CHAPTER III

THE NOVELS OF THE ETHICS OF SURVIVAL

The problem of the ethics of survival for the individual in a society dominated by a system of highly organized technology and conflicting political control also engaged the attention of Koestler who examined it in two novels, namely, *Thieves in the Night* (1946), and *The Age of Longing* (1951). The first of these, subtitled 'Chronicle of an Experiment', is an account of the Zionist situation in Palestine between 1937 and 1939. Koestler visited that land in February 1945, and spent seven months there collecting information about the Jewish problem that was eventually recorded in *Promise and Fulfilment* (1949). This latter account of Palestine between 1917 and 1949 should be studied as a companion piece to *Thieves in the Night* in the same manner as one should read *Darkness at Noon* and *Dialogue with Death*.

*Thieves in the Night* sets forth to describe the establishment of a Jewish commune called Ezra’s Tower in 1937. The model for the settlement was taken from the Kibbutz En Heftzeba of Galilee. The chief character of the book is Joseph, the son of a Russian-Jewish father, a violinist, and an English mother. He went from Oxford to Palestine to join a group of other Zionists--mostly refugees from central Europe with their minds full of things to forget--having no root except that which lies in Palestine. After five years' training they embarked on a project of founding a new settlement--an agricultural community, called Ezra’s Tower. After terminating his study in 1926, Koestler like Joseph] spent three years working on a kibbutz at the foot of Mount Gilboa. So, the first half of the book, chiefly
Thieves in the Night begins with the characteristic intensity of Koestler's opening lines: "If I get killed today, it won't be by falling off the top of a truck -- Joseph thought, digging his fingers into the tarred canvas cover of the swaying and lurching vehicle." From the original settlement of Gan Tamar, Joseph is starting for the site of their new settlement, an uninhabited hill in Palestine. Koestler has set the atmosphere of the novel by making Joseph travel over a truckload of hand-made grenades and other things, with Simeon and Dina. The Jewish pioneers, a group of twenty-five young men and women, move out at night and start working on the fortifications, watch towers, and temporary living huts. The Arabs from the neighbouring villages, Kfar Tabiyeh, fought with them at the beginning, but after some initial skirmishes, the commune grew as a self-governing unit, and practised 'unmitigated communism'. As Joseph records in his diary,

Our communes are the only place in the world where individual property is completely vested in the community, where all men are really equal, and where you can live and die without ever having touched money. In these hundred-odd settlements of ours we have now been practising pure real communism for over thirty years, having survived all trials without sacrificing a single basic principle, and have transformed a seemingly utopian idea into a small-scale but significant working concern.1

The action of the novel is seen mostly through Joseph's eyes, and is recorded in his journal. The persecution of the Jews was reaching its peak
at that time and the communal life in Palestine alone offered to the Jews some scope for restoration to humanity. Commenting on the conflict depicted in the novel, Iain Hamilton has thus observed:

Against the richly detailed background of the settlement, the Arab village in the valley below, the intrigues in Jerusalem, Koestler demonstrates the classically tragic nature of the clash between the Zionists and the Palestinian Arabs. The point of view is, of course, Zionist, but he gives full weight to the resentment kindled in the feudal Arabs by the noisy, vulgar, graceless and (in their eyes) shameless intruders from the western world of modernity.2

Eventually the British government issued its white paper, cutting off all transfer of land to the Jews, limiting further immigration to 75,000 and condemning millions to death, Koestler indignantly probes the British mandate. The situation is reflected in the thoughts of Joseph:

The Arabs are in revolt, the British are washing their hands off us, but the place is waiting: fifteen hundred acres of stones of all sizes on top of a hill surrounded by Arab villages, with no other Hebrew settlement for miles and a malaria swamp thrown in into the bargain. But when a Jew returns to this land and sees a stone and says, this stone is mine, then something snaps in him which has been tense for two thousand years. (67)

The last line of the above passage truly reflects the characteristic Zionist spirit of indomitable courage and determination.

In the postcript to the Danube edition of the work (1965), Koestler observes that the central theme of Thieves in the Night is the ethics of survival:
If power corrupts the reverse is also true: persecution corrupts the victim, though in subtler ways. In both cases the dilemma of noble ends begetting ignoble means has the stamp of inevitability.

The Arab villagers constantly terrorised the Jewish settlers but the British officials made little effort to check them. The mukhtar and his son Issa, used all their cunning to have the British officials on their side. Bauman, the leader of the Hagana, called the mukhtar 'a fox who lives in a hole with two escapes, one to sunrise and one to sunset' (36).

With strenuous effort and absolute dedication, the settlers transformed the barren hill into a presentable abode. Koestler has brought in the minor details of kibbutz life, which give the novel the character of a documentary. They add to both the scope and the depth of the work. All the settlements had certain basic features—the communal dining-hall and shower bath, children's house, cowshed, prohibition of hired labour; the abolition of money, barter, and private property; the sharing of work according to one's capacity, and of the produce according to one's need.

Joseph writes in his diary:

It is surprising how few basic needs people have once competition and hoarding are abolished. (89)

Koestler's skilful use of reportage helps present the Arab viewpoint and the varieties of British attitudes. The mukhtar has a genuine liking for the hills and his country. He would defend them against the intruders with 'cunning, courage and ruse, with smiles and teachery' (28). Though his own village is squalid and riven with internal feuds, the sight of the Jews
building and ploughing and transforming the land that has been his for generations irritates him. Against this, the expectations of the simple Arab villagers are brought in thus:

When the parley at the tower broke up, the excitable one-eyed villager had just started inquiring whether the new settlers would bring in a doctor and open a dispensary as the other settlements had done and whether the doctor would be able to cure his blind eye. Now as their speakers returned and they saw their dark faces, they surrounded them with the guilty look of children who had been naughty in their parents’ absence. (36)

The passage is a proof of Koestler’s objective perception of any human situation.

Some British officials sympathised with the Jewish settlers but their official position prevented them from taking any action. There were others who preferred the Arabs and some others who did not take any side. The following passage, cited from Joseph’s chronicle, shows the British attitude towards the Jews and the Arabs:

How convincing he [the Mukhtar] was even when he lied, and how unconvincing our Glicksteins are even when they speak the truth! That’s one of the reasons why the English like them and loathe us. We keep on demonstrating our loyalty to them, and the Arabs keep on double-crossing them. But the point is that the English don’t for a minute expect the Arabs to double-cross them; it's part of the game. They have an old and subtle tradition of dealing with Natives; they are attracted and amused by them, they exploit them as a matter of course and expect to be stabbed by them as soon as
they turn their back, as an equal matter of course. Whereas with us they do not know where they are. Our protestation of loyalty makes us only the more suspect. (86)

An American journalist, Dick Matthews, appreciates the first stages of the construction of Ezra's Tower and recognises the achievements of the people but does not like them.

Joseph also suffers from the same predicament. He is engrossed in Judaism but does not like the Jews. Like Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon*, he places the idea of mankind as a whole above man himself. A close associate, Reuben, blames Joseph for being an 'emotional positivist'. He charges him thus:

You only recognise observable phenomena of feeling. You live in abstractions. You are engrossed in Judaism but don't like the Jews. You love the idea of mankind but not the real man. You have lived with us for six years and still we are objects to you, not subjects. (169) (emphasis added)

Joseph, ruminating over his past at a later date (after Dina's death), comments thus:

I became a socialist because I hated the poor, and I become a Hebrew because I hated the yid. (275)

He plays the roles of the central figure, the narrator, and a diarist. A 'squalid little incident' at Oxford made him search for a place in the Jewish fraternity. He grew up as a young man without any knowledge of his Jewish background. At Oxford he had an affair with a woman by the name of Lily, who accidentally discovered in his body 'the stigma of the race incised'
and getting furious, insulted him. Accusing him of infamy and deception, she threw him out of the room. This incident became a turning point in Joseph's life and he decided to devote himself to a cult in the memory of his father and identify himself with the Jews (his father's race). Joining the Zionists, Joseph is moving towards an aim, a sub-conscious longing for a social utopia:

It had been a curious journey—from Lily's bed to Ezra's Tower in Galilee. Whether it was a pilgrim's progress or a wild goose chase he did not know; and at the moment he did not care to know. (76)

In his attempt to fit himself in with the life of the kibbutz, he succeeds only partially—his problem being that of a man caught between two worlds neither of which would completely accept him. His commitment to the zionist cause is not so absolute as to make him forget that he is half-English himself. Bauman calls this problem a trouble of the intellectual squint which makes a man see both sides of the question at the same time. But 'to see both sides is a luxury we can no longer afford', Bauman observes. It appears that Koestler also supports this view of the terrorists. His heroes are always compelled by circumstances to make a choice, but whereas others struggle between their private morality and public demand, Joseph has the conflict within himself. He felt constrained to take a decision only after the violent death of his beloved Dina.

Koestler has made the characters of Joseph and Dina supplementary to each other. The latter's relationship with Joseph fills in his personality. Dina is a tragic character—a victim of the tyrannical world. She was tortured in Germany by the Nazis to force her to betray her father, an
editor of a liberal newspaper. Consequently, she developed a phobia against being touched and went to the new Israel trying to forget what had already happened to her.

Concentrating on work alone, she tried to escape from her past. In Ezra's Tower, she was in charge of the children's home, and was always in very friendly terms with all the members of the commune. Her calm and amiable disposition had a softening influence upon the other characters of the novel. She is seen only through the eyes of Joseph, who is deeply in love with her. Though their affair ends in frustration (she recoils from the slightest physical contact), she yet respects Joseph's feelings for her. More than any other woman in Koestler who influences a man, Dina casts her spell upon Joseph. Her death leaves him free to join the terrorists in Jerusalem and leave the commune, an act that he was contemplating for quite some time.

Koestler has shown his characteristic indifference to women characters in the depiction of Dina. He has not shown her from inside. The reader is merely left to guess her thoughts under her peculiar situation. She bears her fate with grace and equanimity without any self-pity. The following words of Koestler about a girl he denounced in Baku, fit her well:

She was one of those who, in the words of the Koran, carry their destinies fastened around their neck.³

She remains composed even when Joseph announces his decision to marry another girl, Ellen. Only on the fateful day, she feels restless because of the Khamsin, and goes riding alone to the Ancestor's Cave. On her return
journey she was molested and brutally murdered by Issa, the mukhtar's son. The novelist presents her as a victim, and she is shown as a tragic character, not so much by what is said about her as by what is left unsaid.

None of Koestler's novels has love in the conventional sense as the central issue of interest. However, the problem of love and marriage turns up in *Thieves in the Night* with the tension of relationship shown in the triangle of Dina, Ellen, and Joseph. The solution to the complex situation involves social and political issues but the conflict is worked out dramatically. Love is supposed to be free in the commune, but lovers are required to live together. For his refusal to live with Ellen, his mistress, Joseph is threatened with expulsion. But to Ellen, a casual affair is not enough; she demands a more stable relationship. Knowing full well that Dina is the cause of Joseph's reluctance, she is resolved to make him go through with the ceremony. Reuben gently persuades Joseph to submit himself to the commune and marry Ellen even without any emotional involvement. But it must be admitted that Joseph's own action in the next scene with Dina has the effect of a judgement on his decision. Again, Reuben showed him the way out of the crisis by offering him the opportunity to go to Jerusalem on week-days for business transactions of the commune.

The whole incident is bad enough to turn Ellen into a regular category of Koestler's women—the victim. But Ellen is of another mould—she is a fighter, a type rather uncommon in English fiction. Ellen is a woman who fights for her own advantage, and is ready to sacrifice much to achieve her ends. She does not mind Joseph's derogatory views of love so long as she is able to achieve what she wants. Still, her own disregard of
all spiritual values in forcing an unwilling man to marry her, is, to say the least, demeaning to herself.

Koestler, a committed writer here, has delineated closely the Palestinian issue, the last major issue taken up in his novels. The development of the Ezra's commune occupies the first half of the book. Koestler's novels are generally drawn upon his own life. Here also, as already noted, his experience as a pioneer in the Kibbutz Heftseba has helped him write this convincing account of life in the settlement.

The second half of the novel—about the persecution and rebellion—is wider in range. Koestler has drawn an awful picture of the frustration of the settlers in failing to help the Jews in Europe. The White Paper issued by the British in 1939 set a limit to Jewish immigration although the Jews of central Europe were threatened with extermination unless they could escape. Under the circumstances, the Zionist settlers divide themselves into two parties. The first group believed in obeying the law even when they questioned its justice.

The other group believes that the Jews have tolerated atrocities too long, and so should change to terrorist tactics against both the Arab and the British. Bauman was the first to leave the commune and establish contact with the Irgun. Joseph silently admired the second group but adhered to the first until the Arab atrocities on Dina precipitated him into the Terrorist Movement. But the ground for this decision is rather shaky and far from rational:
'But I don't want to be reasonable,' I shouted, 'I have had enough of being reasonable for two thousand years while others were not. I was the reasonable fly running in zigzags over the window pane because there was light on the other side and I had my legs torn out and my wings burnt off with matches. I am through with your 'reasonableness'. (156)

Jenni Calder is of the opinion that the incident that provides the motive for Joseph's immigration verges on the ridiculous, and such an emphasis splits the level of the novel, and the psychological examination interferes with the political demonstration without humanising it. However, the humanising factor is provided by the detailed illustration of daily life. The sharp edges of political conflict are smoothed by the ease and affability of daily intercourse. As Joseph writes in his diary,

It is curious how most of us develop our specific passions here. They are not hobbies, for they are directly connected with the job. There is Dasha with her vitamin and calory mania running the kitchen; there is Ariel who is so intimate with his sheep that I suspect him of committing sodomy in the true bucolic tradition; there is Dina with her children's house, and Moshe, our Communal Shylock. The fusing of job and hobby among the more skilled workers is partly of course a consequence of the freer choice of occupation which the commune provides compared with town life or individual farming. But only partly. There is an additional something in Simeon's relationship to the trees or Dina's to the children who are not hers. It has to do with a new kind of possessive, proprietary feeling which the Commune breeds... The feeling of possessiveness towards an object is the reflection of the memories it represents; its value is crystallised memory... This intimate feeling of
possession is common to all peasants, but in our case there is more to it... The commune is a great, dense, tight-woven partnership of memories. Thus by sharing everything in the place with all the others, my feeling of mineness is not diminished but increased— and this is not a theoretical deduction but the analysis of an intimate experience. It could also be applied to analyse patriotic emotions—but the Race or Nation are more heterogenous and diffuse bodies than the commune. (109-10) (emphasis added)

The above passage is an instance of Joseph's critical self-justification regarding his own stance. In occasions like this, we come across the author's penetrating analysis of a situation and his own position.

In Thieves in the Night, Koestler has presented a debate about the legitimacy of terror and has used the characters as voices in the debate. Bauman, the leader of the illegal self-defence organisation, Haganah, is a socialist to the bone. He is a balanced and responsible person and joins Jabotinsky's right-wing extremism. Hearing the news of Bauman's splitting of the Haganah, Joseph concludes that the situation must be more critical than what they know it to be in their isolated Tower. The settlers are so absorbed in their problems that they have lost all contact with the reality. Joseph realises that the 'egotism of a collective' is no less 'narrowing' than that of the individuals. Koestler emphasises this point through Simeon, a stern and composed figure who joins Bauman's terrorist group:
The English are preparing to sell out on us... In Germany the night of the long knives has begun; our people stand lined up facing a bolted door while the knife penetrates inch by inch into their backs. Most of us here have relations among them, and what are we doing about it? —arguing about Russia and cultivating our little gardens. (112)

When Simeon decides to go over to Bauman, Joseph feels that Ezra's Tower will be impoverished, because a commune is not simply a crowd—'it is a pattern, a mosaic figure, and if a piece breaks loose it leaves a gap for ever' (182). Simeon's decision is a calculated one—unlike Joseph, he identifies himself with the suffering of his brothers and sisters. He realises that Joseph will always be an outsider to the issue because he has a repulsion for 'the assembly of thick, curved noses, fleshy lips and liquid eyes' and he hated even more the 'streak of the over-ripe race in himself'. Joseph joined the extremists for sheer revenge, and nothing else. For Simeon, the concept of revenge is absolute and absurd—'We have to encounter terror by terror' (57), he says.

Koestler has shown the distinctive traits of Simeon and Joseph by means of a piece of observation of the latter which reads thus:

Simeon has all the Roman virtues, he loves people and hates their enemies. I do not even love my people. I rather dislike them. Self-hatred is the Jew's patriotism, Matthews said. (274)

Reuben, the kibbutz leader, is a 'socially ideal type' for collective life. His personality is a kind of neutral one that 'offers no point for attack'.
He is the solid force behind the settlement and goes on performing his duty with nonchalance. Joseph considered him a 'brick', and thought that it was a great comfort to obey blindly instead of having to decide what to do. Reuben's inner strength is properly felt only at a moment of crisis. He helps Joseph out of a dilemma by giving him a job that requires him to go to the city.

In no other novel, perhaps, is Koestler so elaborate in presenting the quality of life of his characters as here. He brings in the political context by using official reports, newspaper reports, reports of debates in the House of Commons, along with the minor details of kibbutz life presented briskly in Joseph's diary. Dina, Dasha, Gaby, Ellen, Moshe, Max, Sarah, Mendl—all of them have their assigned place in the work. These people, belonging to the original batch of settlers, is bound together by their commitment to the cause of Zionism. Koestler has drawn a line between the old settlers and the new horde of 'Hebrew Tarjans' roaming in the hills of Galilee. The old group came from abroad, groping for a new form of social and national existence, an experimental order of fraternity such as was never tried before, and was involved in a revolutionary negation of the past. But the new generation slips into a ready-made form, guided by their elders. Joseph considered the new arrivals at Ezra's Tower to be 'physically precocious, mentally retarded, over-ripe and immature at the same time'. He further observed:

They speak no European language except a little English on the Berlitz-school level; the not too numerous and not too competent translations of world classics strike no chords on them; the humanistic hormones of the mind are absent, no
Latin or Greek being taught in our schools. As against this, they know all about fertilisers and irrigation and rotation of crops; they know the names of birds and plants and flowers; they know how to shoot and fear neither Arab nor devil. (151)

This critical reading of the group is deeply significant, for it shows the present-day dichotomy between the scientific and the humanistic culture, the over-emphasis of the former creating millions of morons to the ultimate detriment to the evolution of a perfect human personality. In all his writing, particularly those of his later career, Koestler has insisted on the need for developing 'the humanistic hormones of the mind'. This emphasis is an important index of the development of Koestler's final outlook on life and things.

The new arrivals may be appropriately called "Neanderthal Boys". Another group of young men, described by Koestler with much sympathy, were the boys of the defence squad, the Sabras. They are mostly under nineteen, born in the country, sons and grandsons of the first Jewish settlers. Hebrew for them was the native tongue, the country their country 'irrespective of promise or fulfilment'. They were haunted by no memories and had nothing to forget. Some of them belonged to the Auxiliary Settlement Police and the others to the illegal self-defence organisation, Haganah. To quote V.S. Pritchett,

With... Thieves in the Night, Koestler returns to something nearer the mood of The Gladiators, and his ambivalent attitude to violence- and to ends and means--is almost decided... He is among the people whom he really envies and admires, the violent people, the people with grenades in
their lorries. This is an old legacy from Communism, one can see it in Malraux also. If anything, Koestler is more depressed by the Zionists' capacity as colonists than by their readiness for killing; practical capacity has no Byronism. We have the suspicion that the Neanderthalers of *Darkness at Noon* are being reproduced in the Promised Land.5

Koestler has used in *Thieves in the Night* a metaphorical language, full of clichés, parables, and anecdotes. The words of Simeon announcing the occupation of the place came out of him 'like a jet through the crack of a high pressure chamber' (6). The report of the commission appointed by the British government to work out suggestions for the partitioning of the country is described as 'not a political report but a printed sneer of derision' (153). In some passages, the prose starts racing from one cliché to another. The following provides an instance:

Already his momentary elation was followed by a new wave of disgust at choosing that easy way out. Reuben had showed him the way out of the first crisis—had enabled him to eat his cake and have it—and now Bauman was doing the same. But he was too weary to argue about Ends and Means— for that was what the whole question finally boiled down to. This was no time for soul searching. Who was he to save his integrity while others had their bodies hacked to pieces?

In the logic of the ice age tolerance became a luxury and purity a vice. There was no way to escape the dilemma. To wash one's hand and let others do the dirty job was a hypocrisy, not a solution. (300)

Koestler illustrates the Arab attitudes to immigrants with the help of a parable:
Of course they don't like us. They are slum children in possession of a vast playground where they wallow happily in the dust. In comes another bunch of children who have nowhere to play and start cleaning up the place and building tents and lavatories with a horrible burst of efficiency. 'Get out from here' they cry, 'we do not want you'. 'But there is plenty of room' says the clever lot, 'and we've got permission to share it, and after we've improved it the place will be much nicer for you too'. -- 'Get out, get out' they cry, having already pinched some of the newcomers' tools and toys; 'get out, we don't want you. This is our place and we like it as it is'. (160-161)

In another parable, Koestler compares the Zionists to our remote ancestors, the fish, who, leaving their fellows, first crept ashore to become amphibians.

Koestler's depiction of the view of the beautiful landscape of the hills is an important attraction of the novel. Departing from his hard, matter-of-fact images, here he has presented an imaginative picture of Galilee:

About half-past five a slight inflammation over the hills to the east showed that the sky was preparing for the rise of day; a gay pallor expanded overhead in which the stars dissolved one by one, and soon afterwards the sun rose with brisk abruptness, as if in a hurry. Within a quarter of an hour the cloudless sky had changed from light grey into a transparent greenish blue, and all around the hills emerged in their normal day-shape, arid and desolate and yet soft and gently curved. They were reddish brown at close range, chalk-grey in the distance, and became of an unreal tender violet pastel shade as they receded towards the horizon. The
new settlers found themselves in the centre of a landscape of gentle desolation, a barrenness mellowed by age. The rocks had settled down for eternity; the sparse scrubs and olive-trees exhaled a silent and contented resignation. A few vultures smiled round the hill-top, the curves they described seemed to paraphrase the smooth curvature of the hills. (29)

A passage like this shows the sensitive mind of a writer who is chiefly known as a firm intellectual. The close observation and the sensitive appreciation of Nature shows Koestler's poetic mind.

The account of the Arab villages and colonies is brisk and dramatic, and overlaid with a profusion of Koestler's sardonic humour. V.S. Pritchett calls it 'an Old Testament world; but argued, of course, and enlivened by Koestler's short, sporting, school boy humour!'

Talks about conditioned reflexes, rape, (or lust without love) and homosexuality seem to attract Koestler. The rape of Dina, however, is only hinted at and, with utmost restraint, he later draws the picture of the suffering she had possibly undergone:

She must have put up a strong fight, for her fingernails were broken and there was blood and bits of skin under her teeth. They counted twenty-seven stabs on her, none of which could have caused instantaneous death. (260)

After this tragic episode, the second part of the novel almost disintegrates, making it obvious that Dina was the inspiration behind all the enthusiasm of the central character in the novel. It is no wonder that Joseph finally resolves to join Bauman's terrorist gang to avenge her death.
In Thieves in the Night, Koestler's attitude to terrorism and to the question of ends and means appears rather ambivalent. In describing the extremist action of the so-called 'stern gang', he provides them with natural justification for violence. Joseph envies Bauman and Simeon for 'having burnt their bridges' and exclaims,

Oh, for the supreme gift of irresponsibility, the gift to translate feeling into direct action! Oh, for the relief of having one's wrath exploded with a good, home-made bomb! The act of killing already appeared to him divested of its flesh-tearing, physical aspect, free from the angle of death and pain, as an almost Platonic act... what a luxury to press one's finger on a hard metal trigger and get hanged singing the anthem and have done with it--done with the Things to Forget which refused to be forgotten and were being repeated on an ever increasing scale with ever more lurid details. (228)

But afterwards he has to change his views regarding senseless killings:

An eye for an eye would be a wise rule if the victim could regain his sight by the culprit's eye. I have experienced that the desire for revenge may become a physical yearning like thirst; but its consummation is like drinking salt water. Some men adrift on the sea go on drinking it until they lose their reason. Some killers go on kicking their dead victim in the rage of their impotence. But the dead is always triumphant and the living is always defeated. (271)

In Darkness at Noon Koestler opposed Stalinism on the basis of his conviction that the end does not justify the means. But in Thieves in the Night, his faith appears to have gone full circle; now he holds that the end justifies the means. He rather admires the way the fascists were able
to combine initiative and imagination with a blind obedience to authority. In the words of Isaac Rosenfeld,

Koestler, moreover, does not set the problem of terrorism in the larger historical context to which it belongs, that of revolutionary action in general. Terrorism seems to have become for him what it was for some non-Marxist or Pre-Bolshevist revolutionaries—the whole of strategy rather than a kind of tactics. He is certain that organised strategy in the socialist sense is now impossible. With the peculiarly masochistic pleasure that many former Marxists now take in yielding to necessity—in their motivation there is present even an element of wickedness, the pleasure one takes in destroying others' illusions—he insists, in effect, that the abandonment of a broad social or international perspective is now forced upon us.⁷

Raymond Mortimer also has resented the fact that Koestler could breathe only in the climate of violence.⁸ He, however, maintains that the writer perhaps does not agree with his hero's support of terrorism. And if so, 'he should have stated the fact in a foreword, there is no hint to this effect in the text', Mortimer writes.⁹

Thieves in the Night, a novel on the ethics of survival, makes fascinating reading. It is a dramatisation of the Palestinian problem, and the characters are shown as participating in the struggle of the State of Israel for survival. It is the most journalistic of Koestler's novels and, as already stated, the story is unfolded through reports, briefs, diaries, and long discussions. The reportage is rather heavy in the second part of the book. Most of the facts are brought in through broadcasts and extracts from newspapers and are recorded in Joseph's diary. Naturally, one is
prompted to ask whether there is any 'action' as such in the novel. The truth is, there is more direct action here than in the other novels of Koestler. The book appears to be one of Koestler's best chronicles. As a novel, however, it did not satisfy some of his admirers. They considered it not so much as a novel as a brilliant example of 'high journalism' or a 'work of propaganda'. Edmund Wilson has observed that Koestler's neglect of the hero as a character has harmed this fascinating book. In his words,

The story of Joseph himself, as distinguished from the historical drama in which he becomes involved, has been carelessly put together and is not really told.¹⁰

Still, he admires it as one of those 'rare feats of journalism which makes you feel that you have been there yourself.'¹¹ Compared with the works of Malraux and Silone, the book appears far from satisfactory, but Wilson discerns its worth as a book full of

the psychological insights which are the only things that make history intelligible and the writing of it a humanistic art. Thieves in the Night is not, and it hardly pretends to be, a first-rate contribution to literature, but it is one of the most valuable reports that have been written about the recent events of our bewildered and appalling period.¹²

As shown in the present work, Koestler's attitude to the Palestinian problem or, for that matter, to the question of terrorism as a tactic, appears to be ambivalent. The subtitle itself, Chronicle of an Experiment, proves it. The State of Israel has now become a permanent reality with the declaration of independence in 1948. As a writer committed to the cause of
Theism, for the first time Koestler's stance on Palestine seems to be fully justified. It is now admitted that the terrorist groups played a decisive role in securing Israel's independence. Yet the impression lingers that Koestler always vacillates between the two extremes — the choice between the yogi and the commissar — the eternal conflict between ends and means.

The debate concerned with the legitimacy of terrorism dominates the better part of the novel. The Jews are persecuted in Europe but Britain is preventing immigration. Illegal immigrants are very often deported, and the Arabs go on terrorising the Jews, yet the British remain passive onlookers. This is shown through the behaviour of several British officials in the novel. Their sympathy for the settlers is only lip-service. V.S. Pritchett has criticised Koestler for ridiculing both the Arabs and the English without discrimination, irrespective of their respective stand on the issue.

In *Thieves in the Night*, Koestler has drawn a line between the Nazi and Soviet terror on the one hand and the Jewish terror on the other. The latter was the outcome of unbearable provocation. Coming under the influence of Bauman, Joseph felt that violence was the only international language in the post-Genevan world. Simeon felt that he supported terrorism out of ideological choice. In the words of Iain Hamilton,

The writing of *Thieves in the Night* (as of the later *Promise and Fulfilment*) was for Koestler a harrowing and painful experience, involving him, as he was later to recall, 'in an acute conflict between conviction and inclination, for I have had my fill of terror and violence, and was yet
compelled to explain and defend the cause of the Jewish terrorists'. Now, thirty years later, Thieves in the Night is essential reading for anyone who seeks to understand why and how the gentle Zionism of Herzl and Weizman was hardened into today's harsh intransigence of Israeli nationalism.  

In the final analysis, the book emerges as a thoughtful reading of the Palestinian question, convincingly explored both from political and humanistic angles. The Zionist attempt at rehabilitation can be viewed as a kind of political parable of our times. Koestler, ever alert to political and human situations anywhere in the world, was naturally drawn to the intricacies of this issue.

Koestler's journalistic tendency overshadows the artistic merit of almost all his novels. Thieves in the Night is no exception. In the opinion of Clement Greenburg,

The journalistic novel exploits nonfiction in order to enable the writer to avoid the more difficult challenges of fiction proper, while on the other hand it uses fiction to make the shaping, manipulation, and adulteration of nonfiction easier. Where the genuine artist starts from a personal, particular experience, the journalist novelist starts from a general, public one, whose automatic cogency relieves him of the necessity of making it cogent by means of art.  

Such an opinion stipulates that public events should not play a vital role in fiction and that the writing of documentary fiction is a means of overcoming the difficulties of both journalism and fiction. But in all his novels, except perhaps in The Age of Longing, Koestler is concerned
with the interaction of man and political events. In the present work, he shows the characters in an atmosphere of persecution and rebellion and the interaction of man and history. Here he had had to cope with the difficulties of both journalism and fiction, and so had recourse to the psychological explanation of personality. To quote Ronald Hayman,

A great deal of the documentation that has to be done is integrated quite successfully into the action, but there is too much reportage and too many facts that can only be brought in by quoting from broadcasts that the characters hear and making them read out extracts from newspapers to one another. The constant recourse to devices of this sort in the second half of the novel is an indication that some of the events in question must be rather remote from the characters, and the fact is that quite suddenly the persecution of the Jews in Europe has become a main theme. It is one that could not possibly be developed here with any success, even though Koestler concentrates less on the actual persecution than on the policy of refusing asylum to the German Jews who escaped to Palestine.\(^{15}\)

As in his other novels, here, too, Koestler uses the third-person narrative. Some of the events are reported through Joseph's diary also, but Joseph's tendency towards self-analysis hampers objectivity. It would, perhaps, have been a greater delight to view Joseph's personality and actions without his own analysis of the motive spring of his thoughts and deeds. As Jenni Calder has put it,

Koestler's antithetical, hammer-blow style works powerfully when he is dealing with facts, but is very often clumsy when he employs it to fashion personality.
It is when Koestler is trying hardest to preserve the balance between events and individuals that we are most conscious of discrepancy. The carefully planned movement of emphasis from public to the personal, from political argument to individual feeling becomes almost perfunctory. The dinner at which the Assistant Chief Commissioner, Dick Matthews, a Jewish professor, and an Arab politician are brought together is an example.

In spite of these shortcomings, the novel is described by Calder as more immediately moving than anything else that Koestler wrote.

Koestler's fictional writings deal with the human predicament. In Thieves in the Night, Joseph shares a group predicament 'which is carried to its extreme' (353). Though Koestler's heroes suffer from their very own 'defeat neurosis', Joseph has a brief moment of shared glory or triumph when in the final scene he is out to help found a new settlement.

In Thieves in the Night, the characters take part in the struggle of the state of Israel for survival. All the characters have their assigned roles to play but they are not puppets in the hands of the novelist. Joseph's motive for joining the settlers is more personal than ideological, and so his motivation is weaker than that of the other fictional heroes of Koestler. But he is a deeper character than Peter or Rubashov or Spartacus. In their case, the conflict is between themselves and the ideas propagated in the novel. In Joseph's case, the conflict takes place within himself—

‘And if my heart is burnt to ashes, my reason I shall keep on ice’, says Joseph (273). He is not suited to the communal life even though he chooses to sacrifice his personal liberty to serve the commune. But he, like Koestler himself, was critical of the Zionist problem
for which he fails to play the role of a dedicated settler. However, Edmund Wilson, striking a contrary note, observes that all that is relevant to Koestler's purpose is to have his hero half a Jew, so that he can loyally take part in the commune and at the same time criticize the Jews from a semi-detached point of view, and to equip him with a personal reason—where one is as good as another—for going over to the party of violence.  

Joseph is given the role of a person who feels lonely among men busy with immediate work and the needs of the passing day. He is left alone to ruminate over an intellectual turned a tiller of the soil:

Rousseau was lucky that the French did not take him seriously; had they followed his advice and all become shepherds and tillers of soil, he would have hanged himself. (153)

Brewster and Burrell in Modern World Fiction have drawn the reader's attention to John Hersy's attempt to define a new literary genre, the novel of 'contemporary history'. Hersy has objected to the rejection of novels concerned with current events merely on the ground of being 'journalistic'. Viewed in this light, Koestler's Thieves in the Night may be rightly included in this new genre.

In The Age of Longing Koestler has probed a deeply disturbing dilemma of the nineteen fifties, namely, the threat of totalitarian enslavement. The action of the novel is set in the turmoil of post-war France, when the communists were the strongest single party in the national assembly. The people of Neutralia in Arrival and Departure were waiting for
the Apocalypse. In *The Age of Longing*, as the apocalypse approaches, people try to justify their behaviour. To quote Koestler's biographer, Iain Hamilton,

Koestler's novel about the collapse of Western Europe, *The Age of Longing*, he had written [sic] amidst innumerable distractions out of a profound sense of disgust, despair almost with the apparent frivolity and helplessness of intellectuals in the face of totalitarian adversary. Once he had finished correcting the proofs he felt that he had done more than his fair share of attempting to disperse the clouds of unknowing into which so many had retreated.19

In the context of France and some other non-communist countries being shown as facing the threat from the dreaded state (Soviet Russia), this novel can be aptly grouped with *Thieves in the Night* as a novel of survival. Some critics prefer to treat it as forming a second trilogy with *Darkness at Noon* and *Arrival and Departure*. In the opinion of Ronald Hayman,

*The Age of Longing* could be seen as an extension of *Darkness at Noon* into the middle 1950's, with the scene changed to Paris, a rejuvenated Gletkin having a love affair, Rubashov leaving the Party and the whole thing broadened by admitting characters to represent the non-Communist points of the contemporary compass. America is represented by the heroine, Hydie, by the colonel, and by a young man on a ridiculous cultural mission; Catholicism by Father Millet and by Hydie's convent education; Existentialism by a neo-nihilist professor and a sulky girl, and Europe by a dying Frenchman, a limping poet..., a displaced professor... a displaced Pole who goes mad... and by two healthy men of action.20
The novel does not have a hero or a protagonist, but two prominent figures, Fedya Nikitin, a Soviet intelligence officer, and Hydie, the daughter of an American colonel. Koestler has assembled here a sequence of dramatic scenes around the story of love between Hydie and Nikitin. He has drawn a vivid picture of the Parisian intelligentsia, who are designed to embody group predicament rather than develop as individual man and woman, and only three of the characters—Hydie, Nikitin, and Leontiev are shown to have individual traits.

Hydie, who has been brought up in a Catholic convent, and has a strong tendency towards mysticism, meets Nikitin, a 'modern Neanderthaler', at Monsieur Anatole's on a Bastille Day celebration. Koestler portrays a fascinating picture of M. Anatole sitting at the centre of the festivities and entertaining the guests with his endearing talks. Engrossed in the display of fireworks, Hydie hits Fedya accidentally on the saddle of the nose, causing the blood to trickle down his face, and soils his evening coat in the process. An awkward situation follows, and his notebook falls on the floor accidentally and is picked up by Hydie.

The embarrassed Soviet agent hurriedly leaves the scene, and Hydie is required to meet him again to return the notebook. In the meantime, she becomes interested in a mysterious list of names in the notebook, the implication of which she failed to grasp just then. But ultimately it played havoc with their relationship.

In her very first encounter, Hydie falls for the physically attractive young man, only to be totally disgusted at the end. A traumatic experience in the past made her lose faith and turned her into a victim of
'the age of longing'. Right at the moment, she was desperately searching for something to believe in. Nikitin's self-assurance, in sharp contrast to her gropings in the dark, gave her a sense of firmness. For several months the couple haunted the cafés and the Paris bistros, talking incessantly and sharing each other's views. They were busy explaining to themselves what they felt, thereby giving the impression that they really did feel it.

The only other character besides Hydie and Nikitin that Koestler develops as an individual is a renegade Russian, Leo Nikolyevich Leontiev, Hero of Culture and Joy of the People. An important commander on the literary front, his column appeared every Friday on the front page of the journal Freedom and Culture. This celebrated author from the Free Commonwealth had his wife, Zina, as a hostage in his homeland. For years he had served the party with his writings and won several academy awards as well as the decoration, for Heroes of Culture, the honorary title, Joy of the People, but later he felt rather inane. The news of his wife's death emboldened him to break with the party, but even then he found it difficult to continue his writings because his mental apparatus could not reconcile itself to the new routine.

In The Age of Longing, Koestler has brought in a medley of characters, each of whose present is overshadowed by some wicked legacy of the past. As a consequence of this, perhaps, almost everyone feels an urge to justify his or her action to someone else. Very often, these characters get all mixed up, the cause of their demoralisation being apparent to others but seldom to themselves. A close look at their overall situation shows that having had to live through the wreckage of two world wars, they
are now apprehensive of a third. They haunt bars, restaurants, and bistros, and attend receptions and political meetings to talk about the impending crisis, which is a threat to the very survival of mankind. These characters are shown not only as ideological and political figures but also as real human beings with their hopes and fears, decisions and transgressions, making them representative of a particular point of time. However, they do not develop psychologically.

The interaction between Hydie and Nikitin supplies the main thread of the narrative. Hydie's childhood frustrations and her days at the convent made her suffer from a sense of isolation and a loss of faith. She was fascinated by the Russian agent at the first sight because he appeared immensely self-confident, giving her a sense of security. As Hydie thought:

Whatever he said had the simplicity of absolute conviction—therein resided his superiority over her. He had faith, she thought with hungry envy, something to believe in. That was what made him so fascinating and unlike all the people she usually met—so unlike her father or herself, not to mention the Three Ravens Nevermore. At last somebody who did not live in a glass cage.21

Their friendship grew into an intimacy which ultimately ended in a sexual humiliation for Hydie. The climax of their affair is, more or less, a symbolic episode—bordering on the Pavlovian theory of conditioned reflex. Nikitin's experiment on her to show that human beings are nothing but conditions and reflexes hurt her so much that she was left with nothing but contempt for him. Simultaneously, she discovers the real mission he is engaged in, and rationally concludes that she now hates him for what he does and stands for.
Hydle's attempt to contact the authority about Nikitin meets with scorn and indifference. Consequently, she decides to kill Nikitin in his flat but bungles. Koestler has drawn at great length her intense mental conflict preceding her desperate action, as well as the scene where she confronts Nikitin with a gun. As it happens, he at first takes her to be merely a jealous woman; but when her motive appears real, he tries to put her off. His taunting remark that she cannot kill him for ideological reasons provokes her to press the trigger and hurt him. Their respective governments, however, hushed up the matter. Nikitin was whisked away home and afterwards sent to a camp in the Arctic. It is significant that for Hydie and Nikitin, their meeting for the first time, and parting, each preceded by an accident.

As a novelist, Koestler shows but little concern for the background of his characters, perhaps because of their having practically no existence beyond their ideas. Very little is said about the childhood or the family background of Spartacus, Rubashov, Joseph, or Peter. Koestler was well-versed in Freudian psychology and knew very well the part played by the past on the later behaviour of an individual. Even then, he did not attach to it much importance. The only exception is The Age of Longing where the past of both the protagonists is gradually unfolded. The facts about their background show them a little more as man and woman of flesh and blood than their predecessors, i.e., Rubashov, Spartacus, Joseph, and Peter.

Hydie is the only female character in Koestler's novels playing the central role. In this she shows herself like his heroes, and other
women characters of Koestler's novels, she is also a victim of her world
but, at the same time, she is a fighter too—she fights not only a personal
battle, but a battle for the values she thinks the western world should
possess. Her childhood was far from normal. Daughter of an alcoholic mother
who was sent to an asylum, Hydie had her education at a Catholic convent in
England, where she became involved in matters of faith. She wanted something
sublimer than everyday religion to believe in. The sight of useless
suffering made her question God's benevolent providence. A child suffering
from cerebral meningitis and producing bird-like cries in its agony left
a disturbing imprint upon her mind, and her faith began to falter.

After her break with religion, she went on searching for some
moorings in faith. Unfortunately, she looks for it in other people. It is in
a moment of this raging conflict that she fell in love with Fedya Nikitin.
She was drawn towards him because he knew most of the answers as against
others who merely fumbled. As Hydie later confessed to her father,

I fell for him because he was sure of himself and had a
belief, a certitude which none of you have. Because he is
real, which none of you are. (322)

Nikitin analyses the reasons for her attachment just before their relation­
ship was shattered by a revolver shot:

It was because I believe in the future and am not afraid of
it, and because to know what he lives for makes a man
strong. For a person like you, who once also believed in
something, that is more than a sex appeal. (359)
In the crucial shooting scene, her longing for a proof of faith is fulfilled. Then she starts hating him with the same vehemence as she loved him.

A visit to Boris, a Russian exile, who is on the verge of insanity and almost ruined as a human being, makes her realise with greater intensity the implications of the work done by Secret Agents like Nikitin. When Boris was in prison, his wife and only child died in labour camps in horrifying circumstances. Learning of it, his mind disintegrates, and he tries to make himself invisible to escape any further wrath of No. 1, whom he now regards as Anti-Christ. His worry, however, is not unfounded as Nikitin was preparing a list of suspects to be liquidated, with Boris as one of them. Hydie also now recognises Nikitin as Anti-Christ.

Hydie is a sort of liberated woman, Koestler's half-hearted portrayal of an American girl. She is totally different from the type of Koestler's ideal woman, Arlova, in Darkness at Noon, who is a Victorian in her grace and dignity. Some of Hydie's thoughts recorded by the novelist show her as a frivolous woman:

How pathetic he [Boris] looked with his bitter lips, the taste of leather. With clear untroubled glance, she undressed the stooping figure across the table. She knew that men did that to women almost automatically, so she had acquired the same habit. (29)

Her fortitude at the time of crisis also draws the reader's attention. Just before going into Fedya's apartment with the intention of killing him, she gulps dry martini at a bar and endeavours to look
composed. She makes herself immune to surprises and unforeseen circumstances and mentally rehearses exactly what she will act and do. In this scene she is able to draw the reader's sympathy. Her father, the colonel, wrote about her in his diary:

...I cannot help feeling that there is nothing much wrong about the girl except that she lives in these messy times, this age of longing. The bug of longing acts differently on different people, but we've all got it in our circulation. Hydie caught it when she ran away from the convent; so may be when you get God out of your system something goes wrong with your metabolism which makes the bug more virulent. (323)

Hydie's peculiar predicament is her loss of faith, which is rather common to humanity in the twentieth century. Her groping for faith or the longing for strength is a tendency that is characteristic of many in our day. Hydie, in her person, represents the qualities of all other women characters of Koestler, but unlike them all, she plays an active role and shapes the events in the novel.

Fedya Nikitin, a neanderthaler like Gletkin in Darkness at Noon, is given more space to breathe. Koestler has drawn him as one who embodies in himself the threat to Western civilization. A commissar from the other side of the Iron Curtain, Fedya starts his life's journey from a dark basement of the black town, Baku. Fedya was brought up by his grandfather, Arin, modelled on Hadji Mir Baba, whom Koestler had met in Bokhara. Koestler is always very good at describing things of which he has personal knowledge. This part of the story he has closely described from his first-hand experience acquired during his visit to Soviet Russia.
From his grandfather, Fedya learnt the past history of the oppression his family had to bear, and grew up to be a modern neanderthaler dreaming only of the Great Change. His father, Grisha, was a revolutionary hero, almost a legend. Fedya was a witness to the brutal physical assault upon his father by the soldiers of the Czar, resulting in his loss of consciousness. The message conveyed to him by his father's last look would come to him again and again:

...he had ceased to smile and his green eyes now looked fully into his son's grey eyes, imparting to him a message which the boy was meant never to forget and never did forget. It was a message of hatred, cruelty and revenge; it was also a message of love, of unshakable faith in the great change, and of a childlike belief in the marvels and happiness which it would bring. (78)

Fedya spent his childhood in the midst of bearded, mahorka-smoking friends of his father who shaped and re-shaped in their talks the social and economic face of the world. The reality of this background has made him a more convincing character than Gletkin. From Baku, Fedya moved to Moscow with Grandpa Arin, just after the Great Change, when he was only eight years old. At school he started studying books about oppressed nations and classes. Other children learned history as a table of abstract events in the abstract past; to Fedya, it was a reality. Life was a part of history with his grandfather, the dead father, and himself as actors on its stage.

Arin was convinced that it was their privilege to live at the time of that momentous event when life started all afresh, as it had after the Flood. Because of his own enthusiasm (and also as Grisha's son) Fedya rose into prominence and every moment felt like participating in the creation of
a new universe. When he realised that the Great Change was only at a standstill, he blamed the saboteurs and enemy agents for it. At school, the teachers of the old generation were replaced by those of a new type: members of the party, or of the komsomol whose professional qualifications consisted of a few months' training, mostly in the form of evening courses. Each class of students was to regard themselves from that time as members of a future battalion in the battle for the utopia.

Fedya is far removed from the people trained in the liberal Western school of thought; his action is always guided by the maxim, 'truth is what is useful to the party at the moment.' He always saw to it that he was not thrown out of the movement. In his komsomol days he betrayed a fellow-student and party-worker, Nadeshda, without an iota of remorse, and sacrificed her as a service to the party.

Going to Paris with a missionary zeal for social revolution, he mixed freely in the social circles only to make a list of socially unreliable figures to be liquidated after the possible seizure of Paris by the Free Commonwealth. He got involved with Hydie for a purely trivial reason—to get back his notebook, and not for any emotional compulsion. He admired her superior culture and felt a sense of triumph over his enemy by having a mistress from the other side. It was like trespassing into enemy territory. Being in Paris was rather a kind of test for a man like Nikitin, a neanderthaler. Many of his comrades could not resist the temptations of Paris life and left the party to 'go to Capua,' a phrase used to insinuate demoralisation.
Like Hydie, Fedya also suffered from a sense of isolation. It arose from his peculiar sense of zeal for what he considered to be the cause. He was cautious and unresponsive, and therefore unpopular with other characters of the novel. Koestler has drawn him as a handsome, muscular, potent, and self-restrained person. In the author's own words,

In his shirt, which brought out his straight, muscular shoulders, he was very good-looking. His face had a simple directness, simplicity without guile; only his slightly slanting grey eyes were markedly expressionless—one way pupils that took the light in, gave nothing out. (15)

It seems obvious that Koestler was fascinated by the virility of the new generation of commissars, namely, Gletkin and Nikitin.

Nikitin's new boss, Gromin, a new arrival from home (Russia) is another neanderthal in this novel. He was a sullen, tight-lipped man whom even Niktin considered to be uncultured. He seemed to make a point of being generally disagreeable to everybody and treated the old hands as if they were all contaminated. (347)

Nikitin believed that the appointment of a person like Gromin (who knew neither the language nor the place) to a post in a place like Paris implied a new wave of distrust in the service against those who had been long stationed in Capua.

'The characters in this book are fictitious'—Koestler wrote, but it is not very difficult to detect in them the reproduction, though partial, of Parisian intellectuals. As Iain Hamilton has rightly observed,
...at this distance in time it is far from difficult to recognise behind the disguises the dopplegangers of Malraux, Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponty, Ilya Ehrenburg (the Soviet Union's licensed liberal), and most of the others who can be picked out from the wordier pages of Mme Beauvoir's The Mandarins. 22

There may be a partial identification of Julien Delattre, a French intellectual, with Koestler himself. He, too, was an ex-communist who spent his days reviewing the ideas and events that ultimately betrayed him. Koestler has shown him as an angry young man preoccupied with a sense of general misery. Julien Delattre also believed that it was better to have no faith at all than to have faith in a mirage. He was the embodiment of the whole school of modern thought. His character was impervious to any outside influence because for him it was too early for a new all-embracing faith to be born, for people in general were not mature enough to make an effort. On the other hand, it was considered to be too late for him and others like him to start changing their ideas. His disillusionment with the ideal results in the immobility of spirit:

Julien and his friends had known the thirst. But they had been offered salt water to quench it — now they couldn't get rid of its bitter taste and only saw the poison in all God's rivers and lakes. (104)

This disillusionment does not allow Julien and his friends to grow psychologically. Like Hydie, Julien also suffered from an urge, a longing, but his longing was futile as he refused to accept anything outside himself, and his own resources dried up for too many lies which he carried about as truths.
Both Professor Vardi and Boris are victims of the communist regime. They are shown as wearied and disillusioned. Vardi illustrates a kind of mental fatigue that drives a man at any given moment of time to accept anything which is different from his own peculiar predicament, as an outlet of escape. He was eager to work in his own line and had a positive aim in life. Getting an offer at the University of Viennograd, he decided to go back to his homeland after living the life of a red émigré for twenty years. The tragic implication of his situation is that he decides to return home in spite of his perfect knowledge that it meant liquidation, meaning death. But he decides to be once on the side of history. The essential difference between Vardi and Julien is that the former, to use Koestler's own words,

never departed from that solid dialectical foundation which alone enables one to see order in apparent chaos. (216)

Count Boris, a refugee from the East, was suffering from a complicated form of tuberculosis which he acquired as a deportee in the Arctic lumber camps. His personal tragedy made him nourish in his heart a design to murder No. 1, the Father of the People, because 'it is a point of honour for humanity at large to kill him' (307). He is living in the midst of constant hallucination, working out the plan for the assassination that he imagines would take place. Though Koestler is not using Boris as a megalomaniac, he yet implies that a tragedy like his is only an index of the reality of the Free Commonwealth. The scene in which Boris is trying to make himself invisible from the visitors is indeed touching. What happens to Boris and his family is typical of the time about which the novel was written. The suffering of this victim overcasts the novel with a
Julien, Vardi, and Boris generally meet together to discuss the political situation. Sometimes their meetings end in misunderstanding and squabbling, but they serve an important purpose by showing the helplessness of the situation where nothing can be done.

Professor Pontieux, a French philosopher, and his wife, Madame Pontieux, are quite articulate throughout the novel where Koestler makes them go on incessantly defending their respective outlooks. The philosopher expounded the principles of neo-nihilism, which had been the craze of the post-war world. In his opinion,

...only in a planned society could man surpass his own limitations through the voluntary acceptance of the necessary curtailments of his freedom. As often as not, history realised its aim by the negation of its own negations... He condemned arbitrary arrests and imprisonment without trial, but recognised the right of the forces of progress to eliminate ruthlessly the exponents of reaction. (95) (emphasis added)

Madame Pontieux represents the extreme pro-Commonwealth wing of the neo-nihilistic movement. She was of a domineering type and quite often flared up in her conversation with others.

In the work under discussion, Koestler has depicted an assortment of characters through prolonged discussions in which they are engaged. They talk about the kinds of freedom enjoyed by the people in the Commonwealth, argue about the menace of a world war, and justify their own behaviour under the threat. It was within Koestler's obvious competence to draw at
length the world of the elite and to analyse their various differences of attitude. Dupremont, a writer of best-sellers; Navarin, a poet, Father Millet and his niece, Lord Edward, the colonel, Jules Commanche; and M. Touraine are all weary and disillusioned people intermittently brooding over the past and shrugging their shoulders at the future. The craving for action is there, but there is no action as such.

Monsieur Anatole, with his vivacity, frankness, and amiability, brings a kind of relief to the drab atmosphere of The Age of Longing. With his refinement, and quickness of mind, and capacity for pleasant conversation, he appears to be a misplaced figure in a world afflicted by the bug of longing. He calls Nikitin 'a belated victim of the Bastille, shedding the blood of the Fourth (Estate), the Revolutionary proletariat' (13-14). His witty summing up of his own declining health also metaphorically presents an insight into the world situation then prevailing and also provides the setting of the novel:

Ask my daughter if you don't believe me: she will tell you about the cirrhosis of the liver, and the swollen prostate and the blood pressure and this and that. The income-tax you pay for your vices gets ever higher as the years pass, and in the end there is no income, only tax--then the ruthless collector attacks the capital and squeezes the last drop out of your reserves... we are caught in the trap, members of a doomed civilisation, dancers on the darkening stage across which the shadow of the Neanderthal is settling. (18)

His talk is not always frivolous, though invariably entertaining. Sometimes he shows 'genuine indignation'. The following passage is an instance in point:
'It is the same thing' explained Monsieur Anatole, 'your democracy is debauched and impotent, and when your politicians quote Lincoln and Jefferson, they get the same kick out of it as old lechers gloating over performance of youthful virility, which they are no longer able to imitate... whatever they tell you, my child, don't believe it. Revolutions, reforms, programs, parties--they are always selling you the same picture: 'A glimpse of Paradise'.

The element of cynicism in the above utterance primarily owes its origin to the speaker's disillusion over the ages about a succession of revolutionary programmes. It may perhaps be taken also as a measure of the author's own reaction to the progressive platitudes of the leftist ideology.

Anatole's death marks the end of an era, and his funeral, joined by different people with different longings, and slowly inching its way amidst occasional blasting of sirens, brings the novel to an end. Sitting in the carriage, Hydie realises that

... the place of God had become vacant, and there was a draught blowing through the world as in an empty flat before the new tenants arrived. (384)

The reader can easily appreciate the overt religious tone of this utterance.

As the cortege slowly moves ahead, confusing reports about some suspicious fog (paratroopers) moving along the channel in. It was thought that the stage was set for the taking over of France by the Free Commonwealth but at the end the reader is left to make his own conclusion:
The siren wailed, but nobody was sure; it could have meant the Last Judgment, or just another air-raid exercise. (384)

The modern political novelists like Malraux, Silone, Kafka, Orwell and others rarely allowed women characters to play a vital role in their novels. Koestler also has made it plain in his autobiography that to write about women bored him stiff. In the novels of these writers, women are shown only in relation to men and are rarely given significant roles to play as individuals. The women characters of Koestler's novels are generally overshadowed by men. They are made of such fragile stuff that they can be easily transported from one novel to another without any real harm to the situation. In The Age of Longing, Hydie is the only woman character who has the guts to stand up to men. Others are either passive victims or frivolous creatures.

Zina, the wife of Leontiev, belongs to the same category as Rubashov's Arlova—who sacrifices herself silently. Held as a hostage by the Commonwealth government to ensure the fidelity of her husband, she commits suicide to give him freedom. Like Arlova, she is a simple, generous, and worldly woman, accepting her fate as it is. She has a sobering effect on Leontiev who was devoted to her. He was as terribly upset by the news of her death as was Joseph by Dina's. Their sacrifices sit tight on the conscience of their men.

Nadeshda, Nikitin's adolescent mistress, is another silent sufferer among Koestler's characters. Her story is presented in the novel only in flashbacks to provide clues to Nikitin's behaviour. Like Nikitin, she was a member of the Komsomol. She was accused of conspiracy because her father, a
member of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, belonged to a group of conspirators. No specific charge was made against her. Still, she had to appear before a commission of inquiry. Nikitin was asked to testify to his mistress's reliability. Koestler handles this peculiar episode with great dexterity, hinting thereby at the manner the things were handled in the Free Commonwealth. Several members of the cell stated their views but most of them were rather contradictory. One girl called her a wolf in a sheep's skin but could not prove the charge. A boy testified to Nadeshda's sincerity in carrying out the tasks allotted by her cell, but when closely questioned, it was not a calculated lie to mask her real intention, he had no answer. After the meeting, Nadeshda disappears from the scene. Nikitin accuses her of frivolity before a State Security Department official, Comrade Maximov. According to him, she had a puerile attitude towards the task of socialist reconstruction and concludes that her behaviour was 'objectively conducive to undermining his comrades' morale' (126). Nikitin sacrificed her for the sake of the party, but she was not the type of Arlova or Zina. She shows some similarity with the type of Ellen in Thieves in the Night. She was essentially a fighter, as can be seen from her retaliation of Nikitin in the middle of the street.

Nikitin's behaviour at the interrogation both amused and stunned Maximov, who was the type of man Nikitin denounced from his childhood. He reminds us of Ivanov, Rubashov's first interrogator in Darkness at Noon. Nikitin's attitude towards Maximov and the Revolutionaries of 1917 is similar to that of Gletkin towards Ivanov:

They were all of the past; what had they done to be so proud of themselves anyway? Conspired and thrown bombs and
fought partisan actions—all romantic, outmoded stuff. They had not built a single factory, had no inkling of production and the Plan. (127)

The difficulty with Nikitin lies in that he cannot remember Nadeshda as a total living entity. For him, a person was, after all, a mere assembly of bits, and qualities, and odours and so on:

...apart from these bits and qualities the person did not exist, was merely an illusion which vanished into nothingness. No wonder that he could no longer reassemble the fragments of that grammatical fiction which went by her name. (120)

This heretical view of Nikitin puts him in the proper perspective of his background, and his training as a worker of the party.

In the nineteen-fifties, France was the leader of the capitalist states of Europe. In the present novel, the part entitled 'Interlude' is nothing but a reportage on the state of mind of free Europe in the fifties. Koestler calls it a chapter from an as-yet-unwritten history, of 'the fall of Pre-Pubertian man', and it may be described as a satire on modern diplomacy.

An atomic explosion in the Ural Mountain Range shakes the world and a Free Commonwealth airman, Captain Bogarenko, goes to photograph the wreckage. From a very low altitude, he observes the destruction of a large industrial town, and sees human shapes crawling on their bellies among the debris. Bogarenko is so moved by the sight that he goes over to the Americans with photographs. The Commonwealth government announces that the
explosion was caused by a high-powered nuclear bomb of the American type. Strikes broke out in France and Italy, with peace demonstrations aimed largely at the windows of U.S.A. consulates. The more the Americans protested their innocence, the more skeptical the world became about it. The American version that the incident could have been accidental was ridiculed by the New Father of the People, suggesting that Brutus killed Caesar by accident, Nero fired Rome by accident, and so on and so forth—'almost immediately Socialist sarcasm became the approved style of Commonwealth public life, letters and art' (106).

Then the Commonwealth accepted the American suggestion to set up an International Commission of experts, but they never got beyond the attempt to formulate a resolution that all available information and full co-operation should be given to the Commission in order to facilitate its investigation on the spot. The resolution adopted by the Commonwealth omitted the last three words, and when it was put to vote, the Americans objected to it, the Commonwealth delegates walked out, and the former were branded saboteurs of peace and international understanding. In a later development, the Commonwealth announced that the bomb was dropped by a plane belonging to the Rabbit Republic. The pilot was captured with his written orders, and he made a full confession. The world breathed a sigh of relief. The government of the Rabbit Republic was overthrown by members of the Unified Party for Peace and Progress, and the Americans safely got away with the handing in of protest notes. Koestler has skilfully handled this type situation to show the gap between human need and practical response. The tragedy of destroying a whole nation was quickly obscured by the diplomatic haggling that followed.
The element of satire inherent in the account is not easily missed by the reader. It underscores the stark reality of the present-day political manoeuvres which rarely show any genuine concern for ameliorating the many complex problems of human existence.

Critics are not much impressed by the purely literary qualities of Koestler's novels. It is because, for him, ideas were more important than the people who expressed them. The most haunting and deeply personal of Koestler's novels, The Age of Longing is, in essence, a lively intellectual debate on social and political problems of its time. The reader is reminded of some of Shaw's plays, Man and Superman, for instance. Ronald Hayman maintains that

the dialogue achieves nothing but an analysis of their differences in attitude, and the tensions perish like so many unused rubber bands. But there are other scenes which built up considerable tension between the characters, individualizing them through their reactions to a particular situation. These separate situations may be loose in relation to each other and to the novel as a whole, but at least they are all parts of a movement in the same direction. 23

Unlike Darkness at Noon and Arrival and Departure, the work under review is loose in construction—it exists only in parts and gives the impression of unassimilated documentation. It abounds in monologues as well as dramatic scenes often interrupted by short lectures. The climatic scene where Hydie passionately tried to shoot at Nikitin, is an instance in point.
But it must be kept in mind that very few writers have been able to get into the communist mind with as much sureness of touch as Koestler, who has torn the veil of the Soviet myth. The reader often gets the feeling that Koestler is writing from inside a holocaust. As a prophetic writer of journalistic fiction, Koestler brings into this novel a fair measure of 'vivid contemporaneity'. In the words of Iain Hamilton,

Every page is informed by the distilled essence of Koestler's own experiences—physical, moral, psychological— and the pessimistic tone of the story is brilliantly offset by Koestler's delight of the phenomenal world—women, food, drink, music, talk, nightclubs, the smell of French black tobacco, the long evening light warming the stones of Paris. It is a novel loud with warning signals, but between the Flaxon alarms are passages of exquisite lyricism and elegy.

It can be argued that in a work of fiction depicting the bankruptcy of the Western ideals and the spiritual struggle between two nations of conflicting ideologies, the idea should be exposed in full.

But it can be easily seen that such an exercise would detract from the fictional character of the work. In the numerous digressions in the present novel, the author has taken up subjects like historical continuity, the avarice and selfishness of the French bourgeois, the problem of an apostate; the scientific reconditioning of man's mind; the escape from tyranny by learning to escape the fear of pain, pornography, and salvation in literature, political consciousness of the masses; and many other topics. But he has not succeeded in drawing out a single human fable out of the plethora of ideas. In the opinion of Jenni Calder,
The novel is a failure, largely because Koestler has moved away from the representation of any kind of action, and the physical threat is entirely unreal. His characters have come to a physical and intellectual standstill: they brood over the past and shrug their shoulders at the future. The only real answer and the only real threat lie in the sexual encounter of Hydie, a lapsed Catholic American girl, and Nikitin, the Russian.

The fierce conflicts of political and historical standpoints have dwindled to the confrontation of a bored American, motivated, as far as one can tell, by an irresponsible curiosity, without faith and without love, and a dogmatic, narrow and intolerant Russian.

Calder's is not a lone voice. Others, too, have criticised the lack of action in the book. The prolonged discussions among the characters make the work more diffuse in form. In no way can they be said to have enhanced its quality.

Max Fischer's observation that The Age of Longing is a novel of a skilled journalist and philosophical essayist points out the basic defects of the work as fiction. Most of the characters dazzle the reader with their verbal exhibitionism. Father Millet's niece is the only character who walks about silently. The characters are rather static and of a common type. Apart from Hydie and Fedya, it is only in Leontiev's mind that some conflict can be traced. Koestler reminds the reader of the French novelist, Malraux, in his use of dialogues. The characters in general use one kind of language—that of an intellectual. Individual traits of speech arising either from the temperament or the social background of the character are altogether absent. The speeches are framed in such a set pattern that they
can be easily interchanged among the several characters.

In *The Age of Longing*, the characters are busy analysing and explaining; rarely do they talk to each other, even in the cafes. Perhaps for this reason, we do not find any gentle and good humour in the book, only some shades of sardonic humour here and there. The negative elements or responses have made the work conspicuously devoid of any human warmth. This is, however, not to imply that there is no wit in the novel. Some of the characters are witty and penetrating. Like Malraux, Koestler speaks through all his characters. In this novel, there are more monologues than in his other novels. The action here is carried on through narration and discussion and so there is little scope for the characters to indulge themselves in small-talk.

The love-story in the novel is not well developed. The reader sometimes wonders whether Hydie and Nikitin were ever truly in love. Hydie's feeling for the Russian was sincere, but this the other failed conveniently to realise. To her, he was the very embodiment of faith and conviction. For him, she was just a specimen of a culture alien to him. He first went to her for the trivial purpose of getting back a notebook, but afterwards his various curiosities about the people she belonged to made him continue his relationship with her. His was an admiration for a person of a 'superior culture', as in the case of Nadeshda. In his childhood, he hated others for having more than what he himself possessed. He tells us that he once hated a boy for having a model boat. On close scrutiny, the same trait of his character seems to be at work in his relationship with Hydie. This is very like the age old longing for the 'forbidden fruit'.


For Nikitin, human dignity has no meaning at all. And so he makes the mistake of experimenting with his girl by applying the theories of professor Pavlov. What he considers a mere application of a scientific theory is considered by Hydie 'a degradation worse than any inflicted on a prostitute'. The second mistake committed by him was to underestimate Hydie's faith, though broken. He thought that to kill, one must believe in something. When she actually shoots at him, he slumps down with a bewildered expression in his face. Like others of his upbringing, he also feels lost when confronted by an unprecedented situation. It is an act that can be explained only in Koestler's own phrase, 'the grammatical fiction', which is beyond the realm of predictability. Hydie's desperate act is not a heroic action—it is a kind of terrorist action which, in her own words, is a senseless act.

Though not well developed, the story is complete with a beginning, a middle (a development), and an end. In Koestler's other novels, love is a mere occurrence, but here the author has shown Nikitin wondering how he was able to stick to that 'spoilt, decadent creature, who kept crying after her convent' (340) for almost four months. He had actually put up with her so long 'more out of kindness and pity than desire' (349). He is seen, however, as a pathetic figure 'feeling an ever so slight pang of regret' for those 'colourful fish in their fluorescent tank' in the world outside the Iron Curtain. For a moment, Nikitin appears to have a basic humanitarian aspect. It may be safely maintained that Koestler was quite capable of displaying human sentiments and warmth if he wanted, but because of his urgency to speak to the world from a pulpit, he passed them by.
In the crucial scene, Nikitin very neatly presents his point of view about the world situation. In his words,

Of course many ugly things are happening in my country. Do you think I do not know about them? I know them better than you do. But what good is sentimentality? It does not help, and it corrupts. And what difference will it make in a hundred years that there is a little ugliness now? It always existed. In a hundred years there will be no ugliness—only a classless world state of free people... Everybody in your world is unhappy. Everything here is infected with unhappiness. It is like syphilis. So it must be burnt down like an infected slum and a new house built in its place. In a hundred years humanity will have a new house which is clean and healthy. (359) (emphasis added)

His prophetic vision of the future is a replica of Koestler's own vision of a utopia. In the final scene, the novelist brings together the whole group of people awaiting the cataclysm. The reaction of various people to that great occurrence is more deftly handled at this point than anywhere else in the novel. Monsieur Touraine for instance,

...by instinct...preferred that they should all stick together but the nightmare of it was what nobody could tell which exactly was the right moment to take the decision and abandon it all: flat, furniture, job, social position—the fruit of a lifetime of intrigue, pushing, humiliation and honest toil. (367)

He is exasperated at Monsieur Plisson's inability to realise his dilemma, notwithstanding the latter's readiness to preserve the substance of the nation.
A dialogue between Julien and Father Millet refers to the enormity of the people's helplessness at the moment of the crisis:

'Each time I see your police in action, I am tempted to become a communist', he said.

'What will you be tempted to become when you see the Commonwealth police in action?' asked Julien.

'Either a victim or a desert father on a small oasis...'(369)

Koestler's own opinion about this work may be considered at this point. In *Bricks to Babel* he wrote:

*The Age of Longing* is, in a way, a dramatisation of those essays [essays and speeches collected in *The Trail of the Dinosaur*], and is the only one of my novels which I dislike (except for a few chapters). But it helped to work out of my system the bitterness towards that failed god, and the guilt of having served him. It also made me realise that to carry on in the same vein would be repetitive and might become an obsession. To go on repeating oneself may be permissible, and even necessary, for a politician; for a writer it is fatal. 26

*The Trail of the Dinosaur* and its companion piece, *The Age of Longing*, are rightly seen by many as Koestler's farewell to arms.

The title of the novel is explained in an 'impassioned diatribe' aimed at Hydie by Jules Commanche, a former leader of the French Resistance and now a high-ranking government official. According to him, the source of all political libido is faith, and its object the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Lost Paradise or the Utopia. So each time a god dies
there is trouble everywhere; people feel that they have been cheated by his promises. Commanche feels that Europe has not yet recovered from the shock of God's death last time on July 14, 1789, the Bastille Day. The slogan of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' has now replaced the vision of the Holy Trinity. For the common people, their faith is dead; only the longing remains. He further explains:

And this longing, Mademoiselle, can express itself in beautiful or murderous forms... only the longing remains—a dumb, inarticulate longing of the instinct, without knowledge of its source and object. So the people, the Masses, mill around with that irksome feeling of having an uncashcd cheque in their pockets and whoever tells them 'Oyez, Oyez, the kingdom is just round the corner, in the second street to the left', can do with them what he likes. The more they feel that itch, the easier it is to get at them. (337)

His view is supported by almost all the characters in the novel, who are the victims of that bug. Hydie approached Jules Commanche to report against Nikitin, but when he pleaded his inability to do so, she decided to act of her own. In view of the 'official passivity', she decided to rouse the apathetic public by a 'symbolic act of protest'. The passage below sums up her feelings:

...and all those other learned, tea-drinking Russsians, and the meek, bookish Jews, and the devout Moslems and mystical Hindus, and the verbose Frenchmen of the Resistance— they all had, at one time or another, discovered the value of the symbolic gesture, the ritual sacrifice, the ultima ratio of terror against terror where all other means had proved hopeless and sterile. Of course her act might also prove
sterile, its results were unpredictable; but then who had ever known what interest a sacrifice will pay? (341)

Their refusal to compromise with themselves gives distinction to Koestler's characters. Julien also tells Father Millet that he would not buy protection with a last minute conversion to faith. He indulges himself in self-pity even when he knows his weakness. The harsh realisation of one's own limitation is present in the characters of The Age of Longing.

In the second phase of his literary career, Koestler developed a keen interest in a branch of science, viz., parapsychology. This novel reflects this preoccupation of the author. The moment Leontiev received the cable announcing Zina's death, he was thinking of her. Precisely at that moment the seam of the right pocket of his worn-out dressing gown burst open and a rent occurred. Zina had the habit of cautioning him against straining the pockets of the gown. The gown was also a classic example of conditioning. He was unable to write in any other outfit since Zina gave it to him—on their tenth wedding anniversary twenty years ago. This incident gave his premonition of an impending catastrophe a seal of certainty.

Orville Prescott has maintained that The Age of Longing is gruesomely interesting, intellectually disturbing, and spattered with brilliant bits. But he finds it quite mediocre as a creative work of art. Koestler holds his place with some other politically active authors, namely, Orwell, Malraux, and Silone. He will be remembered as a writer expressing the conscious and unconscious longing of the people of his generation. The overall impression of Koestler that we get from this novel is that he will be forever remembered as a speaker on the 'anti-
Communist circuit.' Speaking of the political climate of the two countries, Boris remarked:

Because here you can quarrel and lecture us in a cafe. Over there you could not lecture the rats in the Lubianka - and 

sotto voce, for even the rats might denounce you. (36)

Julien, Koestler's prototype, has something sensible to say on the course of history. He believes that

Every period has its specific dilemma which seems all-important, until history passes over it with a shrug; and afterwards people wonder what they were so excited about... The great disputes of history usually end in a stalemate, and then some new problem crops up, of a quite different kind, which absorbs all passions and drains the old controversy of its meaning. (36-37)

The story of Leontiev is skilfully handled by the author to show the nightmarish atmosphere prevailing in the Free Commonwealth. Leontiev, like Spartacus (in The Gladiators) rebels against the revolution itself. Learning of Zina's death, he immediately decides 'to go to Capua', and shocks his friends by his course and determination. In his opinion,

One only lived once, and the only way to live a full life was to live in the present. The past and the future, even if they existed, were no more than water flowing past under a bridge. You could spend your life standing on the bridge and live in the illusion that you were moving towards the future, whereas in fact only the water was moving under you, future into past. (287)
Leontiev has been standing on the bridge long enough and now decides to flow with the current. When the policeman from the Commissariat comes to arrest him, he feels rather relieved—for him 'freedom proved too heavy a burden' (288). Murray A. Sperber's remark about Koestler puts the novelist in his proper situation:

Arthur Koestler, because of his Middle European Jewish background, his refugee situation, and his personality, felt the apocalyptic nature of his times with particular intensity, and for a generation of his life, from his first book in English in 1937 to his farewell to political literature in 1955, he chose to express himself mainly in apocalyptic and prophetic modes. 28

Koestler has used in this work a close, thick-set prose full of detailed observation. It requires much concentration to read the novel written in a metaphorical language—metaphors taken mostly from different branches of science. He uses the terms taken from medical science with great felicity. The man who could be quite light-hearted and full of fun in his autobiographical writings and essays, is very serious in his novels. Koestler was conscious of the difficulties of a writer writing his novel on a political situation. He was waverling between his understanding of the conventional technique of writing fiction and the urgency of the view he had to put forth through his work. Unlike many, he failed to strike a balance between the two.

Twenty-three years after the publication of The Age of Longing, Koestler started writing a short novel about the call-girl circuit at scientific symposia. The Call-Girls: A Tragi-Comedy was completed and
published in 1972. It was dedicated to Messieurs Bouvard and Pecuchet, Flaubert's immortal pair of clowns, who epitomise the follies of the savants of his time. After his unrewarding visit to India and Japan—unrewarding because it could not provide him an answer to his dilemmas—he went back to Western sciences. At this period he participated in a great many symposia on psychology, biology, and neurophysiology, which stimulated him to a great extent. But at the same time they struck him as 'little more than vanity fairs frequented by an international set of celebrities'—he called it 'the academic call-girl circuit'. To quote Cynthia Koestler,

He was excited by this because he enjoyed above all hard-headed and hot-headed discussions on over-lapping fields of science, which were the purpose of such symposia. He was to be sadly disappointed in the lack of communication between the different branches—one of the tragic themes in The Call-Girls.29

The setting of The Call-Girls is in a remote village in the Alpine Range having a close resemblance to the Austrian Alpine village of Alpbach, the conference centre at which Koestler attended a symposium in 1968 and afterwards edited the discussions and published them as Beyond Reductionism (1969).

Nikolai Borisovitch Solovief, a nuclear physicist organises a conference on "Approaches to Survival" to which twelve distinguished participants, representing all aspects of contemporary science, quasi-sciences like sociology, and art are invited. They have to analyse the present situation, examine man's urge to self-immolation, and to suggest remedies. The President of the United States of America intimated to the
delegates his keen interest in the project and high expectations that the deliberations would result in a document which would benefit mankind in the face of a threat of a third world war. As usual, the symposium leads to mutual recriminations and ends in chaos. In the words of Iain Hamilton, The Call-Girls is:

a brief but comprehensive satire on those peripatetic academics who can never resist the temptation to air their well-worn ideas at foundation sponsored conferences... It is, rather, a superbly funny (and alarming) distillation of all the symposia Koestler had ever attended; and, without weakening the narrative or reducing its characters to caricatures it succeeds in comprehending within the narrow compass of 190 short pages an astonishing wealth of scientific and ideological interest. (emphasis added)

Koestler has hinted at the sheer futility of holding such seminars and has closely portrayed the behaviour of the participants and their exhibition of scholarship and learning. The director was, however, apprehensive of the final outcome of the project. When Solovief insisted that there should be only twelve papers read over a period of five days leaving eighteen to twenty hours for discussion, he expressed his misgivings about the discussions that generally tend to degrade into 'blind man's buff'.

Most of the participants are known to each other because, barring one or two, all of them are regular academic call-girls who are at the beck and call of the organisers of such symposia. Tony Caspari, the young Copertilian brother, is the only person attending such a symposium for the first time. To his excitement, Dr. Harriet Epsom, a Kleinian child
psychologist, reacts like this:

Rot. It becomes a habit, may be an addiction. 31

Claire, Solovief's wife, appears to be the only sensible person in the novel besides the driver, Gustav. Her observations serve the purpose of \textit{chorus}. She writes a letter to her friend at Harvard saying that the call-girls are getting more moth-eaten every year. She wonders whether it can be the effect of over-specialisation. Each of the call girls sticks to his or her own views. Claire wrote in her letter:

The village is asleep, dreaming sweet incestuous dreams. There must be some calves out somewhere in a field, which I can hear but not see—each with a bell round its neck, each thinking a monologue all for itself, to which no one listens. \textit{Exactly like having a symposium.} 37 (emphasis added)

The sharp satirical undertone of the work as a whole clearly emerges in the above passage.

Niko Solovief, declaring the conference open, speaks in an informal but precise manner about the principal factors that have endangered the survival of the human species. It is more or less a summary of the world situation by the author himself, because in Niko we discern much of Koestler. Solovief is well aware of the threat coming from nuclear and biochemical weapons and the pollution of the environment. The annihilation of aerial distance and the rapid progress of the mass communication system have only sharpened ideological conflicts instead of knitting the nations into a greater human community. The world appears to shrink to a smaller
living space, because of the bridging of the distances and the enormity of the size of the world population. The migration from rural to urban areas all over the world has resulted in overpopulated and cancerous growths of cities. In this, Koestler's voice sounds like that of Gandhi, who also could foresee the danger that would arise out of this perpetual exodus from the villages to urban settlements. As a remedy, he gave the call of 'Back to the Village'. Solovief further believes that notwithstanding technological achievements, man's emotional immaturity will surely bring about self-induced extinction for the entire human race.

The proceedings of the seminar, however, failed to achieve anything concrete, thereby proving the pointlessness of the discussions. Koestler has succeeded in entertaining his reader by realistically presenting the atmosphere and portraying the participants with their characteristic faults and foibles.

All the participants started in a self-important manner, talking more about their own achievements than the issue under discussion. Horace Wyndham reads a paper on genetics, entitled 'The Revolution in the Cradle', where he raises the question of improving human brains. He sums up his discussion by saying that the brain is a voracious organ, and it has to be nourished from the cradle if it is to realise its full growth potential. But another participant, Petitjacques, has a different opinion altogether:

Can you not understand that our misfortune is to have too much intellect, not too little? That is the existential tragedy of man. (76)
Incidentally, this is close to the realisation round which Koestler veered in his later life. Another speech by Petitjacques succinctly records the world-situation in the thirties:

Your generation in the Pink Thirties was pathetically naive. You rejected your own society, but you believed in Utopia—five-year plans and balalaikas. You had a double motivation: revulsion against the status quo and devotion to an ideal—attraction and repulsion, a negative pole and a positive pole, a magnetic field. We only believe in the negative pole. No mirages. No illusions. No programmes. Just NO (67).

Otto Von Haider and Harriet Epsom had already met twice that year at an ecology congress in Mexico city and a futurology symposium in Stockholm. Significantly, Haider produces the same paper with minor alterations here and there. Koestler’s justification of his action is satirical in intent:

After all, one could not expect scientists to produce some original discovery in each of these public occasions. Rather they looked upon themselves as a travelling team of professional wrestlers, who are familiar with one another’s antics and go through their paces each time pretending surprise and indignation at the base tricks of their opponents. (95)

Soloviev blamed himself for selecting the wrong set of people for the symposium and Claire wrote in her letter thus:

It seems to me that each of them possesses a small fragment of the truth which he believes to be the whole truth which he carries around in his pocket like a tarnished bubble gum,
and blows up on solemn occasions to prove that it contains the ultimate mystery of the universe. Discussion? Interdisciplinary Dialogue? There is no such thing, except on the printed programme. When the dialogue is supposed to start, each gets his own bubble gum out and blows it into the others' faces. Then they repair, satisfied, to the cocktail room. (101)

Harriet Epsom, a humble zoologist, in her deliberations expressed a sense of shock at the way the anthropologists and psychologists seem to ignore the humanity of man and build their theories of human nature on analogies derived from zoology—Pavlov's dogs, Professor Burch's rats, Konrad Loranz's geese (102). She felt that it would be utterly pointless to generalise the aggressive behaviour of mankind from the behaviour of monkeys in unnaturally crowded conditions of confinement. Violence, according to Harriet, is not a biological drive but a reaction provoked by stress when it exceeds a critical limit. The facts of history reveal that the number of individuals murdered for personal motives is always negligible compared to the millions murdered in the name of impersonal causes like patriotism, loyalty to the class, Christian against Moslem and so on. She refuted Freud's theory that wars were caused by pent-up, aggressive instincts in search of an outlet. To quote her exact words,

Soldiers do not hate. They are frightened, bored, sex-starved, homesick; they fight with resignation, because they have no other choice, or with enthusiasm for King and Country, the righteous cause, the true religion—moved not by hatred but by loyalty...[Man's] tragedy is not an excess of aggression, but an excess of devotion. (104)
Haider's observations that the origin of war could be found in the biological urge displayed by some animals to defend at all costs their own stretch of land or water was sharply criticised by Harriet as a misleading analogy. She believed that wars are fought not for territory but for words and that

if Dr. Valanti and his colleagues could come up with some synthetic enzyme which would make man immune against suggestibility of slogans, the demagogues would go out of business, and half the battle for survival would be won. (106)

Sir Evelyn Blood, however, agrees with Harriet on the point. As a poet ('a professional juggler with words', as he puts it) he knows that words are man's most deadly weapons. In his opinion,

The word Allah consists of three phonemes and has caused so far an estimated thirty million deaths, with more to come. If you are making an inventory of the causes of the human predicament, you must give top priority to language. It is the heady poison which destroys our species. (110-111) (emphasis added)

'As a method of communication for the whole species', Solovief breaks in, 'mankind renounced language a long time ago' (111). He finds that other species possess a single system of communication by sign, sense, or odour, which is understood by all its members. Mankind alone is split into thousands of language groups which act as disruptive forces throughout the history of mankind. He feels the necessity of promoting a new language understood by all, but the irony of it is that a committee for this purpose has already been formed but the members fail to decide whether its
proceedings should be conducted in English or in French.

Solovief regretted having invited to the symposium Professor Burch, whose lecture, entitled 'The Technology of Behaviour', was nothing more than 'a fiasco'. Most of his time was taken up by showing lantern slides of rats and pigeons in boxes, learning some skills. The procedure was called operant conditioning, and Burch was eager to apply it to the control of human behaviour with some minor technical modification. Blood's response to the views of Burch can be stated as a fine example of the squabblings the call-girls generally indulge themselves in. He observes that formerly...

...it was fashionable to warn students against the heresy of anthropomorphism, of attributing human thoughts and feelings to animal. Now Burch is preaching to us the opposite heresy that we should not attribute to man thoughts and feelings which are not demonstrated in his rats. As my favourite writer said somewhere: 'the pundits of Burch's school have replaced the anthropomorphic view of the rat with a ratomorphic view of man. I am surprised they are not growing whiskers'. (115)

The reason for inviting some select resource personnel (the call-girls) to a seminar is presented by Koestler in these lines:

Burch occupied one of the most coveted chairs in the United States, his text-books were mandatory reading, and the particular branch of psychology which he represented had recently been shown, by a nation-wide poll among students, to be by far the most popular. (114)

The satiric undertone of this observation reveals Koestler's basic attitude to the issue. In another passage of similar import, he writes:
Although nobody ever quoted a line by Blood, for he was not the quotable sort of poet, he enjoyed an international reputation, was invited to lecture at American, Indian and Japanese universities, and no international symposium was complete without his rumpled, but imposing presence. He was knighted at sixty by England's gracious Queen... and was generally considered as the Call-Girl laureate. (63)

Another participant, Tony Caspari, lectured on esoteric matters like 'alpha rhythms' and 'intention waves'. He started with observations on the power of the mind over matter and research... on subjects like telepathy and some other physical phenomena. To quote him,

...we have to undergo a rather severe training to protect us against credulity and the contemporary variety of nostalgie de la boue - wallowing in muddy mysticism. We are not attracted by the fog, but by the light. By groping towards the light we are made to realise how deep the darkness is around us... the scientific approach can only throw light on one limited aspect of reality, leaving the rest in darkness—as the human eye can only perceive a small fraction of the spectrum of radiations which surround and penetrate us. (123)

Tony's line of research aimed at the attainment of a mental state far superior to the one pursuing the humdrum routine of everyday existence.

Bruno Kaletski, who burst upon the symposium a little late, was rather a comic figure—always at the run, and appeared forever with a bulky briefcase under his elbow in a self-important manner. He had the reputation of interrupting discussions on such seminars and wrecking them. The following lines brilliantly exhibit this point:

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Bruno would talk non-stop in the discussions, and keep interrupting the speakers to cross-examine them, usually starting with: 'Excuse me, but I am too stupid to understand the point you are trying to make. Do you mean that... or do you mean perhaps...? and so on. And if he did know the subject, he would refer to some long-forgotten technical paper which had anticipated the speaker's point—or conversely, to some quite recent works published in some obscure journal which refuted it—and in most cases he was dead right. (55)

Readers acquainted with such symposia will not fail to realise how accurately Koestler has observed the behaviour of the academic call-girls.

The last morning session of the symposium presented to the participants a sort of dramatic entertainment by Dr. Valentti. On a projection screen, he gave a visual demonstration of the electrical stimulus of the brain to establish the point that the movements and postures of different animals like cats, rats, monkeys, dolphins, crickets, and bulls can be controlled by stimulating their brain. He further gave a practical demonstration of the stimulation of the human brain with electrodes and other gadgets on his assistant, Miss Carey. The same, however, had to be abandoned on the charge that it verged on 'an obscenity'.

Though Dr. Valentti was vehemently criticised, he went on trying to explain that evidence from anatomy, psychology, and brain-research establishes the fact that the human species is afflicted by a paranoid streak, not in the metaphysical but in the clinical sense. In short, Dr. Valentti attempted to define that
the psychological malfunction underlying the paranoid streak reflected in man's history the chronic conflict between emotion and reason, instinct and intelligence, the compulsion to live, die and kill for irrational beliefs which were unaffected by logic, and overrode the instinct of self-preservation. (146)

In the meantime, Miss Carey, repelled by the verbal attack on her saviour, Dr. Valentti, gave a voluntary demonstration of her schizophrenic mentality by attacking Claire with her knitting needle. She grew so vile and brutal that she had to be dragged out of the room and put to sleep—only with considerable effort.

Niko Soloviev finally sums up the conference, which proposed to 'inquire into the causes of man's predicament to formulate a tentative diagnosis and to suggest possible remedies' (145). The week-long symposium was recorded on cassettes to be published later in order to give the world a chance to judge its outcome.

The deteriorating international situation, however, made the departing participants both nervous and scared, for they were not sure ever they would reach their destinations safely. The expensive symposium was drawn to a close with a superb stroke of irony. The schizophrenic lady, Miss Carey, set ablaze at midnight the neatly piled stack of tape-recorded proceedings. The flames were extinguished, but not before the findings of the symposium, 'Approaches to Survival', were transformed into black cinder. This irony at the end must be called well-devised.
The theories advocated by the specialists and the remedies suggested by them are authentic in so far as they reflect the current trends in science from anthropology to behaviourism. In his later career Koestler developed a keen interest in psychology, telepathy, neurophysiology, and other allied subjects. Commenting on The Call-Girls, Koestler wrote in Bricks to Babel:

This does not mean that I had become cynical about science; only rather sceptical regarding its powers of providing 'alternative to despair'—its competence to answer the ultimate questions concerning 'the meaning behind it all'; to make the invisible writing legible to our myopic eyes.

Koestler's exploration of the theme is skilful and the eccentric character of the academicians is well defined. Scientists and philosophers are just like the average being--they also engage themselves in squabbles, jealousies, suspicions, and aggressions. Koestler's descriptive technique has been put to admirable use in exposing their foibles. To cite an example,

Like the other call-girls, Valenti had started haltingly, with well-worn clichés and oratorical tricks, but had gradually warmed to his subject and ended in a note of sincerity, even passion. But was not that passion, too, inspired by the archaic structures deep down in the spongy tissues of his brain; and were the data presented to the computer perhaps also biased by them? (140)

Koestler has incorporated the prologue and the epilogue to the novel two short stories, 'The Misunderstanding' and 'The Chimera'. The three
individual pieces of work in *The Call-Girls*, though different in style and setting, are intended by the author as a variation on a single theme.

*The Prologue* gives an intensely satirical account of Jesus carrying the cross on his shoulder. The symbolic episode reflects on the failure of religion which is a mere abstraction to the multitude. As Jesus (presumably) speaks,

I wanted to die in order to wake you up. That was the only reason. For I thought that you were asleep, or absent-minded or otherwise engaged, and therefore unaware of the abominations and desolation of the world you made. (12)

Koestler has used the stream-of-consciousness technique in making Jesus go through the painful ordeal to die in an ugly way to bring God back to His senses. The last lines brilliantly sum up the soulless intellectuality of our day and the danger it poses:

Thou dumb spirit, vapour of the desert, ignoble absence thou art not, hast never been. Only a parable. And my own death another parable; they will remember it and twist its meaning. They will torture and kill in the name of a parable. They will fight insane wars for its correct interpretation. They will slay children for the love of a metaphor and burn women alive in praise of an allegory. And thus will your will be done, not mine. (14)

The prophetic undertone of this passage shall rarely escape the attentive reader. Koestler's own views regarding this story will put it in proper light:
While the allegedly rational community of scientists and sociologists stubbornly refuses to admit—ignoring the evidence from past and present history— that mankind may be an evolutionary misfit, poets and seers have always taken man's insanity for granted or attributed it to the malice of the gods. Reading the Gospels from this angle, the motives of Jesus seemed to become more intelligible if one interpreted his voluntary martyrdom as an act of protest against the indifference of the Almighty towards the tragic madness of his creation. I thought this a reasonable hypothesis and was for a long time haunted by it; it finally took shape in fictional form: a short story called 'The Misunderstanding.'

In 'The Epilogue': the Chimeras', Koestler has observed that chimeras may infest the human brain also. Dr. Grob, evidently a psychotherapist, has in his clinic Anderson, a patient obsessed with chimeras. He pays the doctor a hundred dollars an hour to talk about chimeras, with the intent of convincing him that he (i.e., the doctor) too, would gradually turn into a full-blown chimera. To be obsessed with chimera, Anderson observes, is a healthy normal state of mind because the whole world is being taken over by them. His own obsession is so serious that he finds all the people around him turning into chimeras. Koestler's presentation of this episode is worth citing:

Instead of a reply, Anderson made hurriedly for the door. He was seen out by smiling Dr. Miller, who, having in the meantime unzipped his hip-pocket, smartly opened the door with his tail. As a farewell greeting, Dr. Grob rose in his hind-legs, and gave Anderson an encouraging lick on the check. 'He looks already much improved', Grob remarked to his colleague. (173)
When he got out into the street, Anderson wondered whether he was a boy, or girl, man or chimera. A procession coming towards him consisted of only vague shapes like 'a face in a tree open to different interpretations'.

The motive behind this epilogue appears to be both entertainment and enlightenment. An Englishman struck Koestler 'as a much more attractive hybrid between a lion and an ostrich. In times of emergency he rises magnificently to the occasion. In between emergencies he buries his head in the sand with the tranquil conviction that Reality is a dirty word invented by foreigners.'

The symposium on the question of survival became a farce, but the author would continue to depend on the better sense of his fellow Englishmen, who would certainly rise to the occasion if ever a need arose to save the human race from extinction. The Call-Girls brings to an end Koestler's career as a novelist with this informed, clever, and witty work of fiction.

The work is a critical appraisal of the present-day world in terms of its colossal technological and scientific progress, and its spiritual destiny. It can also be seen as a kind of a continuation of a search for an answer to the besetting puzzle of human existence—a search that Koestler started with The Lotus and the Robot.
Notes and References


6. Ibid. p. 66.


9. Ibid. p. 222.

11. Ibid. p. 47.

12. Ibid.

13. Hamilton, Iain. 'Wonderfully Living : Koestler the Novelist'. Astride
97-98.


15. Hayman, Ronald. 'The Hero as Revolutionary : Koestler's Novels'. London

p. 219.

17. Wilson, Edmund. 'Arthur Koestler in Palestine : Thieves in the Night'.

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20. Hayman, Ronald. 'The Hero as Revolutionary : Koestler's Novels'. London

p. 50. (All subsequent references to the text will be from this
edition).


