

ligion. Koestler replied vehemently that Judaism was indeed a racialist religion, and that no progress would be made by Jews until they acknowledged this.¹

Again I asked him what were his grounds. He said, "What about the ban on intermarriage?" I replied that the Jewish ban on intermarriage was exactly on a par with the Christian ban on intermarriage with non-Christians: it was intended to prevent the disintegration of the religious community, and was not racialist, since conversion to Judaism was possible for anyone of any race or colour. Hitler, I pointed out, did not allow conversion to becoming an Aryan.

Koestler waved impatiently, and said, "What about the prayers which Jews make to 'the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'? Isn't that racialist?"

"No", I said. "Maimonides was once asked by a convert whether converts were allowed to make this prayer, and he replied that they were, since the fatherhood of Abraham was a spiritual one."

Again Koestler was impatient. "How many Jews have read Maimonides?"

"How many Catholics have read Aquinas?" I retorted. "But if you want to know Catholic doctrine, you don't ask a Catholic peasant, you look it up in Aquinas."

"I can't talk about this any more", said Koestler, and walked off. I was sorry that I had not had a chance to say that when a convert to Judaism is given a Hebrew name, he is called "son of Abraham", a fact well known even to the unlearned.

I CONCLUDED that Koestler was not amenable to argument on this topic. It meant too much to him. He had arrived at his own solution to his problem of Jewish identity and nothing was allowed to disturb it. He resented his own Jewishness, but anti-Semitism had forced him to declare it. The setting-up of Israel, he felt, let him off the hook. He was now free to be the Gentile, integrated into European culture, that he always wanted to be. The view that there was no Jewish culture, only a racialist, tribal attachment, was too convenient to him to be subjected to factual examination.

The ironic thing is that Arthur Koestler was a Jew to his finger-tips, not only in physical appearance, but in his whole habit of thought. The search for truth, the concern for justice, the this-worldly messianism (surviving even the attempt to sub-

merge himself in British pragmatism) all put him into the great tradition of Enlightenment Jews from Solomon, Maimon and Heine to Freud. But he was unaware of this. His extraordinary intellectual qualities, bred into him by a culture that prized learning far above wealth or physical prowess, he ascribed to his own merit or to European civilisation. To him, to be a Jew meant to be a frightened, downtrodden, ragged East European ghetto-dweller, with whom it was an offence to be associated, and who had to be exorcised either by the development of a new race of Jews in Israel (who, he convinced himself, were becoming "blue-eyed and fair-haired"), or by absorption into Gentile culture. But if Koestler's hopes for the disappearance of a distinctive Jewish culture were ever to be fulfilled, where should we get another Koestler?

Parapsychologist

By Brian Inglis

SOME OBITUARIES of Arthur Koestler left the impression that his interest in parapsychology was an aberration: perhaps a sign that his formidable mental powers were waning. Nothing could be further from the truth: it was a logical, almost inexorable, development, as he himself came to recognise—a little ruefully, as he would have preferred to get some answers to the questions he had endlessly posed, rather than be plunged into further mysteries.

For convenience, his experiences with "psi", the parapsychologists' shorthand for the paranormal forces involved (and to Arthur's amusement, used by physicists about the forces they are dealing with in a not very different sense), can be divided up into five categories: all of them occurring before *Darkness at Noon* made him famous, and all described in his autobiographies.

First, a certain accident-proneness—he gutted part of the family home by putting candles too close to some curtains, and a can of baked beans exploded in his room, knocking him out—at the age of nine gave neighbours the impression that he was psychic, in the sense that a child around whom poltergeist phenomena occur may be regarded as psychic, so that he was "much sought after for table-lifting seances."

Second, there was the childhood ride in an ambulance during which he was to be possessed by the "oceanic sense" for the first time: what would now be described as an altered state of consciousness, which was to return, to his relief, while he lay

¹ See Koestler's contribution to *Next Year in Jerusalem: Jews in the Twentieth Century*, (ed. Villiers, London, 1976), where he refers to the "vicious circle" by which Jews, as he alleges, are responsible for anti-Semitism: "... the archaic, tribal element [in Judaism] engenders anti-Semitism on the same archaic level."

under sentence of death in a Spanish gaol, taking away the dread.

Third, there were experiences of the kind he was to describe in *The Invisible Writing*. In 1932 he witnessed that remarkable charlatan Eric Hanussen provide a demonstration of psychometry, telling a man he had not previously met about his past while holding the man's bunch of keys. Hanussen got it totally wrong—about the man: but another journalist, a woman who was present at the test, subsequently reported that every detail had been correct, about *her*. Three years later, when his faith in communism was becoming shaken, and in a fit of despair Arthur was trying to commit suicide by sticking his head beside a gas oven, a book fell out of the shelf above him and crashed on his head—of all books, it was the Second Brown Book, describing the extraordinary humiliation of the Nazis in the *Reichstag* trial. And in the chapter “The House on the Lake” he described his stay with a woman who was psychic, and the curious manifestations which occurred.

Fourth, there were “meaningful coincidences” in his life which he found hard to attribute to chance. An episode which contributed to the onset of the “oceanic sense” in prison was the recollection of Thomas Mann's description of Consul Thomas Buddenbrook's falling under the spell, when he was dying, of an essay of Schopenhauer's, which had for years stood unread in his library, arguing that death is not final, but “a reunion with cosmic consciousness.” Arthur after his release wrote to Mann to thank him for the comfort this memory had given him. Mann wrote back to say that while sitting in his garden, he had felt a sudden impulse to read the essay, which he had not looked at for close on forty years. As he went to find it in his library, the doorbell had rung, and the postman had handed in Arthur's letter.

Fifth, there was the evidence for the reality of ESP which J. B. Rhine and others were providing in laboratory trials: and this, I suspect, is what clinched matters as far as Arthur was concerned. I do not know at what stage he became convinced that Rhine's results effectively demonstrated ESP; but in *The Invisible Writing*, moving forward in time, he described meeting his old friend the mathematician and philosopher Hans Reichenbach in 1952, and assuring him that Rhine's statistical method had been vouched for by no less an authority than R. A. Fisher—causing Reichenbach to go pale and drop his ear trumpet: “If that is true, it is terrible, terrible. It would mean that I would have to scrap everything and start from the beginning.”

And this incident gives a clue to why Arthur's interest in parapsychology did not emerge—or, rather, resurface—sooner. In 1931, soon after he had been appointed Science Correspondent to the Ullstein chain, he had inserted an advertisement in

their papers under the heading *CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM*, asking for authentic reports of occult experiences, but saying they would not be taken into consideration unless attested “beyond any reasonable doubt.” At the risk of reading too much into it, I would suggest that it neatly encapsulated Arthur's attitude to the subject: awareness that it had an element of absurdity (the baked beans, the Brown Book); a recognition of the need, nevertheless, to explore the subject: and a desire for evidence of a kind which would be beyond *reasonable* doubt—not the unreasoning doubt of the sceptic.

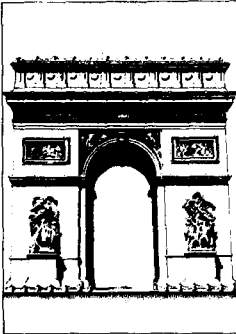
But soon afterwards, Arthur formally joined the Communist Party, and was consequently debarred from further pursuit (occultism, as Rubashov reflected while awaiting his execution, was inadmissible, a “bourgeois deviation”). Later, the War, and then the Cold War, preoccupied him. When in 1955 he renounced political writing—“Cassandra has gone hoarse”—he joined the Society for Psychical Research, and in 1961 defended J. B. Rhine in an article in *The Observer*; but during the 1960s he was locked too closely in battle with the next generation of Reichenbachs—materialists, reductionists, logical positivists, neo-Darwinians, behaviourists—and too well aware of how delighted they would be to hang the label “occultist” on him, to take any risks. When I interviewed him for a TV programme on “Telepathy” in 1966 he was distinctly cagey (partly, admittedly, as he was suffering from a monumental hangover), insisting that he was still sceptical, that his mind was split on the subject.

ONLY WHEN the great trilogy was finished did he feel he could make his position clear. In the early 1970s, he was to recall in *Bricks to Babel*, he had some psychic experiences which, though they were of “little evidential value”, were for him “subjectively important”: he allowed himself to be co-opted on to the Council of the SPR, and in 1972 put the case for psychical research in *The Roots of Coincidence*. He put it, as he admitted, in “a gentle, timid, roundabout way”, but this sufficed to show why the paranormal had become so important to him: it fitted in neatly with his other interests, providing parallels with nuclear physics, possible leads for research into evolution along neo-Lamarckian lines, and a tie-up with mysticism. And although he soon resigned from the SPR Council (appalled by the back-biting), he soon, as one of the trustees of the *KIB* Foundation, began to explore various research possibilities, including one which was very much his own—“Project Daedalus.”

Some years before, Arthur had reasoned that if the mass of historical evidence for levitation, some

Paris, 1947

October 1st 1947



DINNER MALRAUX.

We met them in the bar of the Pallas-Athénée (an enormous luxurious bar full of glamorous demi-mondaines in extravagant clothes). Malraux spent twenty minutes at least studying "La Semaine à Paris" and finally decided that we should dine at the Auberge d'Armailhès.

We drank vodka and ate caviare and blinis and balyk and soufflé sibérienne, and M. got very tight, so that it was even more difficult to understand what he was talking about than usual. However, we did understand him to say that in using his reputation as a man of the Left to help the reactionaries he was taking a big gamble, in which he believed he would succeed; but if he didn't i.e. if de Gaulle, once in power, did not act as Malraux thought he should) he would feel he had betrayed the working class and there would be nothing left for him but to *se faire sauter la cervelle*. When K [oestler] said "what about the General's entourage?" Malraux replied "L'entourage du Général, c'est moi." We thought this rather silly, but were later told that Malraux is in fact the only man who dares to give de Gaulle advice, who sees his speeches before he makes them, etc. Towards the end of the evening he started talking the most awful nonsense, particularly when he asked K about his psychology book and then, instead of listening to what K said, started telling him the meaning of certain psychological terms, all of which he got wildly wrong. At this point K mentioned Bergson, whereupon Malraux went right off at a tangent and started talking at full speed about Bergson; after a bit he said "Je suis le plus grand philosophe du monde."

"Do you mean you are, or are you quoting Bergson?", asked K bravely.

"Non, c'est moi qui parle", replied Malraux—but we didn't feel quite sure, and I don't think he knew himself by that time what he was talking about. He then turned to me and asked me whether, as *une anglaise*, I thought that T. E. Lawrence had "de l'accent."

I said I didn't know what he meant by that, and he said, no, I do use the word in a rather special sense. He explained, but in such a way that both K and I understood different things. I thought—and still think—that he was talking about Law-

rence's style; K understood a reference to personality or something else, I forget what.

Malraux also told us some rather long historical anecdotes about ancient Persian princesses and princes which I remembered his having told us on a previous occasion; but as K always seizes such opportunities for a short rest, he still hasn't heard them. Madeleine [Malraux] was very beautiful and charming. . . .

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DINNER CHEZ CAMUS.

We all took food and drink, and K and I, after careful marketing in the rue de Buci, brought a cold roast chicken, a lobster and some champagne, as although there were lots of other delicious things to be had, we felt French people would not think them worth eating. However, we did take a few shrimps and *palourdes* for ourselves, which indeed everybody else spurned, except Mlle [Suzanne] Labiche [Camus' secretary]. The other guests were: Sartre and Simone [de Beauvoir], Kappy [Harold J. Kaplan] and his wife, and Celia [Paget Goodman].

K started talking about the "Iron Curtain" which has separated the French intellectuals from Anglo-Saxon culture since 1939, and said what a pity it was that, through no fault of their own, they were ignorant of all the latest developments in, e.g., psychology, biology, neurology; also, most important, that they were unacquainted with the semanticists and in particular had never read [Ogden and Richards] *The Meaning of Meaning*.

We told how we'd met Merleau-Ponty's wife, who is a doctor and helps at brain operations, in the Mephisto, and K had asked her whether she'd ever seen an operation on the third ventricle and whether she knew about Forster's syndrome, and how she'd obviously never heard of it; and said we found it curious that Merleau-Ponty, who writes books about psychology, shouldn't have primed his wife to look out for this.

Sartre and Camus expressed polite regret at their ignorance, but didn't sound very sorry about it; they said they didn't think ventricles existed in the brain, only in the heart; and they further thought that psychology and the empirical sciences had nothing whatever to do with philosophy, and consequently they weren't interested in them. I was not surprised at this, having already been told by Camus (who got quite *emballé* about it) that nothing of any interest had ever come out of laboratory work, and that it was particularly unlikely that anything worthwhile had ever been done in American laboratories. . . .

EXTRACTS FROM THE AS YET UNPUBLISHED DIARIES OF

Mamaine (Paget) Koestler