



**Henry Innes MacAdam. *Outlook and Insight:
New Research and Reflections on Arthur
Koestler's The Gladiators***

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Reviewed by

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Henry Innes MacAdam's relationship to the *The Gladiators* (1939) is of an unusual intensity and rarely paralleled devotion. Albeit only publishing his first article on the novel, to my knowledge at least, relatively recently (MacAdam 2006), he first read Koestler's story almost seventy years ago (84), and that reading had a momentous effect on his life: it sparked not only a lifelong fascination with the book itself, including corresponding with Koestler in the 1970s (87) and pursuing the decades-long project of reconstructing the story of Hollywood's abandoned project to film the novel, tracing and eventually retrieving its long-lost screenplay (MacAdam, Cooper, and Radford 2021), but it also caused MacAdam's "lifelong interest in Rome and Roman history" (MacAdam 2006, 85), leading to his decision to become an expert on ancient history and archaeology.

Notwithstanding his somewhat untraditional training for literary research, as a direct result of his fascination with the novel, Henry Innes MacAdam has become not only the foremost authority on *The Gladiators* but also one of the most prolific commentators of Arthur Koestler's fiction in English. Even prior to *Outlook & Insight*, MacAdam has co-authored a two-volume monograph and published at least seven articles on this book alone. It is thus probably not too much of an exaggeration to claim that if Koestler's Spartacus story breaks free of such doubtfully deserved judgments as being "rather dated" (Scammell 2009, xix), "static and talky," with "problems of language and construction" (166), and "replete with anachronisms" (Cesarani 1998, 150) and re-emerges as an intriguing and complex historical novel, then it likely achieves that feat mostly thanks to MacAdam's efforts.¹

1 Mostly but not solely. Others with an appreciation for *The Gladiators* include Jenni Calder

In other words, the publication of a monograph on *The Gladiators* by MacAdam is certainly a major event in Koestler studies, and the volume thus naturally raises high expectations in the reviewer. This is, admittedly, not an unambiguously desirable situation: the higher one's expectations are, the more likely it is that those expectations remain unfulfilled. Fortunately, however, as I am to show below, *Outlook & Insight* is in many ways just as momentous as one would expect, even if not without some minor flaws. While those, in my opinion, could have relatively easily been avoided, they do not detract from the volume's immense value for understanding one of Koestler's major novels.

What I see as the book's most important contribution is the publication and commentary of a whole range of manuscript material. Besides Arthur Koestler's complete correspondence with the translator of *The Gladiators*, Edith Simon, *Outlook & Insight* also includes Koestler's synopsis of books 1 and 2 of the novel. All of these documents are provided both in their German original and in English translation, alongside MacAdam's detailed yet concise commentary, discussing each document's contribution to our understanding of the novel or the process of its translation, as well as its context. What is more, these documents, with the exception of Koestler's synopsis, are not only shared with the reader in neatly typeset and edited form but also as verbatim reprints.

In most of the remainder of the book, MacAdam tackles the novel as a literary narrative. These parts are, unfortunately, much more uneven both in terms of their contribution to our understanding of *The Gladiators* and as far as the depth and meticulousness of the analyses are considered. Reading these parts of the volume, I cannot help the feeling that the care of a meticulous editor or reviewer would have helped overcome most, if not all, of these shortcomings, resulting in a publication much closer to MacAdam's usual standard.

Of these parts, the chapter "Structural Differences: Editorial Modifications" is probably the most uncontestedly groundbreaking. It reveals that a whole range of changes were made to the structure of the text *en route* from Koestler's typescript to the published novel. Since, in the meanwhile, a new German edition has been published based on the former, and thus the question of the definitive version of the novel inevitably emerges, this, in itself, is far from a technicality. More importantly, however, MacAdam goes beyond merely presenting the changes and introduces his own theories on the genesis of these changes, their origins, as well as what further changes might be expected to be revealed following a closer analysis. While some of MacAdam's conclusions are both debatable and their reasoning unexplained, even the effort itself is laudable given that *The Gladiators* is a regrettably little-researched novel.²

(1968), who considers it "the most vigorous of Koestler's novels" (121), and John Atkins (1956), who goes as far as to label it "Koestler's most successful novel" (120).

2 For example, he attributes those changes with conviction to the publisher's editors, yet in the

Likewise, “From Brecht to Wilder: Literary Influences on *The Gladiators*” provides crucial service to the reception of an author who has been frequently, facetiously, and mostly superficially and unfairly charged with writing stories allegedly without any organic relationship to the Western literary canon, or even without any literary value. Just as importantly, besides identifying potential literary influences on the novel, MacAdam also verifies, and at times corrects, similar claims by Michael Scammell, Koestler’s most authoritative biographer. It is rather unfortunate, however, that the chapter has received less than five pages and the treatment of this key aspect of *The Gladiators* barely goes beyond listing names and works.

After these unambiguously important chapters, it is time to move to the discussion of the volume’s weaknesses. Starting with what I see as the weakest point, it remains a complete mystery to me what the function, and even the point, of the chapter “Koestler at a Crossroad” is. It apparently summarizes Arthur Koestler’s career and possible life paths in the 1950s, in a period more than a decade after the publication of *The Gladiators*. In fact, it is not until the third page of this five-page chapter that the novel is even mentioned, and when the reference is finally made, it is in the context of what Koestler called “The Law of Detours” both in *The Gladiators* itself and in his autobiography, *The Invisible Writing* (1954). Yet, while the publication of the latter in the 1950s might potentially provide a weak rationale for discussing the 1950s, MacAdam does not even mention the book in the chapter, leaving any reader not intimately versed in Koestler’s biographies absolutely unable to fathom what the term even has to do with the 1950s. Rather than citing this source, or at least mentioning the term’s weak links to the 1950s, he refers to Koestler’s postscript to the Danube Edition of the novel published in 1967 and Edward Saunders’s (2017) biography and the undergoing preparations for filming the text. All of this missing information eventually appears almost fifty pages later, in a chapter that, in retrospect, shares the same function as the rather unconnected fragments of thought shared in the present one: “Some Aspects of *The Gladiators*’ Narrative.” Working these two chapters into one and placing them at the position of the second one would have not only made the reader’s job easier but also could have helped MacAdam’s argument.

The above-mentioned law of detours, introduced early in the book by MacAdam, can be described in Koestler’s own words roughly as follows: while aiming at any desired political goal, “[d]etours on the road are unavoidable” (Koestler 1945b, 153), and whether the “end justifies the means” (9) cannot be decided in any other way but retrospectively. “[T]he only means to decide the broad direction of a movement is to watch it a reasonable stretch of time and then draw the

Simon–Koestler correspondence published in this very volume there is ample evidence that those changes might have been made by Edith Simon and Arthur Koestler during one or more of their numerous meetings.

average curve of its oscillations” (153). This means, on the one hand, that while “[s]ubjective statements of [a movement’s] leaders are of no interest, and the question of their bona fides is historically meaningless” (153); nevertheless, “if burdened with responsibility, and confronted with a practical decision to be taken, you have to choose one way or the other” (11–12). Yet the correctness of the decision is only available after the fact, and then not immediately. On the other hand, no radical social or political change can be achieved in vacuum, without the people. Unfortunately, however, “[w]hile you are moving up the road you never face the peak, your direction is the tangent, leading nowhere. If a great mass of people are pushing forward along the serpentine, they will, according to the fatal laws of inertia, push their leader off the road and then follow him” (11). Or, in the poetic formulation used in *The Gladiators*: “[Spartacus] had walked the straight road, evil past behind and goal in front, had turned neither left nor right. Or was this the very error, to walk the straight and direct road – was it necessary to make detours, to walk the crooked roads?” (Koestler 1939, 135).

Why exactly MacAdam has decided to devote a significant part of his book to the theme of the “law of detours” remains unexplained throughout. While it is a major motif not only of *The Gladiators*, but indeed “runs through all three of Koestler’s earliest published novels” (MacAdam 2022, 13), in my opinion, this theme is so over-explained, it is hardly worth any further discussion at present. Besides Koestler himself referring to the law of detours being a central motif of his first three published novels both in his biographies and in numerous other places (most, if not all, of which are mentioned by MacAdam himself), not only do such early studies discuss Koestler’s earliest fiction through the lens of the dilemma of ends vs means as John Atkins’s (1956) *Arthur Koestler* (cf. e.g. 117–121, 185–193), Jenni Calder’s (1968) *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of George Orwell and Arthur Koestler* (121–144), or Wolfe Mays’s (1973) *Koestler* (9–23) but so do already many of the earliest reviews of the novel as well (cf. e.g. *Birmingham Post* 1939, Muir 1939).³ And discussions of this dilemma have stayed with us ever since (Levene 1985, 50–54; Ingle 1999; 2002, 68–76; 2021; Satkunanandan 2015, 171–183; Eged 2021; Steen 2009). In fact, Kirk M. Steen (2009) devotes the majority of his whole chapter on the novel to how the law of detours appears in the novels, while MacAdam himself has a published debate on this issue with Stephen Ingle (cf. MacAdam 2021b, Ingle 2021), not to mention that Ingle also devoted a whole article just to discussing the issue of ends vs means in Koestler’s fiction, a source not even once mentioned by MacAdam in the reviewed volume (Ingle 1999).⁴ What makes all

3 Failing to refer to the instant recognition of this theme as early as 1939, at the novel’s publication, is especially striking given that he admits as much in his earlier discussion of the novel’s reception (MacAdam 2021a, 21–23).

4 He does refer, however, to Ingle’s later, not very fortunate and somewhat oversimplified summary of some of the arguments of the article (Ingle 2002, 68–76) and calls it a “garbled account of the narrative of *The Gladiators*” (MacAdam 2022, 47).

of this even more striking is that in an earlier publication MacAdam provided a coherent, easily understandable, and very relevant discussion of the historical development of the discussion of the motif of ends vs means/law of detours in the reception of *The Gladiators* from its publication to the present day (MacAdam 2021a), discussing many, albeit not all, of the sources referred to above. In *Outlook & Insight*, however, no such overview is given, nor is it explained in what way his interpretation contributes to what seems to be a strong critical consensus on the centrality of this motif.⁵

Whatever the usefulness of yet another discussion of Koestler's treatment of the ends vs means conundrum, however, it is important to realize that while this theme is described, MacAdam also comments amply on other aspects of the novel. And it is important to emphasize here that albeit he has discussed this narrative multiple times, his commentary here still has a lot of new information to offer on Koestler's portrayal of ancient Rome, Spartacus and other historical figures, nationalities and their differing outlook on the revolt, and simply on the novel as *historical fiction*. It is somewhat surprising, however, that albeit MacAdam briefly mentions Koestler's inclusion of a stage farce in the novel, as well as its affinities with his only published play, *Twilight Bar* (1945a), he does not point the reader to his extended treatment of the same issue published earlier (MacAdam 2021b).

Annoying details, such as discussing an overwritten point without explanation and contextualization, tackling Koestler's life in the 1950s without any explanation in a book devoted to a novel published in 1939 in two incomplete chapters (or rather one divided into fragments by the interjection of a number of others), and parts occasionally ending prematurely or staying in an extended draft stage (see my comments above) certainly do not help the reader of MacAdam's *Outlook & Insight*. Nor do the frequent typographical errors or that the volume has two "Acknowledgements," only one of which is listed in the "Table of Contents." As I have suggested above, it is almost certainly the result of the unusual choice of publisher. Elsinor Verlag in Coesfeld, albeit an important champion of Koestler's fiction and without doubt a first-rate publisher of fiction in German, they are not an academic press, and it is doubtful if they offer the editorial services, much less the same kind of meticulous peer review as an academic publisher would have.

5 I consider the dilemma of ends vs means and the law of detours as the same basic conundrum, or at most the law of detours as a special application of the ends vs means paradox. While MacAdam would probably not agree with me, nor would for sure Stephen Ingle (2021), my interpretation is closely based on Koestler's own presentation of the problem (Koestler 1954, 267; Koestler and Koestler 1984, 29–32) and is also shared by other Koestler scholars: "What Koestler called 'the law of detours' was never clearly defined. [...] It is the ends-and-means controversy under a different guise" (Atkins 1956, 190). The two terms are used in an interlinked manner by Wolfe Mays in his summary of Koestler's *The Gladiators*: "Koestler sees [the slave revolt] as an early example of a revolution which failed to achieve its objectives as a result of pressures from the masses who did not understand the 'law of detours' which their leaders found necessary to employ, and which involved them in a conflict between ends and means" (Mays 1973, 10).

In sum, while Henry Innes MacAdam's *Outlook & Insight* is not without its imperfections and shortcomings, considering the major contributions it brings through publishing, translating, and discussing a whole range of previously unpublished manuscripts, it is still a major achievement in the reception of Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators*. One can only hope that MacAdam's unusual choice for a publisher is not going to be an obstacle in reaching British and American audiences. German-speaking markets are beyond doubt very well covered by this small but efficient and well-established publisher.

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