



Koestler: The Indispensable Intellectual, by Michael Scammell (Faber, £14.99)

“Who will ever forget the first moment he read *Darkness at Noon*?” said Michael Foot. Arthur Koestler’s powerful intellectual thriller about a political prisoner was published in 1940, while its author was himself in solitary confinement in Pentonville prison, having fled to England as an illegal immigrant. A British secret service officer described him as “one third genius, one third blackguard and one third lunatic”. Koestler was born in Hungary in 1905, “at the moment when the sun was setting on the Age of Reason”. He studied engineering at Vienna, then worked for a Zionist press agency in Palestine, before returning to Europe in 1929, where he worked as a science journalist in Berlin. There he became an ardent communist, a sign of what Scammell describes as his lifelong determination “not just to describe the world, but also to change it”. Scammell’s magisterial biography - the result of nearly 20 years of research - is a fitting tribute to this complex and controversial figure: egocentric, combative, polemical, sometimes foolish, but always worth reading. **PDS**