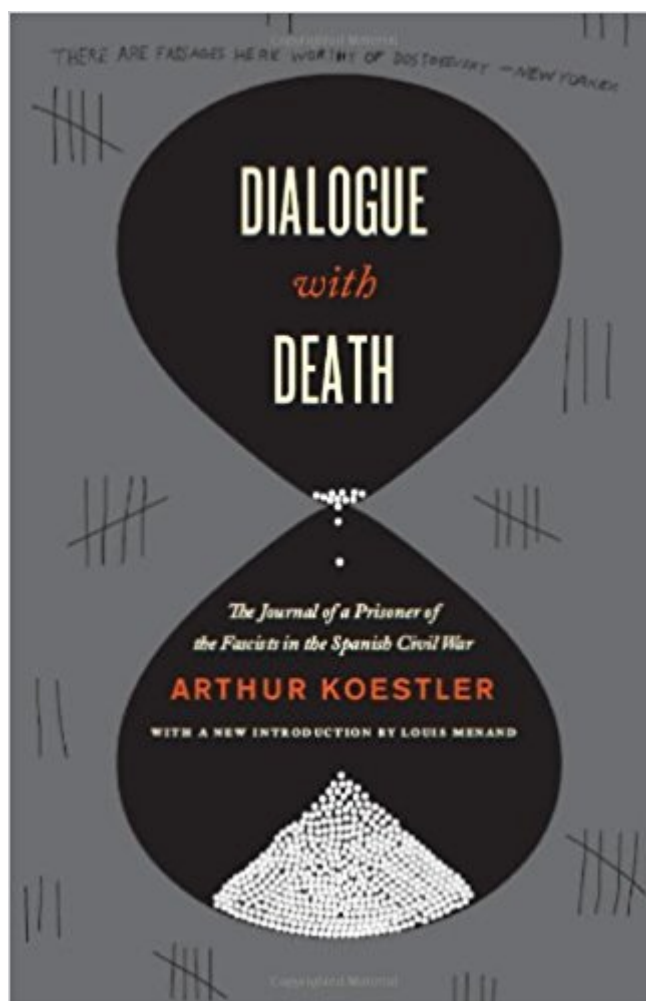


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# Dialogue With Death: The Journal Of A Prisoner Of The Fascists In The Spanish Civil War



## Synopsis

In 1937 during the Spanish Civil War, Arthur Koestler, a German exile writing for a British newspaper, was arrested by Nationalist forces in Málaga. He was then sentenced to execution and spent every day awaiting deathâonly to be released three months later under pressure from the British government. Out of this experience, Koestler wrote *Darkness at Noon*, his most acclaimed work in the United States, about a man arrested and executed in a Communist prison. *Dialogue with Death* is Koestlerâs riveting account of the fall of Málaga to rebel forces, his surreal arrest, and his three months facing death from a prison cell. Despite the harrowing circumstances, Koestler manages to convey the stress of uncertainty, fear, and deprivation of human contact with the keen eye of a reporter.

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## Customer Reviews

"Koestler's harrowing memoir of his three months behind bars with the constant threat of execution inspired his iconic *Darkness at Noon*. *Dialogue with Death* is the more lasting book for its lucid, exact, and unrelenting depiction of an imprisoned man on the verge of death." (Lucas Wittmann *Newsweek*)

Arthur Koestler (1905-1983) was a prolific and controversial Hungarian-born writer whose most famous work in the U.S. is *Darkness at Noon*. Koestler was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire and a Companion of Literature in the early 1970s.

Arthur Koestler, an English journalist, is in Spain when the troops of Francisco Franco begin their efforts to overthrow the Spanish Republic. He lives in fear of torture and death and writes about how being locked up really feels. He survives to tell the tale. One feels great sorrow for the country torn apart and for the brave men who fight in this military exercise that is a trial and training ground for World War II. The Germans and Italians test the weapons they will use against the Allies on Spanish ground. *Dialogue with Death: The Journal of a Prisoner of the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War*

This is a journal about the true account behind the fall of Malaga to rebel forces as experienced by Arthur Koestler, the reporter/journalist/novelist. It depicts his three months in prison at the hand of the fascists during the Spanish Civil War. He illustrates with absolute clarity the fear and desperation that the uncertainty of his life and death situation and the deprivation of human contact can cause. There is a lot of political discussion, something that imbues much of his literature, but the core of this work is psychological. It is about facing death, whether it is certain death or not. Perhaps the uncertainty, in his case, was tougher to contend with. Never knowing when. This book is excellently written. It is a classic and has stood the test of time. Anyone who reads it will find it difficult to believe that it is not fiction. A great read. I can't believe that so few have sold on. Sergiu Pobreznic (author)

This is a great short personal memoir about being thrown in jail in Spain during the civil war in the 1930's with a death sentence hanging over your head for supporting the other side. Koestler sets the stage very quickly with a few short chapters leading up to his being a journalist and Soviet spy in a village on the front lines of the battle and his dangerous decision not to evacuate soon enough when it was clear the rebel fascist army was about to advance and likely take the village. Koestler ended up spending a total of three months mainly in two different jails and repeatedly heard men being executed during the nights he was held. There are a great combination of thought provoking descriptions of what kinds of things you might think about in such a situation and the simple things that mean so much when you have so little. For example, Koestler describes how an overwhelming feeling of despair and fear would come over him and he came up with different ways to fight against it. "One of my magic remedies was a certain quotation from Thomas Mann. Sometimes during an attack of fear, I repeated the same verse thirty or forty times, for almost an hour, until a mild state of trance came on and the attack passed. I knew it was a method of the prayer-mill, of African tom-tom, of the age old magic of sounds. Yet in spite of my knowing it, it worked." Strongly recommend this wonderful little memoir that is not dated or especially tied to its time and place

while still describing the people and place as well.

I read this because I like Koestler, not because I care greatly about the Spanish Civil War; this is the same reason I read Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia". (If you do care greatly about the Spanish Civil War then you should probably read Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls".) In this book Koestler describes living in a Spanish city Malaga before and as it is taken over by the rebel troops commanded by General Queipo de Llano. (By the way, however good reasons Franco had for his coup d'etat, it seems strange to call the rebels and foreign mercenaries the Nationalists; this praises with faint damning.) Most of the book is about his time in prisons, and this would be worth reading by anyone who cares about the retributions that happen in civil wars. After Koestler left Spain, he went to Britain and later went to France. What happened to him in France is similar to what happened to him in Spain, and he tells this story in *Scum of the Earth*.

What a charmed life Arthur Koestler lived if you bear in mind that his frightening time in prison in Spain was followed in short order by the brutal treatment he received at the hands of the French before the fall of France in WWII. Both experiences provided rich material for his novel "Darkness at Noon" describing the life of political prisoners in a totalitarian state. In 1937 Koestler was certainly naive in his belief that his status as a foreign correspondent of known left wing sentiments would protect him in the aftermath of the capture of Malaga by Franco's forces during the Spanish Civil War. However, given the state of chaos and general lawlessness across the country, it is unlikely that the option of flight would have guaranteed a happier outcome. So he was left to face incarceration and interrogation as best he could. He provides a vivid account of the physical and mental terrors faced by those accused of aiding revolution, regardless of the fact that most had been fighting for the elected government of Spain. The plight of the prisoner in solitary confinement all too aware of the nightly executions of others deemed guilty without the chance to defend themselves is a horrible one indeed, and Koestler reflects the mood swings from defiance to despair as well as the burden of time with great clarity.

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