as part of his dark and disturbing legacy.

Featuring cameos of famous friends and colleagues including Langston Hughes, George Orwell, and Albert Camus, **Koestler** gives a full account of the author's voluminous writings, making the case that the autobiographies and essays are fit to stand beside *Darkness at Noon* as works of lasting literary value. **Koestler** adds up to an indelible portrait of this brilliant, unpredictable, and talented writer, once memorably described as “one third blackguard, one third lunatic, and one third genius.”

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