

entertaining friends. As always in his establishments there was a guest-wing so that visitors could be reasonably independent if they wished. But they had to be available in the evenings for conversation and/or Scrabble (which became an increasing obsession in the last years, although he never achieved championship status). Cynthia added to her other duties by becoming an eager and successful gardener and looking after their two dogs—David (the Lhasa Apso) and Goliath, the huge Newfoundland, which Cynthia used to enter in dog shows, without telling Arthur, so that she had to play truant to get him there.

DURING THE LAST YEARS it was a sadness to me that, apart from his interest in the paranormal, his writing was confined to reworking some of the ground he had already tilled. *Janus* was a summing up of his books over the past twenty-five years. *Bricks to Babel*, which he called “an omnibus”, was a rich and rewarding anthology selected from all his works, arranged thematically with a linking commentary. It was the only anthology of key passages of a writer’s work, that I know of, selected by the author himself.

I often suggested to him that he should continue his autobiography which ended in 1940 at the conclusion of *The Invisible Writing*. Some weeks before his death, he told me he was doing this but swore me to secrecy. It now appears that this work was a kind of joint autobiography by Arthur and Cynthia of their life together, each writing alternate chapters. It starts in 1949 with Cynthia applying for a job as his part-time, temporary secretary, working at his house near Fontainebleau; and Cynthia had got up to 1956 when the end came. It provokes the usual sad question of the extent to which revision of unfinished, uncorrected work by a third party is justified. But the effort must be made, and it is hoped that the book can be published by the end of the year.

In his final note “*To Whom It May Concern*”, written nine months before they took their lives, he referred to the debt he owed to Cynthia “for the relative peace and happiness” he had enjoyed—for the first time—in the last period of his life, and I think that the years at Denston must have been strongly in his mind when he wrote this.

IF THE PICTURE I have painted of Arthur Koestler is a rather lightweight, personal one it is because in these early days of loss, I prefer to dwell on my relationship with him as a friend rather than as an Editor and Publisher. As I have said, I was fortunate in knowing him in his mellow years, and I never encountered personally the irascibility and sudden

flashes of ill-temper of which one has heard so much and of which I caught only an occasional glimpse. To me he was an extremely endearing author to work with. Though he hated discussing work in progress he was always keen that I should read it as soon as he laid down his pen, and he would wait with some anxiety for the verdict. “If even *you* can understand it”, he would say, “it must be okay. . . .” One book that he did discuss during its preparation was *The Thirteenth Tribe* (in which he suggested that Ashkenazi Jews were not Semites at all but converted Khazars, hailing from the Caucasus). I suggested the title which he adopted; and in consequence he dedicated the book to me, referring to me as the editor with whom he never quarrelled. It was the best compliment I ever received.

Chess Man

By David Pryce-Jones

ARTHUR KOESTLER happened to be ahead of me as I was boarding the *Lofleider* flight to Reyjavik, and so we took seats together. It was the first week of July 1972, and we were off to Iceland to cover the Spassky-Fischer chess championship, he for one Sunday paper, I for another. Atmospheric pieces were required, not analyses of the games. Departure was at half-past-eight in the morning. As soon as we were in the air, a voice came over the intercom, “Will Mr Arthur Koestler please make himself known?” He raised a hand.

Advancing, the stewardess said that she would like to serve him a drink, courtesy of *Lofleider*. “*Brantwein?*”, he inquired. “In Iceland we call it *brennevin*. . . .” Icelanders, we were to learn, speak English in an up-and-down whine, and are fond of instruction. From somewhere in the rear she fetched a bottle, a large home-brew kind of bottle, without a label, and poured out two mugs. From the reek, the stuff must have been distilled from potatoes, or wood, by peasants probably blinded or paralysed for life by their moonshining. I explained that at that hour of the day I could not come to terms with a brew like this, and Koestler then drank my mug as well as his own. Closing his eyes, he lay back: “But *zis iss murder*. . . .”

I had known him for about a dozen years. Originally I had written to ask for a contribution to the weekly magazine whose literary editor I then was. It turned out that I was living round the corner from him, and one Sunday he asked me to a drink before lunch. On that occasion, Goronwy Rees was describing the part played by Anthony Blunt in recruit-

ing spies for the Soviet Union. Astounding as this was, Blunt's treason hardly seemed a state secret, even back in 1960.

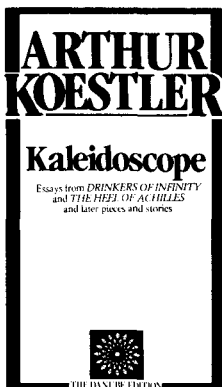
THE AWE that I initially felt towards Koestler had subsided by the time we were on the flight to Iceland. His impulses were generous, his curiosity unlimited. To think of him as impatient or intolerant was to fail to perceive how he was governed by deep and admirable rage against the infamy of the times, which, by the law of probability, he ought not to have survived. Of course logic was a process of enforcing conclusions, with the inquisitorial purr of that Hungarian accent; and issues could be less clear-cut than his presentation of them.

Whatever the subject might be, he judged it in every possible particular until a generality had been reached, either *this* or *that*. The English anecdotal style, in which meanings are left implied (and may even prove contradictory), was not for him. What

was this dialectical muddle in which our national virtues and vices had been intimately and historically connected? England was "*the best country to sleep in*", as he liked to put it; and certainly he felt at home in it, sufficiently at home to challenge its *idées reçues*. Consider the famous tolerance: Might that not be an aspect of insularity? Was humanity here a factor of plain ignorance about "far-away" conditions elsewhere in the world?

More than he realised, perhaps, people who were instinctively grateful for their English good fortune looked to him in order to learn from his experiences. In return he wondered if they could ever *know* the truth of what Europeans had been through. I recall conversations about Communism and Nazism and Zionism, about Lukacs and Hungarian intellectuals, about the handing over of his once Communist friends, Alex Weissberg and Margarete Buber-Neumann, by the NKVD to the Gestapo at the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact; and I still see his expression of wary incredulity: "You

Passionate Duffer



THE "WE" refers to an endearing fraternity of men, to which I am proud to belong, known as the Passionate Duffers. We worship Caissa, the Muse of Chess, but owing to the inadequacy of our mental equipment can never hope to attain her favours, condemned as we are to remain life-long amateurs in the double meaning of that word: dilettantes and aficionados. Thus protected

from the temptations of the arena, we have remained pure at heart and are all the more distressed by the degrading antics displayed prior to the match by the contestants and their banderilleros in the Russian and American Chess Federations. The haggling about the venue and the revenue, the political invectives and insinuations, make one almost feel that chess is a game too noble to be left to the chess players.

YET, all personal, political and tribal passions apart, the bloodiness would still be inherent in the royal game, and if it were not there the game would not be a symbol or paradigm of the working of the human mind. Chess is a battle of ideas; and the most savage battles have always been fought for ideas. No wonder that Caissa emerges from the medieval twilight with a tantalising smile and a dagger in her hand. She haunts Oriental legends and Nordic sagas in

dramatic episodes where princes stake their fortunes or realms on a match against an outsider—who infallibly wins and is infallibly slain for his pains.

My favourite yarn is in "*St Olaf's Saga*", where King Canute plays a game with Ulf Jarl (Earl Ulf). Canute blunders, making a hasty move which makes him lose a knight; then, in true duffer style, recalls his move and makes another instead. Ulf is furious, upsets the board, and takes sanctuary in a church—where he is slain the next day by Canute's henchmen.

BUT WHY all the nastiness, why the apparent malignancy? The reason is intuitively felt by every chess player, yet difficult to explain without giving the impression of indulging in artificial profundities. In the first place, each chessman, whether bishop, rook, knight or queen, embodies a dynamic threat, as if it were alive and animated by the desire to inflict the maximum damage (by attack or defence) on the opponent's men. When a chess player looks at the board, he does not see a static mosaic, a "still-life", but a magnetic field of forces, charged with energy—as Faraday saw the stresses surrounding magnets and currents as curves in space, or as Van Gogh saw vortices in the skies of Provence. Thus there is a strong element of animism and magic in the game. Lewis Carroll was aware of it when he chose chessmen as the *dramatis personae* for *Through the Looking Glass*; and the Red Queen's "Off with his head" could come straight out of an Icelandic saga.

NAIVE CHESS PLAYERS occasionally have Walter Mitty dreams of carrying a computer in their brains which will calculate with lightning speed

went to the usual school. Eton I suppose—so how come you were sensitised to these things? Who was responsible for telling you? . . . ”

WHAT I HAD NOT expected was the light-heartedness, even after the *brennevin*, with which he stepped out into the round-the-clock daylight of Reykjavik in summer. He was playing truant. He was a reporter once again. “He sniffs the air with animal cleverness”, I wrote in a notebook, “he makes me think of an otter, trim, the coat in tip-top condition.”

Besides, we had stepped straight into comedy. Bobby Fischer had not arrived. To judge from his pronouncements, he might never leave America, and the championship would founder. An opening ceremony was held in an almost unlit theatre, *Hamlet* without the prince indeed. Wringing his hands, the President of Iceland flitted through the proceedings. Already Spassky looked the victim of

psychological skirmishing, not steady enough now for chess. His representatives, including a lugubrious Soviet Ambassador, were claiming victory by default. Max Auwe, chairman of the World Chess Federation, was an old acquaintance of Koestler's. Soon my telephone was ringing, for Koestler to say, “Still no chess today, I have it from Auwe. It is a scoop, but in confidence. Do not tell your paper.” The cold war had come to this.

Many of the grand masters present latched on to him. They were revelling in move-a-minute games, or playing twenty boards at once, and trying to inveigle him to join in. I do not think he did so, though his theoretical knowledge of the game was impressive. The talk was all of Botvinnik. Capablanca, Alekhine. Fischer's genius was endlessly dissected. Koestler picked up one grand master's phrase and converted it into “ze mid-field aura of ze qveen.” Enjoying himself more and more, he liked to argue that a computer would one day play the supreme game. During one of the series of press

all potential variations ahead of any given position and select each time the perfect move by eliminating, one by one, all the inferior moves. A single example will show that this is impossible.

The average number of legally permissible moves in a given position is around thirty. Say it is white's turn to move; to each of his thirty potential moves black has thirty potential answers, which leads, in round figures, to 1000 variations at the end of each “complete move” (one by white and one by black). Every one of these variations branches again into 1000 sub-variations two complete moves ahead, making a total of 1,000,000 positions; three complete moves ahead there will be 1,000,000,000 of them and so on, each move increasing the variations by a factor of 1000. The average length of a game between evenly matched partners of average strength is forty to forty-five complete moves; but, taking duffers into account, it may be a modest twenty-five.

Thus in order to decide on the perfect opening move, the Walter Mitty computer would have to calculate at least twenty-five moves ahead (and against a strong opponent perhaps twice as many).

Calculating twenty-five moves ahead would mean that the machine would have to generate a total number of moves in the order of 10^{75} (1 and 75 zeros). Even if the computer could operate at the rate of 1,000,000 moves every second, which is about 500 times faster than the most optimistic programme-designer would consider feasible, it would take 10^{69} seconds to complete the calculation.

Well, we couldn't wait that long. Ever since our planetary system came into being some $4\frac{1}{2}$ billion years ago, no more than 10^{18} seconds have elapsed.

IN PLAYING bridge or poker or scrabble, there is a large element of chance which provides a convenient excuse for being beaten. In chess, there is no such excuse. Yet the worst misfortunes are those for which one has oneself, and only oneself, to blame. It might seem that similar considerations apply to tennis or boxing, where also skill, not chance, decides the issue; and some of the stars in these games do indeed take defeats hard. But even if one is in principle prepared to put physical skill on a par with mental aptitude, the mind itself which makes these judgements won't have any of it. To be called clumsy is an acceptable insult; to be called stupid is unpardonable.

The great Alekhine, when beaten, often threw his king across the room, and after one important lost game smashed up the furniture in his hotel suite. Steinitz, on a similar occasion, vanished from his quarters and was found disconsolately sitting on a bench in a deserted park. He died insane. So did Morphy, who preceded him as world champion. Morphy suffered from persecution mania; Steinitz from delusions; he thought he could speak over the telephone without using the instrument and that he could move chessmen by electricity discharged from the tips of his fingers. What sane person could devise a symbol more apt for the omnipotence of mind?

A.K.

“The Glorious & Bloody Game”
in *Kaleidoscope* (1981)

conferences where the lugubrious Ambassador was yet again claiming Soviet victory, Koestler created quite a diversion by his explanation of the binary-denary system to those around him. "Are you *the* Arthur Koestler?" someone asked, only to receive the reply, "No, the other one."

ACCORDING TO THE GRAPEVINE, Spassky was longing to give an interview to Westerners, but could not escape the *KGB*. So we went to his hotel. Sure enough, he was sitting in the far corner of a public room on the first floor, with half-a-dozen guards on either side of him. Then he made for the lift. So did we. On the landing, however, the hurrying guards suddenly froze Spassky out, so that the non-Russians were all pushed into the lift together, and deposited on the ground floor. I decided to stay in the lift, and so found myself back on the first-floor landing, confronting Spassky. The *KGB* guards then froze me out, bundling Spassky into the lift, and going up, not down to Koestler and the others in the hall. The Marx Brothers could not have managed it better.

In the continuing absence of Bobby Fischer, Koestler was deep in local detail. The cod war was then harming England in the eyes of Icelanders. "*Second World War Comes to Iceland*" ran a headline in a newspaper, which waxed indignant about the dredging up from the harbour of a British bomb dropped on a German ship in 1941, without exploding. A young taxi-driver, asked to take us to the hotel, leant out of his window to answer back, "Why should I?" Did I realise, Koestler wanted to know, that dogs, cats, pets of all kinds, were forbidden by law in Reykjavik on grounds of hygiene? Had I noticed the peculiar smell of Icelanders? This was because hot water was piped direct into homes from the country's geysers—*guy-zers*, in his pronunciation—so that they were obliged to take sulphurated baths. What about the fact that corrugated iron on buildings in the town centre was considered old and important enough to come under a preservation order?

The good looks of Reykjavik women contrasted favourably with the insignificance of their men. This, Koestler speculated, might have something to do with historic antecedents: Norwegian genes to the women, Irish genes to the men. Reykjavik was a place where women felt free to accost male passers-by. This sexual frenzy, in his opinion, could be explained in terms of the northerly location.

¹ Curiously enough, Koestler had written in his Reykjavik diary: "... Funny to be a war correspondent again after all these years. Everybody's favourite pastime: to psychoanalyse Bobby [Fischer]. Got so bored that [I] slunk away to souvenir shop, bought ashtray made of Icelandic lava, guaranteed to give owner magic powers of seduction."

Obscured in winter darkness for half the year, women were driven to display themselves to as many men as possible in the other half. One evening, while we were having dinner in the hotel, a party of Reykjavik women broke in, shrieking with excitement that they were going to get their hands on Koestler, scattering waiters, upsetting a side-table. Going down under the press of them, he said very deliberately, "Zese are a degenerate people."

After that, we ate at a restaurant with a striking name. "Ve vill go to Nausea", he would say, though Nausea had its hazards for him too. A man alleged to be the national poet was lying at the foot of the bar. Every so often he would haul himself up for *brennevin* (which Koestler had never touched again), pointing a finger and bellowing, "I know you! You are Hungarian, yes! But not Koestler—your name is Istvan Szabo!" Each time, the national poet then relapsed to his position on the floor.

At the point when it had become tedious to plan another trip to a *guy-zer*, Bobby Fischer slipped in. The telephone rang. "Confidentially, Auwe says they will definitely be playing. It is a scoop. Do not tell your paper." Had Fischer calculated the delaying ploy? Though Spassky was now pale and appeared to have the shakes, Fischer did not look in complete control of his nerves. But play they did. We watched. Somehow it was an anti-climax. The analysts had taken over. And perhaps the papers had had enough of our scoops. We returned home.

Psychologist

By John Beloff

IF YOU ATTEMPT the impossible you cannot succeed. Koestler's career—or, should one say, his change of direction in mid-career—raises some pointed questions regarding the position of the individual in contemporary science. How much can even a polymath of genius hope nowadays to achieve in a world of specialists? What influence can the lone thinker exert on the development of scientific thought in this era of institutionalised and organised research? To put it bluntly, can the amateur survive in a community of professionals?

I think there can be no doubt that Koestler, himself, believed that he had something important and original to tell the world. He did not want to become merely the mouthpiece for other people's ideas, however much his early experience as a science-journalist may have prepared him for such a role, and however well his prodigious facility