

“He Is Not English, He Is Not a Novelist; And How Far Is He Even Likeable?” On the Critical Reception of Arthur Koestler’s *Thieves in the Night*

ZÉNÓ VERNYIK

Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic

zeno.vernyik@tul.cz

This paper deals with the immediate critical reception of Arthur Koestler’s *Thieves in the Night* (1946). Through a comparative analysis of reviews published at the time of the book’s appearance, it aims to show that the said reception was in many cases neither fair, nor focused on the book’s literary values. More specifically, in comparing the novel’s American reception with its British counterpart, and focusing on the various fallacies and biases, predominantly in the latter, this work aims to draw attention to the fact that the present-day obscurity of this commercially successful novel might be due, at least partially, to the often angered and biased reaction to the topic of the book, and its explicit criticism of British foreign policy, rather than a result of the book’s qualities themselves.

Keywords: Arthur Koestler; reception; foreign policy; Palestine; 1946

. . .

“No es inglés, no es novelista; ¿Y hasta qué punto es agradable?” Reflexiones sobre la recepción crítica de *Thieves in the Night* de Arthur Koestler

Este artículo es una revisión de la valoración del libro de Arthur Koestler *Thieves in the Night* (1946) por parte de varios críticos literarios. Mediante el análisis comparativo de distintas reseñas publicadas en el momento de aparición del libro, se intenta demostrar que en muchos de los casos la recepción no fue justa ni tampoco se centró en los propios valores literarios del libro. Así, se comparan las percepciones americanas de la novela con las británicas, poniendo especial énfasis en diversas falacias y singularidades que aparecen especialmente en las segundas. Es importante recalcar el hecho de que el ostracismo actual de la novela, de notorio éxito comercial en su momento, puede ser debido a una reacción encolerizada e injusta dada su crítica explícita a la política exterior del gobierno británico, en lugar de analizar el libro en sí mismo.

Palabras clave: Arthur Koestler; recepción; política exterior; Palestina; 1946

Nowadays, Arthur Koestler (1905-1983) is almost solely discussed as the author of *Darkness at Noon* (1940). This is in complete contrast to his reputation in his lifetime as “one of the most versatile and protean writers of the twentieth century” (Wainwright 1983, quoted in Scammell 2010, 566) and to his success with readers.¹ While the suggestion that the rest of his literary production simply “seem[s] rather dated now” (Scammell 2010, xix) might provide an easy explanation, it is just as likely that the controversial character of those texts and “Koestler’s disregard for conventional sentiment and disdain for received opinion” (567) is also to blame, or at least this could have strongly contributed to the reception of his books at the time of their publication. Thanks to his books’ attacks on most sides, factions and schools, he became “an intellectual outlaw” and this led to a “steady erosion of his reputation” (567).

To support this, the present paper deals with the immediate critical reception of *Thieves in the Night* ([1946] 1949). Through a comparative analysis of reviews published in the late 1940s, it aims to show that the reception was in many cases neither fair, nor focused on literary values.² More specifically, it shows that while the novel’s American reception was relatively balanced, its British one was overwhelmingly negative and frequently nothing but an angered and biased reaction to its topic and its explicit criticism of Britain’s policies in Palestine in the 1930s and early 1940s. By focusing on this phenomenon, this short essay aims to draw attention to the fact that the book’s present-day obscurity might, at least partially, be a result of this skewed reception, rather than the book’s qualities.

¹ This paper is the result of research supported by the research grant SGS-FP-TUL 20/2014 – “Otherness, Diversity and Understanding as Phenomena of British and American Literature” as well as by the Mobility Fund of the Technical University of Liberec.

² The basis of the analysis is Koestler’s own collection of the book’s reviews. These documents are accessible as part of the Koestler Papers held at the Special Collections Centre of the University of Edinburgh, checked against the newspaper and journal content of EBSCO, Proquest and JSTOR databases, as well as compared to Koestler’s available biographies, to ensure that the coverage is as complete as possible. While one can never say with full conviction that no item could have possibly been left out, there are nevertheless ample grounds to consider that the overview is reasonably representative: it provides a critical assessment of a total of thirty-three reviews, published between October 25, 1946 and January 1948, thirteen of which are British, and twenty American. I am aware of the existence of two further reviews of the novel, the first by Leon Dennen in *The New Leader* (1946) and another by Robert Lowett in *The Humanist* (1947). While I will do all within my means to rectify this shortcoming in the future, I do not think that the absence of these two reviews would change the general picture in a significant way. It is also worth noting that the labels “British” and “American” always refer to the nationality of the authors, and not the place of publication. Although in almost all cases these categories overlap, there are two texts where they do not. The reason for this is that both Raymond Mortimer (1946) and Anne Fremantle (1947) discuss the book in terms of the author’s nationality from a specifically British point of view, discussed below.

The novel is admittedly controversial enough to call forth bitter and overheated reactions. First of all, its events take place in the period between 1937 and 1939, in a very turbulent period of the British Mandate of Palestine:

The 1936-1939 Palestine revolt against the British Mandate was a direct outcome of the dramatic increase in Jewish immigration during the first three years of Adolf Hitler's reign. From 1933 to 1936, more than 130,000 Jews arrived in Palestine [. . .] The decision of the [British] Conservative government to retreat from its support for Zionism was manifested in the White Paper of May 1939. Among other provisions, this document set a quota of 75,000 Jews for five years, after which further immigration would be conditional upon Arab consent. (Kochavi 1998, 146)

It is easy to see that with hundreds of thousands of refugees escaping from certain death on the one hand, and Britain's wish to keep the situation in Palestine under control by "appeasing the Arabs" (146) through curbing "drastically the scope of this immigration" (146), the novel is touching upon a topic that must have been sensitive primarily because Jewish immigration to Palestine remained a point of contention for all sides for the next seven years (146-153), which includes the year the novel was published.

In addition, the story is about the transformation of a liberal pacifist, Joseph, into a terrorist, a sensitive enough topic in itself, and even more so at the time of the book's publication. It appeared after Black Saturday (29 June 1946), "during the course of which approximately 2,700 Jews were detained" (153). As Michael Scammel explains: "Black Saturday, as it came to be called, was a British riposte to Jewish sabotage of the colonial infrastructure, especially the destruction of eight road and railroad bridges linking Palestine to its neighbors, but it led in turn to one of the worst atrocities of the British Mandate, the blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem by the Irgun" (2010, 278).

While a book about becoming a Jewish terrorist is clearly topical after such an incident, it admittedly touches a raw nerve. Even more so, if it is written in the uncompromising way Koestler's is; the text showcases the complete range of opinions on all sides, including the most extreme, mostly without any commentary, except for the reaction of other characters, often biased and extreme in themselves.

Koestler's support for the Zionist cause was also well-known by the reading public, since it was something that he openly expressed. He was a reporter working for the *News Chronicle* dispatched to Palestine in 1937, where he wrote three long articles (Scammel 2010, 145-147) in which he "insisted that the need for a Jewish homeland was more urgent than ever" (147). In 1944, he "joined the Palestine Luncheon Club" (235) and also "attended meetings of [the] Anglo-Palestine Committee" (236). The aim of the latter was "to oppose the British white paper of 1939" (236) already mentioned in Kochavi's quote above. In fact, shortly before the book's appearance in stores, he published two articles in *The Times* and one in *Life*, the latter "openly defend[ing] the Irgun and the Stern Gang" (276).

Yet, the heated and sensitive political atmosphere at the time of the book's publication, and Koestler's public image as a militant Zionist are not sufficient reason, in my opinion, to condemn the novel to the status of a bad or dangerous book, much less warrant the neglect that later monographs on and biographies of Koestler show towards this little known piece of fiction.³ To start with, even the number of reviews published is telling: more critical attention was paid to the book in the United States (twenty reviews) than in Britain (thirteen), quite the opposite of what one would expect based on the political situation described above. This might be partially explained by the fact that the novel was published first in America, early in October 1946, and only at the end of the same month in the United Kingdom (Hamilton 1982, 119; Scammell 2010, 281). The difference in publication date was however so short, and was caused simply by the shortage of paper in Britain at the time (Scammell 2010, 281), that this alone could not possibly cause a significant difference in the critical attention the book received in the two countries. Even less so, considering that in Britain, "some 20,000 copies had been sold a day or two after publication" (Hamilton 1982, 119), a fact that would call for a notable presence in the review sections of British dailies and magazines. This is not to mention that the book was published by a major British publishing house, Macmillan, and was written by an author living in Great Britain who considered himself, above all else, and regardless of his Austrian-Hungarian-Jewish roots, British. As he himself put it in a letter to Upton Sinclair, dated February 25, 1957, "please don't call me a Hungarian author. I am Hungarian-born, but British by naturalization and my books since 1940 have been written in English" (*The Koestler Archive*, MS2382, folder 1, 29).

In order to be able to provide a general picture of the reception, I created a scale of five categories from *overwhelmingly positive* (+2) to *overwhelmingly negative* (-2), the remaining values being *generally positive* (+1), *neutral* (0) and *generally negative* (-1). The two extremes of the scale stand for reviews that contain few or no statements contradicting the otherwise strongly negative or positive assessment, while balanced reviews, with an even mixture of praise and criticism are situated at the origin. Reviews were assigned the intermediate values of +1 and -1 where it was easy to detect whether they were negative or positive in their final judgment of the novel, yet they nevertheless contained a mixture of praise and criticism. Table 1 shows a complete list of the reviews I have analyzed, with their respective values in accordance with the above categorization. Using these categories, it is easy to visualize the main lines of the critical reception in the two countries in question.

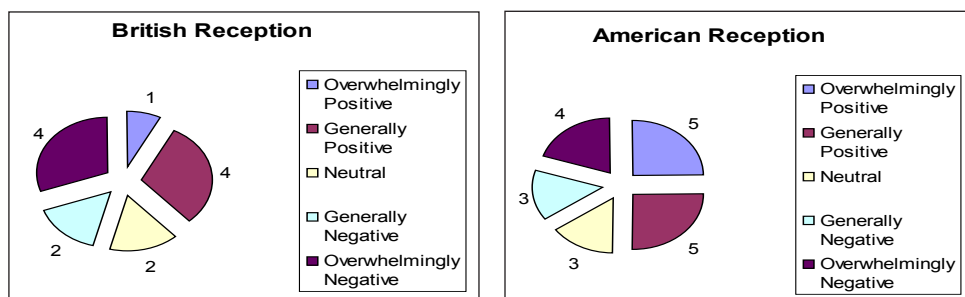
³ It is important to stress here that Koestler's actual relationship to Zionism was much more complex and much less positive than his articles might make one think. For more information about this, see Avishai (1990).

Table 1. A list of the reviews analyzed and their position on the scale of categories

BRITISH REVIEWS	
Fyvel, T.R. "To the King David Hotel." <i>Tribune</i> , Oct 25, 1946	+ I
J.M.D.P. "Mr. Koestler." <i>The Manchester Guardian</i> , Oct 25, 1946	+ I
Morgan, Charles. Untitled. <i>The Sunday Times</i> , Oct 27, 1946	- I
Unnamed, "New Novels." <i>The Scotsman</i> , Oct 31, 1946	+ I
Crossman, R.H.S. "The Anatomy of Terrorism." <i>The New Statesman and Nation</i> , Nov 2, 1946	0
Quenell, Peter. "If You Kick This Book Across The Room—You Will Probably Read It Later." <i>Daily Mail</i> , Nov 2, 1946	- 2
Holme, Christopher. "Zion." <i>The Observer</i> , Nov 3, 1946	- 2
Mortimer, Raymond. "Arthur Koestler." <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i> , Nov 1946	- 2
O'Brien, Kate. "Fiction." <i>The Spectator</i> , Nov 29, 1946	- I
Bowen, Elizabeth. "Books Reviewed." <i>Tatler</i> , December 4, 1946	+ 2
Fremantle, Anne. "What Comes Naturally." <i>Commonweal</i> , Feb 28, 1947	- 2
Unnamed, "A Story of Life in Palestine." <i>Quiver</i> , August, 1947	+ I
Pritchett, V.S. "Koestler: A Guilty Figure." <i>Harper's Magazine</i> , January, 1948	0
AMERICAN REVIEWS	
Prescott, Orville. Untitled in "Books of the Times." <i>The New York Times</i> , Oct 29, 1946	- 2
Pick, Robert. "The Story of Ezra's Tower." <i>The Saturday Review</i> , Nov 2, 1946	+ 2
Watts, Richard Jr. "Koestler's Novel of Zionism." <i>The New York Times</i> , Nov 3, 1946	+ I
Unnamed, "Thieves in the Night." <i>The Washington Post</i> , Nov 3, 1946	+ 2
Brady, Charles A. "Bren Guns in the Holy Land." <i>America</i> , Nov 30, 1946	+ I
Greenberg, Clement. "Koestler's New Novel." <i>Partisan Review</i> , Nov-Dec 1946	- 2
Soskin, William. "Bad Conscience Hurts Novelists." <i>The Washington Post</i> , Dec 4, 1946	0
Hilbrook, Roy. "Thieves in the Night." <i>Current History</i> , Dec 1946	- I
Rahv, Philip. "Jews of the Ice Age." <i>Commentary</i> , Dec 1946	+ I
Chamberlain, John. "The New Books." <i>Harper's Magazine</i> , Dec 1946	+ 2
Unnamed, "Thieves in the Night." <i>Jewish Forum</i> , January 1947	+ I
Glazer, Nathan. "The Parlor Terrorists: Koestler's Fellow Travelers and their Politics." <i>Commentary</i> , Jan 1, 1947	- 2
Fitzsimons, M.A. "Reviews." <i>The Review of Politics</i> , Jan 1, 1947	- 2
Unnamed, "Thieves in the Night." <i>The Presbyterian</i> , Jan 25, 1947	+ I
Goldberg, David (Rabbi), "Thieves in the Night." <i>The Interpreter</i> , Feb 1947	- I
Leek, J.H. "Koestler Too Close to His Subject Here." <i>The Daily Oklahoman</i> , Feb 23, 1947	- I
Unnamed, "Palestine Problem." <i>The Cresset</i> , March 1947	0
Voss, Carl Hermann, "Thieves in the Night." <i>The Clergyman</i> , March 1, 1947	+ 2
Conner, John. "Thieves in the Night." <i>Leatherneck</i> , Apr 1947	0
Tracy, Henry C. "The American Scene in Fiction." <i>Common Ground</i> , Spring 1947	+ 2

As Figure 1 shows, of the total of twenty American reviews, five are very positive (25%), five are generally positive (25%), three are neutral in tone (15%), three are mildly negative (15%), and four are at the extreme negative end of the spectrum (20%). The British situation is considerably different: only a single review is at the positive extreme (7.69%), four are generally positive (30.77%), two are neutral (15.38%), a further two are mildly negative (15.38%), and four are completely negative (30.77%). It is quite apparent that the results lean slightly towards a positive reception in the United States, and much more noticeably towards a negative one in Britain. It is also visible that whereas the number of extremely negative and extremely positive reviews in the United States is almost equivalent, the number of extremely negative British reviews is four times higher than those completely in favor of the novel. Although the percentage of neutral reviews is practically the same in both countries, the biggest share is formed by positive reviews in the United States, but negative in the United Kingdom. While this difference could be due to many different factors, for example the percentage of conservative critics in the two countries, or a difference between the tastes of the two literary markets, my claim is that it has primarily to do with the book's controversial handling of sensitive topics, and in particular with its open criticism of British policies and decisions.

Figure 1. The immediate critical reception of *Thieves in the Night* in the United Kingdom and the United States



Possibly the most controversial of all issues the novel covers is terrorism. Many of the reviews revolve around this phenomenon and its moral consequences, most of them taking it for granted that the book is an apology of terrorism, or even openly terrorist propaganda. Peter Quenell (1946), for example, condemns the novel for showing Joseph's transition from a leftist intellectual to a terrorist: "Joseph, who under the influence of a militant friend was already wobbling that way, graduates from agricultural Communism to 'para-military' terrorism. We leave him as the member of a gang which, among its other activities, expresses the ultra-Zionist point of view by tossing bombs into crowded Arab marketplaces. *Joseph appears to approve; at least, he does not dissent*" (Quenell 1946, n.p.; my emphasis).

The critic's problem is not so much the portrayal of terrorism in itself, but that the protagonist is not fighting against it, or at least condemning it, but is rather actively supporting it. The primary reason for his disapproval is that the book allows for the existence of a protagonist who "believes that assassination is justifiable, collective vengeance is justifiable" (Quenell 1946, n.p.). Christopher Holme shares this view, and because of the novel's portrayal of the intellectual development of a terrorist, considers it an apology: "The book, ruthlessly revealing the mentality of the Jewish terrorist, and taking the reader through all the arguments by which he seeks to rationalise his actions has a nightmarish quality" (1946, 3), resulting in a story of which the "purpose, apparently, was to explain, *even justify*, the Jewish terrorist" (3; my emphasis); again, the critic is making the unsubstantiated claim that the description or explanation of the making of a terrorist in itself equals support of and for terrorism. While T. R. Fyvel's view of the novel is not negative, he nevertheless agrees that the book is "justifying the group of Jewish terrorists who deliberately choose to sacrifice not only their lives, but even their pacifist ideals" (1946, 15).

The view that a book is terrorist propaganda and therefore bad literature, is of course not exclusive to British commentators: M. A. Fitzsimons likewise considers the book "a tract for terrorists" (1947, 109) simply because it raises questions and expresses "doubt of man's psychological motivations" (109) without actually answering such questions and countering the doubt with some sort of certainty. In Fitzsimons' opinion, "searching, unanswered doubt prepares the way for activism which is the twin of nihilism. Thus, we meet the opponent of totalitarianism as the apologist of terrorism" (109). A statement truly puzzling to make, since if all texts that raise more questions than they answer were to be considered terrorist propaganda, most literary and philosophical writings could be categorized as such.

These reviews demonstrably fall victim to several fallacies. For one, they confuse the portrayal of a phenomenon with its support, although the two are not necessarily the same. One can, in fact, suppose that had the novel been condemnatory of terrorism, these reviewers would have praised it. At least, comments such as "Joseph appears to approve; at least he does not dissent" (Quenell 1946, n.p.) or "to explain, even justify, the Jewish terrorist" (Holme 1946, 3) point in that direction. Yet, the objective but distanced, or even sympathetic portrayal of shocking acts and views without a critical attitude is well-known in modern art. Referring to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975), Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) or Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) would be anachronistic, but Charles Baudelaire's portrayal of the drunkard who murdered his wife in "Le Vin de l'assassin" (1857), Georges Bataille's descriptions of sexual transgressions and violence in *L'histoire de l'oeil* (1928) or Randall Jarrell's unsentimental portrayal of the cruelty of war in "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" (1945) might be mentioned. What is common in these texts is that their refusal to criticize the controversial issues they portray does not make

them their supporters, nor does it lower their artistic value or endanger their position in the canon. Quite the opposite: if anything, the honest and unexplained portrayal of excess without extra commentary only makes it more tangible for the audience.⁴

Of course, the very issue of discussing the morality of supporting, or not condemning, terrorism leads to another potential fallacy: by judging the work on the merits of its ethical lesson, rather than on its artistic qualities, the reviewers indulge in moral criticism. This, as Richard A. Posner argues, is erroneous because “the proper criteria for evaluating literature are aesthetic rather than ethical” (1997, 2), and thus, a “work of literature is not to be considered maimed or even marred by expressing unacceptable moral views” (2) and this remains the case even if “the author appears to share” (2) those views. Likewise, René Wellek and Austin Warren (1949) emphasized that although all literary works should meet Horace’s criteria of *dulce et utile*, this second category is not to be taken as a call for works to have a moral lesson to teach:

The usefulness of art need not be thought to lie in the enforcement of such a moral lesson as Le Bossu held to be Homer’s reason for writing the *Iliad*, or even such as Hegel found in his favorite tragedy, *Antigone*. “Useful” is equivalent to “not a waste of time,” not a form of “passing the time,” something deserving of serious attention. (1949, 20)

Another, related charge is that the novel is supposedly a piece of propaganda. The implicit presupposition behind this is that it is impossible for a text to qualify as a work of art and be a piece of propaganda at the same time: such a view is an either-or dichotomy. As Roy Hilbrook writes, “the book is so strongly Zionist [. . .] that it loses force as a novel and becomes a tract” (1946, 512). Likewise, although he acknowledges that the book “does not contain a dull page” (Mortimer 1946, 135), Raymond Mortimer nevertheless assesses *Thieves in the Night* in a fundamentally negative manner because rather than being a novel, “[i]t is a masterpiece of propaganda” (135). In a similar vein, Osmar White on the one hand acknowledges that “[g]ood fiction—as distinct from great fiction—is essentially the product of a condition of society. Fiction with the quality of verisimilitude is, therefore, always more or less propagandist. If it is to bear the stamp of truth, it must plead a cause” (1947, n.p.). Nevertheless, he then goes on to claim that this should be taken as a relative, not an absolute truth, so being open about one’s ideological position, and possibly trying to convince the reader of it, is only allowed to a certain extent: “there are limits beyond which a sincere artist will not go” (White 1947, n.p.). Unfortunately, he fails to define where those limits are, although he makes it clear that *Thieves in the Night* is located on the wrong side of that border.

⁴ In fact, some of the contemporaries of these critics were perfectly aware of the distinction between portrayal and support. John Conner (1947, 59), J.M.D.P. (1946, 3), Donagh MacDonagh (1946, 6) and Elizabeth Bowen (1946) agree, in their different wordings, that the book is, to quote the latter, “a ruthlessly analytical, unheated novel,” in which “Mr. Koestler has lifted his subject on to a universalised human plane” (Bowen 1946, n.p.).

One of the main reasons for Anne Fremantle's offhand dismissal of the book as an "appallingly bad novel" (1947, 494) is also that she sees it as "naïve propaganda" (494) as opposed to I. F. Stone's *Underground to Palestine* (1946)—another book she reviews in the same article—which, in her opinion, gets "pretty close to being literature" (Freemantle 1947, 494) simply because the author of that novel, unlike Koestler, "only record[ed] as a reporter what he heard and saw" (494). Peter Quenell also seems to second this opinion, since he explicitly distinguishes novels of ideas from books with a possible intent to convince the reader ideologically: "'Thieves in the Night' [*sic*] is not the new novel of ideas to which we had been looking forward so much as a mess of propagandist potage" (1946, n.p.).

But however self-evident many of the novel's reviewers take it to be that a work of art cannot be a piece of propaganda, this opinion is more of an illusion than a generally accepted position. A brief look at the Western canon provides ample evidence that various texts, both literary and filmic, have a stable position within it, even though their propagandistic intentions are fairly obvious. It has been a heated debate in Shakespeare criticism, for example, as to what extent his historical plays were written with an active political agenda in mind—see Womersley (1989) or D'Amico (1992). Likewise, one could mention the institution of art patronage often having a distinctly political nature—see MacLean (1993) or Murray (1983)—and literary history is also aware of poets and bards working at courts creating works that showed the patrons or their political agenda in a favorable light (Parry 1952). For more contemporary examples, one could mention Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), an undisputed film classic, albeit a clear case of communist propaganda, or from the other end of the political spectrum, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935). One could similarly cite W. E. B. DuBois who claimed that "all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists" (1926, n.p.), a milder version of which is shared by René Wellek and Austin Warren:

In popular speech, [the term propaganda] is applied only to doctrines viewed as pernicious and spread by men whom we distrust. The word implies calculation, intention, and is usually applied to specific, rather restricted doctrines or programs. So limiting the sense of the term, one might say that some art (the lowest kind) is propaganda, but that no great art, or good art, or Art, can possibly be. If, however, we stretch the term to mean "effort, whether conscious or not, to influence readers to share one's attitude toward life," then there is plausibility in the contention that all artists are propagandists or should be, or (in complete reversal of the position outlined in the preceding sentence) that all sincere, responsible artists are morally obligated to be propagandists. (1949, 26)

Another typical ground for rejection was the factual inaccuracy of historical events or the reviewer's disagreement with the novel's interpretation of them. Nathan Glazer (1947) scolds the author since, in his opinion, "the documentation, both 'news' and

fiction is really a fraud. The terrorist organizations [. . .] are not made up of Social-Democrats and members of collective colonies [. . .] Terrorist action on February 27, 1939 did not scare Britain out of giving Palestine to the Arabs; Koestler's news account on pages 244-8, which purports to prove so, is an artful fabrication" (1947, 56). Raymond Mortimer takes a similar stance when he emphasizes that the book "is a novel only in form; and any criticism of it is bound to be concerned chiefly with the accuracy and completeness of the picture it presents" (1946, 134), of which he goes on to "correct" in detail (134-136). R. H. S. Crossman likewise rejects the claim that the book would be a novel, and agrees that it is fair to judge it on the basis of the correctness of the portrayal of historical events, even if he himself does not do so: "*Thieves in the Night* is not a well constructed novel, and its only plot is the intellectual development of the hero [. . .] This strengthens the impression that it is a piece of reporting which can fairly be discussed on its merits as a picture of Jewish life in Palestine. On my second reading I barely resisted the temptation to underline inaccuracies and examples of one-sided reporting" (1946, 321).

However, these charges seem puzzling rather than substantial, and even more so on closer inspection. Novels being a fictional genre, readers routinely expect the story to be made up by the author, either in part or in total. The fact that a novel is historical is not enough reason to suspend this expectation: many historical novels feature non-existent people, situations, places or other details. It would be extremely naïve to reject *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) just because there was no historical Hester Prynne who had to wear a scarlet "A" on her bosom, or because Ann Hutchinson, the alleged historical inspiration, behaved differently and had a different life—see Colacurcio (1972)—yet this is what Nathan Glazer does when he scolds Koestler for using "artful fabrication" (1947, 56). Putting aside the issue of the problematic nature of the statement that the book is "a novel only in form" (Mortimer 1946, 134) or "not a well constructed novel" (Crossman 1946, 321), one cannot help but question the claim that if something is not, properly speaking, a novel, it automatically warrants its judgement on the basis of its factual accuracy in its portrayal of historical events. Taken at face value, one could imagine that novels have some specific license over other genres, since following this logic, the novel could get away with factual inaccuracies the others could not. Nevertheless, and however unfortunately phrased, it is most likely that neither of the reviewers is making such a claim. Rather, it may mean that, in their opinion, if something does not qualify for their criteria of quality literature, it should be judged as a piece of non-fiction. Another rather puzzling claim since it is not hard to see that bad fiction is still fiction. Or, finally, it may also be a reference to the book's technique of collage: the story is interwoven with newspaper cuttings and official government documents, or at least what passes for such texts. In this case, the reviewers' position is that the novel uses parts of published texts, many of them not fictional, and thus it can no longer be taken to be fiction. Such a statement is, again, indefensible, as it would disqualify a huge portion of modernist and post-modern literature, simply for daring to use collage.

It is untenable that the use of external texts disqualifies a novel from being a literary work of art, and the (non-)fictionality of such borrowed passages or even whole pages is in no way related to this. Art history, just like literary history, even knows examples of extreme cases where the whole text or object is borrowed, yet it gains the status of art through recontextualization. István Örkény's "Mi mindent kell tudni" (1968) is a verbatim reprint of the backside of a bus ticket, while Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* is the exhibited version of a urinal, to mention just two such striking examples. As Jurij Lotman puts it, "Puškin includes an authentic legal document, a court decision, in the text of *Dubrovskij*. If removed from the novel, these pages would represent a legal text [. . .] Once it is included in a text with another artistic function, it itself acquires an artistic function to such an extent that, although it was formerly an authentic legal text, it is perceived as an artistic imitation of a legal text" ([1966] 1988, 120). In other words, no matter where the borrowed piece comes from, the fact that it *is* used in a literary work of art makes it literature.

Many of the reviews get so carried away by their discussion of "the facts" that they do not even talk about the novel, but about the situation in Palestine in the 1930s and/or 1940s. Thus there are long passages that have nothing to do with the assessment of the qualities of *Thieves in the Night*. Anne Fremantle feels justified in sermonizing about the responsibility of Christendom, using Koestler's book (and others she reviews in the same article) as a platform:

Europe, and copying her, America, has always turned its sadism and its masochism onto its minorities, its nonconformists, and on to [*sic*] the stranger within its gates, be that stranger Jewish, Negro, Indian or Japanese. But this form of "doing what comes naturally" is leading mankind where it led the lemmings—those rats who marched hundreds of miles to mass suicide by drowning in the sea. We cannot afford to let the lower passions, present in us all, become explicit in our Bilbos and our Webbs. We all have our fascist moments—as Koestler shows in his novel [. . .] —but we must get the better of these for our own sakes. And however stupidly or badly the Jewish terrorists are behaving it is our fault, collectively, as Christians. (1947, 494)

Raymond Mortimer likewise discusses a whole set of what he considers factual inaccuracies, under the guise of assessing the book. As he himself admits, "I have felt obliged to point out certain gaps in the picture presented by Mr. Koestler" (1946, 136). I provide just one example here, the rest are similar in character: "Mr. Koestler takes it for granted that we have the moral right to impose on the Palestinian Arabs immigrants on a scale we should not consider admitting ourselves. The Jews now number roughly one third of the population of Palestine. It is as if England had admitted fourteen million, and the United States forty-five million, during the last twenty-five years" (136). Yet, these comments have little to do with Koestler's novel, and such philosophizing should neither take up the place of actual assessment, nor influence it.

Another common problem is the identification of the book's protagonist, Joseph, with its author, yet another decision that remains fundamentally unsupported. The mildest form of this is Anne Fremantle's warning that Koestler "might have done better to stick to the first person into which his Joseph occasionally drops" (1947, 494), instead of keeping the focalizer-protagonist separate from the author. Raymond Mortimer is more explicit: "Joseph himself is not altogether credible as a character [. . .] It is difficult to believe in [his] background, because Mr. Koestler uses him so often and so freely as a mouthpiece for his own opinions and emotions" (1946, 134). For Peter Quenell, "[t]he chief character, Joseph, is a mere ventriloquist's dummy" (1946, n.p.), while for R. H. S. Crossman, "the personality of the hero is dominated by that of the author" (1946, 321). Beyond the problem that it is not made clear what, if anything, these critics base their judgements on, their preference to consider the protagonist-narrator, Joseph, as identical with, or closely related to Arthur Koestler, ignores the basic distinction between the biological author and both the implied author and the narrator. Considering that this distinction was made after the publication of these reviews, this is a pardonable slip, but not something that does not deserve correction. As Wayne C. Booth explains, "[e]ven the novel in which no narrator is dramatized creates an implicit picture of an author who stands behind the scenes, whether as stage manager, as puppeteer, or as an indifferent God, silently paring his fingernails. This implied author is always distinct from the 'real man'" ([1974] 2004, 139). And considering the fact that the narrator of Koestler's story is, in most cases, Joseph, the protagonist, his position becomes a step further removed from that of the biological author: "many novels dramatize their narrators with great fulness [*sic*], making them into characters who are as vivid as those they tell us about (*Tristram Shandy*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Dr. Faustus*). In such works the narrator is often radically different from the implied author" (140).

But the most common, and probably most typical point of contention, at least for reviewers from the United Kingdom, is the novel's criticism of British policies in Palestine. Peter Quenell goes as far as to start his treatment of the novel with his disapproval of its critical attitude towards the way the British managed Palestine:

THREE types of reader [*sic*] will be stirred, more or less violently, by Arthur Koestler's new novel, *Thieves in the Night*. American Anglophobes will receive it with glee as yet another damning exposure of British villainy and inefficiency. People in this country who have relations in Palestine, and every week expect to hear that they have been shot, or bombed, or mined, may kick it furiously across the room [. . .] Lastly, there are readers like myself who regard Arthur Koestler as an uncommonly intelligent writer and will be disappointed and dismayed by this, his latest, effort. (1946, n.p.)

The reviewer, before even starting to discuss what the book is about, effectively, though indirectly, charges it with: (1) hatred for the British, (2) total insensitivity toward the personal tragedies of British families, and (3) being unintelligent. He

is, however, by no means alone in his opinion. R. H. S. Crossman also criticizes the novel in a similar vein: "Has he accepted the casuistry of 'the British intern us without charge. That justifies us kidnapping them?'" (1946, 321). And this question is not left as rhetorical: "Koestler is convinced that the terrorists who follow the example of the Irish and the Boers have chosen the correct tactics in dealing with Britain, and that Doctor Weizmann has chosen the wrong ones" (321-322); a conclusion which is, in the reviewer's view, obviously a fallacious one. Roughly the same sentiment is repeated by Raymond Mortimer in his review, though more explicitly and in more words:

But can he really think that it is right (or even politic) for Jews to murder the British soldiers and administrators who have the misfortune to be sent to Palestine? No people has treated its Jewish citizens better than the British. Even the social discrimination against them that elsewhere sometimes shows itself—for instance, in clubs—has no place in England. And for a year the British were alone in fighting the people who included in their war aims the total extermination of Jewry. They do not ask for gratitude: they were fighting, like all their allies, first and foremost in self-defense. But they might have expected not to be assassinated by those who but for them would have been consigned to the gas chambers of Buchenwald. (1946, 136)

It is interesting to see how an article that should be focusing on the merits (or weaknesses) of a novel lapses into first a defense of British behavior, and then into an emotionally manipulative denial of a people's right for self-defense if that act means fighting against people who saved them previously.

But if rejecting a book because it criticizes British policy seems unprofessional, channeling the resulting frustration into open personal attack is even more so. One cannot help feeling that the hostility of such reviews has more to do with the reviewer being upset about the novel's criticism, than with the qualities of the book itself. Anne Fremantle, for one, closes her discussion of the novel by scolding the author for "writing from the aloof security of his Welsh farm, where he enjoys the hospitality of the country he so virulently attacks" (1947, 494). She seems to be implying that as an immigrant writer working in Britain, he has no right to criticize the British, a way of thinking analogous to that used by Raymond Mortimer (1946), quoted above, who refuses that right to the Jews on the basis of the fact that many of them were saved by British soldiers (in a different time and place). And the very same logic is followed by Peter Quenell:

And lest you should be distressed by the picture of this talented middle-aged novelist roaming around Palestine at the risk of his life and limbs, I am happy to be in a position to calm and reassure you.

A biographical note printed on the dust-cover (which also records how he was rescued by British agency first from a Spanish prison, then from a French concentration camp) informs us that Arthur Koestler is now enjoying the royalties and cultivating mutton in the studious seclusion of a North Wales sheep-farm. (1946, n.p.)

The elements used are identical: a personal attack on the biological author based on his immigrant status and postulating that it is not appropriate, or even allowed, in such a position to criticize the policies made by politicians of the majority culture. Yet, perhaps the strongest attack on Koestler based on his non-English identity is by Raymond Mortimer. In fact, he goes so far as to start his treatment of Koestler's novels (but first and foremost *Thieves in the Night*) with the following few lines, before even discussing the basic features or the plot of the novels: "'Of living English novelists I like Koestler the best.' This was said to me recently by a friend in France, where *Darkness at Noon* has, in translation, enjoyed a sensational success. 'He is wonderfully living,' I answered, 'but he is not English; he is not a novelist; and how far is he, as a writer, even likable?'" (1946, 132). A very strong set of hostile statements to start with, and he continues in a similar vein. Without providing examples to support his statement, he claims that Koestler, as an author who was not born English, and was "[b]ilingual by education" and "had to learn a third language in which to write," fell short of native English writers, because his English, unlike Joseph Conrad's, had "no personal flavor. Finding a page torn out of one of his books, you might guess it was Koestler by the content, but never by the rhythm or the choice of words" (132). His reason for disliking Koestler's fiction is no less outrageous, "I find Mr. Koestler's writings dislikable because they neglect the necessity or even the existence of gardening" (133), unlike the products of cultures he considers to have "old governments" since those supposedly make it possible for their citizens, "except when menaced by foreign powers, [to] give themselves, their day's work done, to such enjoyments as their temperaments require, making music or love, fishing or studying" (132). As opposed to this, in Mortimer's opinion, Koestler supposedly "treats ordinary, peaceable enjoyment as trivial or even discreditable" (132), a claim that he does not support with examples from the author's writing, and one that is more than dubious considering the numerous scenes in Koestler's *Thieves in the Night* devoted to Joseph's love life, people playing chess or singing.

The most telling part of this forced opposition between Koestler and "old governments" is that these are identified as "American or British, Swiss or Swedish, whether republican or monarchist makes no difference" (Mortimer 1946, 132): that is to say, the author is situated as a rootless newcomer, opposed to the traditional and stable culture of Britain and other potentially Germanic cultures. This act of situating Koestler as a rootless outsider, in opposition to British culture, is in fact something that Mortimer himself admits. In his view, Koestler's "loyalty is to no abiding place on earth" (136), "an expatriate who has become an exile" (133), someone who "is not merely independent," but who, in Mortimer's view "is, or feels, isolated" (133). This is in shocking contrast to Arthur Koestler's self-identification as a British writer. In fact, a similar attack on Koestler as an outsider who cannot compete with the superiority of British culture appears in a less explicit form in V. S. Pritchett's treatment of Koestler's literary production when he claims that simply because "we

ourselves—see *Passage to India*, George Orwell, etc.—have a robust tradition of satire at the expense of our own people, Koestler's looks thin and conventional" (1948, 91).

These reactions, although neither professional nor correct, are nevertheless understandable. After all, *Thieves in the Night* truly criticized British policies in Palestine, and “[f]aced with a threatening outsider the best mode of defence is attack” (Kearney 2003, 65). When the book is critical of British policies, it does not only make a political statement or a critical remark. It goes further, in its forcing of the British subject, from an external position, to be critical about British policies, it also asks for self-scrutiny, and this is what ignites the attack: “[s]trangers [. . .] represent experiences of extremity which bring us to the edge. They subvert our established categories and challenge us to think again. And because they threaten the known with the unknown, they are often set apart in fear and trembling” (3). This is also why, in Pritchett's article, British works of self-satire are robust, while Koestler's is immediately marginalized as “thin and conventional” (1948, 91). And this is what Mortimer is also discussing in his unwarranted and puzzling soliloquy about the importance of gardening and Koestler's presumed ignorance of it (1946, 133). And since “the price to be paid for the construction of the happy tribe is often the ostracizing of some outsider” (Kearney 2003, 26), it is not surprising to see how much energy Mortimer devotes to proving that Koestler is “not English” (1946, 132), but “an expatriate who has become an exile” (133).

The situation is doubly interesting, because, as mentioned above, Koestler identified himself as “British by naturalisation” a person whose “books since 1940 have been written in English” (*The Koestler Archive*, MS2382, folder 1, 29). And these words are very close to Benedict Anderson's since they mention naturalization and language: “from the start the nation was conceived in language, not in blood,” so “one could be ‘invited into’ the imagined community. Thus today, even the most insular nations accept the principle of *naturalization* (wonderful word!), no matter how difficult in practice they make it” ([1983] 1991, 145). This explains then, why Mortimer had to mention Koestler's lack of originality in English (1946, 132) while classifying him as an outsider (133): the nation is “a community imagined through language” (Anderson [1983] 1991, 146), so in order to relegate him to the position of the alien, Mortimer had to deny Koestler his ability to use English properly.

Of course, beyond all these fallacious critical remarks, many of the reviews also voiced charges that do relate to the novel as a literary work of art. Their less frequent, and mostly general and textually unsupported character, along with the limitations of an academic article, forces me to postpone tackling them to another paper. I am fully aware that the injustices of the reception in the 1940s cannot be fully proven until this part of the work is also done. Nevertheless, even this brief overview of the most typical and atrocious problems can help in drawing attention to a work that with its portrayal of an individual's route to terrorism, as well as its focus on the politically complex issue of handling a massive wave of refugees, could not be more topical these days.

A discussion of Koestler's *Thieves in the Night* gains even more importance, however, once one notes that besides Mark Levene's *Arthur Koestler* (1984), published a year after Koestler's death, only one other monograph has been devoted to a discussion of his literary output. This latter volume, Elisabeth Prinz's *Im Körper des Souveräns: Politische Krankheitsmetaphern bei Arthur Koestler* [In the Sovereign's Body: Arthur Koestler's Political Metaphors of Disease] (2010), however, has a highly specific focus: Koestler's use of illness as a political metaphor, which severely limits its relevance for any analysis that deals with the author's less directly political work, or focuses on non-political aspects of his production. Furthermore, although the title might lead one to believe that it deals with the whole *oeuvre*, it is in fact limited to only three of Koestler's novels: *Darkness at Noon* (1940), *Arrival and Departure* (1943) and *The Age of Longing* (1951).

While there has been a certain resurgence of interest in Koestler since the turn of the century, most of the recent output is formed by biographies. David Cesarani's *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (1998), Christian Buckard's *Arthur Koestler: Ein extremes Leben 1905-1983* [Arthur Koestler: An Extreme Life 1905-1983] (2004), László Márton's *Koestler, a lázadó* [Koestler, the Revolutionary] (2006) and *Koestler asszonyai* [Koestler's Women] (2012), and Michael Scammel's *Koestler: The Indispensable Intellectual* (2010) are all cases in point.

Granted, there are two further monographs that attempt something beyond writing yet another biography. However, even these—Mihály Szívós's *Koestler Arthur: Tanulmányok és esszék* [Koestler Arthur: Studies and Essays] (2006) and Robert E. Weigel's edited collection, *Arthur Koestler: Ein heller Geist in dunkler Zeit* [Arthur Koestler: A Bright Mind in Dark Times] (2009)—mostly deal with non-literary issues, such as Koestler's scientific output, or his political and philosophical views.

In terms of academic articles, the situation is even worse. The only publication on Koestler's literary output beyond *Darkness at Noon* is Matthias Weßel's essay (2015) in which he postulates that English characters play a crucial role in bridging the gap in Koestler's (and Neumann's) novels between the experience of the average British reader and the plot of these texts.

While *Thieves in the Night* is briefly tackled in Weßel's paper from his specific perspective, this is the only text to date, other than the present article, which deals with a possible interpretation of this novel. All the other sources mention it only in passing, if at all, and do nothing but repeat the opinions of the original reviewers from the 1940s without any critical assessment or attempt to surpass them. Thus, my article can be considered a necessary first step towards discussing the book on its own terms.

WORKS CITED

- ANDERSON, Benedict. (1983) 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- AVISHAI, Bernard. 1990. "Koestler and the Zionist Revolution." *Salmagundi* 87: 234-259.

- BOOTH, Wayne C. (1974) 2004. "Types of Narration." In *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Theories*. Vol. 1, edited by Mieke Bal. New York: Routledge.
- BOWEN, Elizabeth. 1946. "Books Reviewed." *Tatler*, December 4.
- BUCKARD, Christian. 2004. *Arthur Koestler: Ein extremes Leben 1905-1983*. Munich: C. H. Beck.
- CESARANI, David. 1998. *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*. London: William Heinemann.
- COLACURCIO, Michael J. 1972. "Footsteps of Ann Hutchinson: The Context of the Scarlet Letter." *ELH* 39 (3): 459-494.
- CONNER, John. 1947. "Thieves in the Night." *Leatherneck* 30 (4): 59.
- CROSSMAN, R.H.S. 1946. "The Anatomy of Terrorism." *The New Statesman and Nation*, November 2: 321-322.
- D'AMICO, Jack. 1992. "Shakespeare's Rome: Politics and Theater." *Modern Language Studies* 22 (1): 65-78.
- DENNEN, Leon. 1946. "Self-Hate as Patriotism: *THIEVES IN THE NIGHT*. By Arthur Koestler. The Macmillan Co. New York. 1946. 357 pages." *The New Leader* 29 (19): 12.
- DUBOIS, William E.B. 1926. "Criteria of Negro Art." *The Crisis*, October. [Accessed online on March 31, 2016].
- FITZSIMONS, M. A. 1947. "Reviews." *The Review of Politics*, January 1, 109-110.
- FREMANTLE, Anne. 1947. "What Comes Naturally." *The Commonweal*, February 28, 493-494.
- FYVEL, T. R. 1946. "To the King David Hotel." *Tribune*, October 25, 14-15.
- GLAZER, Nathan. 1947. "The Parlor Terrorists: Koestler's Fellow Travelers and their Politics." *Commentary*, January 1, 55-58.
- HAMILTON, Iain. 1982. *Koestler: A Biography*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- HILBROOK, Roy. 1946. "Thieves in the Night." *Current History*, December, 512.
- HOLME, Christopher. 1946. "Zion." *The Observer*, November 3, 3.
- J. M. D. P. 1946. "Mr. Koestler." *The Manchester Guardian*, October 25, 3.
- KEARNEY, Richard. 2003. *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*. New York: Routledge.
- KOCHAVI, Arieh J. 1998. "The Struggle against Jewish Immigration to Palestine." *Middle Eastern Studies* 34 (3): 146-167.
- KOESTLER, Arthur. 1940. *Darkness at Noon*. London: Macmillan.
- . 1943. *Arrival and Departure*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- . (1946) 1949. *Thieves in the Night: Chronicle of an Experiment*. London: Macmillan.
- . 1951. *The Age of Longing*. New York: Macmillan.
- . 1967. *The Ghost in the Machine*. London: Hutchinson.
- LEVENE, Mark. 1984. *Arthur Koestler*. New York: Frederick Ungar.
- LOTMAN, Jurij. (1966) 1988. "Problems in the Typology of Texts." In *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology*, edited and translated by Daniel P. Lucid. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 119-124.
- LOWETT, Robert. 1947. "Thieves in the Night by Arthur Koestler." *The Humanist* 7, 152.
- MACDONAGH, Donagh. 1946. "Evolution of a Terrorist." *The Irish Times*, November 23, 6.

- MACLEAN, Sally-Beth. 1993. "The Politics of Patronage: Dramatic Records in Robert Dudley's Household Books." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 (2): 175-182.
- MÁRTON, László. 2006. *Koestler, a lázadó*. Budapest: Pallas.
- . 2012. *Koestler asszonyai*. Budapest: Noran Libro.
- MORTIMER, Raymond. 1946. "Arthur Koestler." *The Atlantic Monthly*, November, 132-136.
- MURRAY, Timothy. 1983. "Theatrical Legitimation: Forms of French Patronage and Portraiture." *PMLA* 98 (2): 170-182.
- PARRY, John J. 1952. "The Court Poets of the Welsh Princes." *PMLA* 67 (4): 511-520.
- POSNER, Richard A. 1997. "Against Ethical Criticism." *Philosophy and Literature* 21: 1-27.
- PRINZ, Elisabeth. 2010. *Im Körper des Souveräns: Politische Krankheitsmetaphern bei Arthur Koestler*. Vienna: Braumüller.
- PRITCHETT, V. S. 1948. "Koestler: A Guilty Figure." *Harper's Magazine* 196 (1172): 84-92.
- QUENELL, Peter. 1946. "If You Kick This Book Across The Room—You Will Probably Read It Later." *Daily Mail*, November 2.
- SCAMMELL, Michael. 2010. *Koestler: The Indispensable Intellectual*. London: Faber and Faber.
- STONE, Isidor Feinstein. 1946. *Underground to Palestine*. New York: Boni & Gaer.
- SZÍVÓS, Mihály. 2006. *Koestler Arthur: Tanulmányok és esszék*. Budapest: Typotex.
- THE KOESTLER ARCHIVE. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Library, Centre for Research Collections.
- WAINWRIGHT, Martin. 1983. "Koestler and Wife Found Dead." *The Guardian*, March 4.
- WEIGEL, Robert G., ed. 2009. *Arthur Koestler: Ein heller Geist in dunkler Zeit*. Tübingen: Francke.
- WELLEK, René and Austin Warren. 1949. *Theory of Literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- WEßEL, Matthias. 2015. "'Becoming Anglicized?' The Increasing Importance of English Characters in the Exile Novels of Arthur Koestler and Robert Neumann." *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* 5 (1): 1-11.
- WHITE, Osmar. 1947. "US Sailor Looks In." *Herald (Melbourne)*, February 15.
- WOMERSLEY, David. 1989. "The Politics of Shakespeare's *King John*." *The Review of English Studies* 40 (160): 497-515.

Received 18 February 2015

Revised version accepted 10 November 2015

Zénó Vernyik graduated from the University of Szeged and Masaryk University and holds a PhD in Comparative Literature. He is an Assistant Professor in the English Department of the Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic. His primary research interests are the *oeuvre* of British writers of Hungarian origin (primarily Arthur Koestler and George Mikes), modern and contemporary American and British literature, spatial theory, and the representation of cities in literature. He has also published articles on Australian cinema and Belgian literature.

Address: English Department, Faculty of Science, Humanities and Education, Technical University of Liberec. Studentská 1402/2, 461 17 Liberec, Czech Republic. Tel.: +420-485-354-251.