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Leo Valiani and Arthur Koestler - A Friendship for Life. Letters Between 1942 and 1953

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The correspondence between Valiani and Koestler started in Mexico in 1942, on Valiani's arrival there, (he actually arrived in Mexico in December 1941 and stayed there until July 1943).

As it is well known they got to know each other during their arrest at Roland Garros, and had all the months of the detention at Le Vernet d'Ariège for exchanging ideas and sharing views and readings. Both of them had come from a cosmopolitan Central-European background and there were only 4 years of difference of age between them (Koestler was born in 1905, under the name Kösztler Artúr, in Budapest, whereas Valiani was born in Fiume, then belonging to Hungary, under the name of Weiczen Leo in 1909). There was much in common between the two of them, also from the point of view of their political beliefs. Koestler as a journalist had been condemned to death during the Spanish Civil War, was released through the intervention of the British government. He published *Spanish testament* about the Spanish Civil War, a novel that had already made him famous. As he could not accept the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact he had left the Communist Party. He went to France where, he was again arrested.¹ Koestler was set free after four months, after which he joined the French Foreign Legion and later on managed to enter Britain again where he served in the Pioneer Corps.

The main facts about Valiani's life are also quite well known, as also his escape organized by Giustizia e Libertà² from Le Vernet.³ While Valiani lived in exile in Mexico, Koestler became more and more famous as a writer (after *Darkness at Noon* he published *Arrival and Departure*, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, *Thieves in the Night*, etc). In 1944 Koestler travelled to Palestine with accreditation from „The Times”. After then he settled in London and tried (in vain) to lead an international campaign to prevent the German mass

¹ See Leo VALIANI, „Io e Koestler nel campo di concentramento,” *Nuova Antologia*, n° 2148, ott.-dic. 1983, 87-96; „Koestler the Militant. A Last Tribute,” *Encounter*, lug.-ago. 1984, 68-72; „Koestler ed io nel campo di concentramento. Appendice,” in Arthur KOESTLER, *Schiama della terra*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989, 249-260; „Budapest oltre il buio di Koestler,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, 14 gen. 1989; „Arthur Koestler. Il ribelle antitotalitario. Tanto coraggio e tanta onestà intellettuale,” *Avanti!*, 16-17 set. 1990.

² See Andrea RICCIARDI, „Leo Valiani tra politica e storia,” *Fondazione Bruno Kessler, Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, Bologna: Il Mulino 2009, 127 and Leo Valiani. *Gli anni della formazione. Tra socialismo, comunismo e rivoluzione democratica*, Milano: Franco Angeli 2007.

³ *Leo Valiani tra politica e storia. Scritti di storia delle idee (1939-1956)*, a cura di David BIDUSSA, presentazione di Giovanni DE LUNA, in *Annali Anno Quarantaduesimo*, 2006, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Feltrinelli Editore: Milano 2008.

murder of the Jews in the Holocaust. Besides the complete failure of all his endeavors he also suffered because his family's deportation.⁴

Koestler's description of Valiani, named as Mario in the *Scum of the Earth* comparing him to Job, the true man testifies his great affection and respect.⁵ Valiani's memories of Koestler and his letters testify the reciprocity of this respect.

Valiani in spite of all the difficulties he suffered in Mexico, was preparing for the future, mainly by carrying on serious historical-political studies – as someone says he made history and he also studied it. Valiani writes about his studies to Koestler, for instance he tells about his book-reportage on Italy in the past 15 years based on his own experiences, his study on the socialist movement, on the Spanish Civil War and that he was working on the history of 20th century thought. He was reflecting on topics closely connected with his past beliefs so as to have a clear view of achievements and failures and a better perspective for the future action to take. He talked about the book he was going to publish and would send the draft in Spanish for *Filosofia socialista in Europa nel XX secolo*.⁶

Valiani was hosted by Koestler in London in 1943 on his way back to Italy. He also got financial help from Koestler, the money was very useful for him on his courageous trip from Sicily, where he and his companions were dropped with parachutes, to Milan.⁷

The two friends met more seldom and also their correspondence got less frequent from the end of the 50s' onwards, but as we will see from the letter by Valiani, quoted at the end of this article, the intimacy of their friendship did not change.

About 50 letters and notes preserved in the Koestler fund at the Edinburgh University Library and 7 letters from Koestler addressed to Valiani kept at the Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Foundation in Milan testify not only a friendship but their common ideals, cast some light on their private life – in most cases closely connected to their public life and their way of thinking, reactions to some of the great events of history – from the preparation of the Resistance movement until the fight against terrorism – Italy's and Europe's history. Mainly through Valiani's reflections the reader of the letters can also follow some of the reception of their works.⁸

The few letters by Koestler were written in English (he himself tells that Valiani could not write in French any longer).⁹ He didn't use Hungarian, either, but on two occasions he added two kind words in his letters: saying good-

bye in Hungarian,¹⁰ proving that this language still had some special meaning for him, and that he also recognised its significance in their friendship, too, whereas Valiani uses three languages: English, French, Hungarian. The latter is the language used for confidential communication – Valiani also wrote a long and most confidential letter starting from the problems of his sister's illness, analyzing his way of thinking entirely in Hungarian: saying: „this language is what connects us”.¹¹ What is interesting, and can be explained most probably with their hatred towards Nazism, is that they never wrote in German, although it was a mother tongue for Valiani – the language he spoke with his parents at home – and almost one for Koestler, who studied in Vienna and became a journalist of high esteem in the early thirties in Berlin (and also a member of the German Communist Party in 1931 which he left in 1938). He wrote as a journalist originally in German, he started to write in English only later on. Unfortunately the letters written by Koestler to Valiani during the period of his exile in Mexico are missing, as most of them are also during the years after the war. Of course, it is understandable if they got lost in those extremely difficult years. It is quite clear also from the letters that they did not only write to each other, but they could also send messages through friends and acquaintances and they met either in Italy, in London or in Paris several times after the war.

The letters also prove how much Valiani cared about Koestler's work, to what extent he followed not only the works themselves, but also their international reception. And it was an extremely important period in the career of Koestler, as his novel *Darkness at Noon* cast a new light on the terror in the Soviet Union. *Darkness at Noon*, published in 1940, gave Koestler international fame. The account Koestler gave on the Soviet Union was shockingly new to the readers, he presented for the first time the Soviet purges, a show trial ending with the main character, Rubashov's, modelled on Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin's confession against himself and sentence to death. The great actuality of the novel was exactly his execution on 15th of March 1938. A novel that contributed to changing public opinion in Western Europe and in the US. Even people from the left realized facts until then unknown to them and made its author one of the most influential intellectual. It also meant a financial success, so that Valiani, in his disastrous economic situation, as he described it in his letters from Mexico – wrote to him as his only friend to be able to turn to in need, without finding a job in Mexico and therefore without an income. He also asked to contact Koestler's publisher for the publication of

4 See David CESARANI, *Artur Koestler. The Homeless Mind*, William Heinemann: London 1998, 220.

5 Arthur KOESTLER, *Schuma della terra*, Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1989, 86, 125-126. See also in Ilona FRIED, „«Giobbe», un intellettuale del Novecento,” *Nuova Corvina*, 6 (2000), 9-12.

6 Arthur Koestler, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL), Mexico, 24 august 1942

7 Leo VALIANI, *Tutte le strade conducono a Roma*, Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1947, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1983, 1995, 38.

8 I publish the letters faithful to the original copies, without any changes in their text.

9 „(I can't write French any longer)” Biblioteca e Archivio Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Fondo Valiani, n. 6, 6/2/46.

10 Biblioteca e Archivio Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Fondo Valiani, n. 10, 4th September 1954, Öllelek Arthur, n. 14, August 6th 1971, handwritten at the end of the letter: Szervusz Arthur.

11 Arthur Koestler, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL), Pegli, 8/8/54. See also, Ilona FRIED, „Lettere da un'amicizia: Leo Valiani e Arthur Koestler,” *Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore. Studi su authorship e intertestualità culturale*, Matteo BRERA, Susanna GRAZZINI (eds.), Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2017 (in print); Ilona FRIED, „La “candela che si brucia per dare luce”. La corrispondenza di Leo Valiani e Arthur Koestler fra il 1943 e 1953,” *Parigi e Roma sulle rive del Danubio*, Ilona FRIED, Catherine HOREL (eds.), *Nuova Corvina*, n. 29, 2016 (in print).

his own works. This latter also meant financial aid, through advance payment for a work accepted for publication.

The letters written by Valiani from Mexico also give some information on the group of “Que faire?”,¹² on Franco Venturi’s arrest by the fascist police and Valiani’s idea about antifascism gaining ground in Italy.

In one of the letters he writes about Eva Tay, his “copîne”, who was writing a novel then on Mexico where she had been living for about five years and asking Koestler to read her manuscript and in case he found it interesting to help her by recommending it to his publisher.¹³ Eva Tay was a Belgian dancer of German origin and before going to Mexico she might have lived in Majorca and had written on women exercises and health. There seems to be an only copy of the book to be found in the library of Mexico.¹⁴

One of Koestler’s biographers mistakenly mentions her as Valiani’s wife.¹⁵ Nevertheless, she seems to have been an important relationship for Valiani during the period of his stay in Mexico, as shown from his long letter to Koestler in which he explains about the woman’s wish to write a novel and asks for Koestler’s help not only by reading the manuscript, but in case he finds it worth publishing also to recommend it to his publisher. Valiani mentions her also in a letter in 1946 already from Italy and he shares his reserves on her with his friend and asks him not to give any more money to her.¹⁶ He must have known that Eva Tay was going to ask for the support of Koestler, what as a matter of fact she did, as shown by Eva Tay’s letter written to Koestler, in which she informs him about Leo’s ill health, and begs him to help him. The letter also presents her character very much full of herself and with high pretensions.

In the following pages I am going to publish letters written by Valiani in English between 1943 and 1953, whereas you can find other ones written in French between 1942 and 1946 in the article: Ilona Fried *La “candela che*

¹² See also Guido FRANZINETTI, *Leo Weiczen: Communist, Democratic Communist, Revolutionary Democrat* (in this volume).

¹³ Letter from Mexico, 25 juillet 1942, Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL), published in Ilona FRIED, „La “candela che si brucia per dare luce”. La corrispondenza di Leo Valiani e Arthur Koestler fra il 1943 e 1953,” op. cit.

¹⁴ Eva TAY, *Guía para el deportista: higiene, entrenamiento y competencias*; see also on Anna Maria MARTINEZ SAGI, „an immensely evocative voice in the liberal-progressive press in nineteen-thirties’ Spain.” „Sagi’s affirmation of the place of woman in sport is closely allied to the increasing awareness amongst progressive women of the need to take their responsibilities seriously, starting with their own bodies. Much of what Sagi writes, particularly around the mid-nineteen thirties, is directed to this end, and she finds a fellow traveller in Eva Tay, a dancer of Belgian-German descent residing in Mallorca from 1932 onwards. Tay’s articles in *Brisas* detail programmes of daily exercises together with illustrations, condemnations of Spanish women as possessing the worst bodies of all European women, and a dismissal of commonly employed slimming methods.” in P. Louise JOHNSON, „Women Writing on Physical Culture in Pre-Civil War Catalonia,” March 5, 2004, http://ies.berkeley.edu/pubs/workingpapers/AY0304-18-Physical_Culture.pdf

¹⁵ Cesarani mistakenly mentions Eva Tay as Valiani’s wife. Valiani’s letter to Koestler from Milano 8 January 1946, shows how he wanted to spare his friend from Eva Tay’s begging for money from him, Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL), published in Ilona FRIED, „La “candela che si brucia per dare luce”. La corrispondenza di Leo Valiani e Arthur Koestler fra il 1943 e 1953,” op. cit.

¹⁶ 8th January 1946, Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL), see also among the letters in this paper.

si brucia per dare luce”. La corrispondenza di Leo Valiani e Arthur Koestler fra il 1943 e 1953 mentioned above.¹⁷

Mexico City, July 19 1942

Dear friend Arthur,

I hope You’ll let hear anything from Yourselves, soon. Meanwhile, I’m reading the American edition of Your “Spanish Testament”, which is very fine. I read also some critics of this book in New York reviews, (Newsweek, Bazar etc.) which speak of You as of “one of our major writers”. Well, I’m very glad; when anyone is worthy of a great success, so You are. If You can, tell me also anything about Your next book.

You remember, perhaps, I told You once that the review which I was managing in Paris (“Que Faire”) had a very intelligent Russian contributor. He is actually in New York and wrote me that he found your “Darkness at Noon” a “glorious book”.

Since June 1940, I’m no more member of any political party, but with some friends of mine (You made their acquaintance in Paris, in 1940; they are Mr. Cianca, Magrini etc.) we are publishing a big independent Italian antifascist review. The news we receive from home prove that our antifascism made strong advances in Italy this year. The best man of ours, Franco V., who spoke so often with You in Paris about my case, is actually at the deportation in Italy. Unfortunately, he was stoped in our adventurous escape, in October 1940, from Vernet and Pétain France towards freedom. We lived then more than a year in Africa, but he could not join us and was finally delivered to fascist police. Well, we learn that Franco, as a victim of fascism receives messages of sympathy of all parts of the country. This is only a little detail (not to be published); there are very much cases of a renaissance of ours. Well, let us see.

My philosophical book will be published here in Spanish translation and in New York in an Italian antifascist edition. Unfortunately, I don’t [know] when I’ll be able to publish it in english translation. Mr. James Putnam of the Macmillan Company wrote me, some days ago: “We are very sorry indeed to have to write you that we cannot make you an offer for the publication of this work. This is not because we question the value of the book. On the contrary, we recognize that you have written the book from a wide knowledge and sound scholarship. But we do not see that we could find a very large public in the United States for a book such as yours right now.”

Surely, philosophy is not a practical thing in such a time. I’m little

¹⁷ See Ilona FRIED, „La “candela che si brucia per dare luce”. La corrispondenza di Leo Valiani e Arthur Koestler fra il 1943 e 1953,” op. cit. See Ilona FRIED, „Colloqui milanesi con il senatore Leo Valiani (1993-1997),” *Metodi & Ricerche*, n.s. 18 (2), 11-16; Ibid, *Fiumén túl – a történelem alakítója és kutatója: Leo Valiani útja*, in *Emlékek városa Fiume*, Budapest: Ponte Alapítvány, 2001, 283-292, and „Oltre Fiume – Formatore e ricercatore della storia: Leo Valiani. Colloqui milanesi 1993-95/ 1997-1999,” in *Fiume. Città della memoria*, Udine: Del Bianco, 2005, 355-366.

disappointed because only the English edition could give me the financial possibility to go on with my studies. Patience.

I'm trying to write a "reportage"-book about underground antifascism in the last fifteen years (Italy, Spain, France, Africa).

Write often, if You can.

Your very affectionate

Leo¹⁸

The letter written to Koestler by Eva Tay from Mexico after the end of the war has mainly an interest in presenting the woman so important for Valiani during his years in Mexico.

Eva Tay, c/o. Bodil Christensen
5 de Mayo 46,
Mexico D.F. 5.9.45

Dear Koestler – I have received a letter from Leo dated 26. July, the first letter in about two years. It comes from Milano under the name of Leo Valiani, Direttore dell'Italia Libera.

The letter is very much depressed, because Leo is ill. He writes he is ill and you know him very much, this means he is really ill. He says, that he is supposed to go to a sanatory, but that he is obliged to do the job for 14 hours a day. He writes „I am sick and tired, sick and tired and ill. I am greatly worried. He says he has not been enable to write a word yet for Jonathan Cape but hopes to do so in the sanatory. There is something else and this is really the reason I write you. He mentioned he has financial troubles. Now, to go to a sanatory, a good one and get really well, costs a lot. I beg you, to try to do something about this. He may neglect his health to such an extend, that it will become hard or impossible to cure him properly. Will you please comunicate with him as soon as possible and insist that he go to a good sanatory as soon he can? This is important, Koestler and you know it well. He was already ill before he went back to Italia, kidneytrouble and so on that are serious matters and can wreck a man for life. Leo is still young, he can probably been cured if he is properly taken care of. Please Koestler, do something about this, will you?

He wants to come back to Mexico and I think this best because he can work here very well, we can make trips to South Amerika, he has contact with the philosophers int he U.S.A. He wants to come next year. Perhaps it will be possible for you too to come over with Daphne. This is an interesting country. You probably want to contact your Publishers in New York too.

I am working very hard, but it is difficult for me to write quickly. It takes so much sweet and blood and time that sometimes I think it silly

altogether for me to insist in producing masterpieces. But I promised Leo and then my agent Mr. Horch is optimisical about it and thinks for unknown reasons, that I have talent. Maybe it is the material wich is rather unusual and good for escapeliteratur. The bad thing is only that there are always unhappy ends and the whole bussines assez triste, as the Indian life is triste – nothing to be done about it. I wonder if I could publishe my book next year to help financially Leo and not to put the whole burden on his poor back. I will have this book in English and maybe you care in reading the manuskript. A word from you means a lot as your are now the Nabob of writers in the States. Maybe I have the delirium de Grandessa, pero creo this time it is better. The title „Nasisa, story of a deadly faszination” Sounds cursi? Nasisa is the heroine, a Coragirl.

If my book comes out, I can make a lecture tour in the U.S.A. next year. I have the intention, to make a second expedition into the Sierra del Nayar with plenty o fotografical material, including Colour films for the religious ceremonies of the Cora Indians. This would pay wonderfull and it would please a great deal too. A ver como andan las cosas. por lo pronto tengo que terminar mi libro.

Koestler, please take care of Leo will you? Insist that he go soon to the sanatory and help him in every way, will you?

Are you still in the Near East? Your Yogy and Commisarbook is a good shake up for a lot of half dead brains. I really and truly think you a fantastic writer in spite that your Fotografie gives me fearcomplexes I wonder if you really are as you look? Would you like to go on horseback trips into the country here? Would Daphne like it to collect textiles? I would be your Guia. I wonder if a horse is still that strange creature for Leo it was before. Yours sincerely

Eva Tay¹⁹

The last mentioning of Eva Tay in the letters is that of Valiani written on 8th of January 1946 mentioned above with the address of Italia Libera. Quotidiano del Partito d'Azione. Il Direttore. Milano Via Senato 38. Regarding Eva Tay, he says:

„Quant à E.T. il me parait qu'elle s'est portée assez mal, du point de vue argent; ne lui envoie rien, si elle T'en demande encore. Tu as été trop chic et évidemment elle avait la tendance à en profiter.” That must have been the very end of Valiani's relationship with the woman.

In 1946 he writes to Koestler:

Milano, September 4, 1946

My dear Arthur,

I have been in Paris for a fortnight and on my return I have been very glad to find Your letter. Really, I missed You in Paris. I am supposed to go

18 Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL)

19 Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL)

there at the end of October again? would You not really find a little fun in a meeting chez la Belle Aurore?²⁰

Many thanks for Your frank opinion on my MS and for Major Hall's notes. (Give him, please, my best regards.) The Italian edition of the book is already under printing, but I will re-write and enlarge the MS for a possible English translation. I think the mistake was to write it too late for a reportage, too soon for a political essay. Unfortunately I could not take the time to write it in 1944 or 1945 and when I got to work on it, I already knew that everything which could be said on the technicalities of the underground has already been said by French, Polish and other authors. This made me hesitating in the writing. On the other side, it was not yet the time (I mean subjectively) to draw all the political lessons, because we still were in the midst of the battle for the Republic, which has been the real reason and issue of our partisan war. I could not criticize the Democratic Republican Socialist parties, as I should have done, whereas even the first stage of our common fight was not over. The battle goes still on, for the social issues, but now it is really no more a specific Italian question, but a part of the general European tragedy. (I saw in Paris many friends from the Danubian countries and they told me the horrible things You may imagine; they are all deceived Marxists, without having the right to confess it.) Of course, I have been misled by a letter of Cape, which urged – some months ago – the quick delivery of the MS, because the subject would lose otherwise any actuality: so he said (and from a reportage point of view he was certainly correct). Besides of that, haste has always been my default. Well, never mind.

I hope to be able to find at least Your Palestine book, when I am going to Paris again. What is Your ethical and world conception right now? The same as in the Yogi? I guess, sooner or later, we shall become atomized, but before that we may enjoy again the alternative of rightist reaction and leftist totalitarianism. I was correct in 1943 to foresee a couple of years of democratic and socialist revival in some Western European country – but this revival is everywhere nearing to its end, without having accomplished more than the writing of a preface to a book which may be (or not) written in detail by a generation other than ours.

I did assist to the Congress of the French Socialist Party. Léon Blum reminded me to Karl Kautsky about 1930 and the younger elements (who defended him) to Otto Bauer at the same time. They are all reading your *Darkness at Noon* (even Orientals do) and feel superior to Rubasciov, but they are not.

During the last six months of 1945 and 1946 there was in America a real trend towards a sensitive world Government, but Molotov rebuked it and now it is going back into the clouds.

20 See LEO VALIANI, *Io e Koestler nel campo di concentramento*, op. cit. 95. La Belle Aurore refers to the talks between Valiani and Koestler in the concentration camp, when hungry thinking of nice meals in an elegant restaurant.

As to myself I am just making what every other M.P. may do in a new Republic, which would avoid the Weimar fate. I did publish a new edition of my book on Socialism. Venturi found my MS on Hungary and I am re-working it.

So I am really in the good spirits for some bottle drunk in Your company. Let's make it true.

Yours faithfully

Leo

In 1947 he sends to Koestler the book-review just published by Benedetto Croce. He also gives a short account on his stand in connection with the split in the Socialist Party and his endeavor to safeguard democracy and constant fear of not succeeding in it.

My dear Koestler,

inclosed You will find the book-review written by our old Benedetto Croce, which deals with "Darkness at Noon". The book (and so "Scum of earth" and "Thieves in the night") has got a very high success in Italy.

The Socialist Party has split here. Don't believe to all the things published on this subject by "New Statesmen" and "The Economist". Silone and myself we are sympathetic to the new Party (headed by Saragat) – even if we would have avoided the split in the very moment when this country was involved in international negotiations. Of course, we would not join the new Party before his leader does not make clear that it is not his intention to go back to old Engels-Kautsky-an Socialism, but to look for a new, modern one i.e. for the upsetting of a strong Executive and for an international policy whose aim should be the United States of Europe. Negotiations are still going on. How are You? When are You going to the States?

Is there any chance to meet You on the Côte d'Azur?

Best regards to Your wife.

Je T'embrasse

Leo Valiani

Should we get atomized? In a new Vernet? Better going to Peru? Nice place, nice archeology."²¹

In 1950 Valiani gives his latest news, about the great changes in his life to Koestler, about working in a bank. He does not say, that his job is an extremely important one:²²

21 Rome, March 24, sulla carta intestata Assemblée Costituente, Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL).

22 The letter is still written on a sheet of Assemblée Costituente, but the address is the private address: Valiani, Milano, via Benedetto Marcello 6. 13/7 – there is no year, but it must be 1950, Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL).

My dear Arthur,

thanks for Your nice letter of April 9th. The copain gave it me only a few days ago. He is very nice and I shall meet him again, in Rome.

What about You? From time to time I read Your choses and still hope to be able, sooner or later, to get to Paris for a couple of weeks. What I lack is, of course, time.

I am no more in industry, I had to give it up, because I was too long in bed, operated twice in '48, on that idiotic leg. When able to work again, I went in a bank, here, and am working in, as an economist, or something like that: studies in financial organization asf.

Even for politics I have no time left, except for some minor writings. Politically I am (in a rather platonic way) with Silone. Personally, as far as feelings are concerned, I am of course with You.

Best regards to Your wife, also from Nidia and I remain

Yours

Leo²³

The following letter tells that his job at the bank took him to Asia. As also seen from recent research his job at the Banca Commerciale was far more important than he let know.²⁴ The understatements are part of his character, which can also be seen in his memories about the Resistance movement. He gives a fine summary of his friend's Franco Venturi's career and also a satirical description of Stalin's death and his meeting a descendant of Pushkin from his colored grandfather. His comment on a Checkoslovakian acquaintance of theirs also shows how Valiani kept an eye on Easter European politics, as well. This aspect is further emphasized by his plan to write about the Hungarian Commun, for which he had collected documents in Hungary, as well.

My dear Arthur,

April 15 1953

the day after my arrival at home, from Bombay, I received your letter of April 3rd. It was the best welcome I could hope for? and chiefly because of what your wrote about London, your flat and the British Empire. Since years I am longing for a long trip to London and certainly I badly need some good work in the Library of the British Museum. Now more than ever: having spent 6 months in India, Burma, Siam, Ceylon and having savoured the strange lively civilization the British Empire left behind there, together with some fine XVII. Century buildings in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay. But Banking Research Departments are exacting bosses and so I don't know when shall I have leave enough for such a visit. Let's hope this year; I'll try to get a 3 months leave in order to work on the 2nd volume of my 'Socialist movements'

and if I succeed I'll spare 2 or 3 weeks for London.

Anyway, my closest friend, Franco Venturi, whom you met in Paris, after your departure from Le Vernet, shall spend in London the whole summer and will certainly pay you a visit. After Paris' fall in 1940, he tried to escape to America through Spain, has been arrested there, spent some months in a Madrid jail, has been delivered to the Mussolini Government whose first downfall in 1943 set him free. Up to 1945 he has been with me at the head of the Partisan movement; from 1947 to 1950 he spent 3 years in Moscow as a Cultural Attaché at the Italian Embassy there; now he is a University Professor in History and has been awarded a prize by the Warburg Foundation (which shall enable him to spend 3 months in England for three consecutive years) – for a very big book ont he Russian liberal and revolutionary movements from the Decabrists up to the Narodnaja Volja. (It shall be published shortly in English too, by Knopf in New York and I think by Wedeman in the U.K.). He will be very glad to have a long chat with you about past and future; possibly some time next June.

Well, do you remember Büchler, the Cechoslovakian captain? In March 1948 I learned that he has been arrested in Praha, by the Communist police. Now I received a letter from him: he says he has spent 5 years in jail because of the "Slanski Bande" (so he writes), but has been set free at the end of last month. This would mean that they granted an amnesty (at least to some minor people) in Praha too. I must say that I learned Grandfather's death in Bangkok, which is an exceedingly gay and frivolous city; so I immediately thought: it can't be worse, it shall be better. Of course, let see: as a friend of mine (Aldo Garosci, I think you met him in London) said in his obituary of Stalin – "we can't guarantee a happy end, but the show shall be very interesting". Possibly a Shakespearean tragedy at the Kremlin, with some new Puskin saying: 'Sir, grant liberty to the Russian people!'

(It may interest you that last year in Teheran I made friendship with a descendant of Puskin; exactly of his Negro grand-father; Mr. Hannibal, that's the name, is half-Negro and half-Russian; he embraced the Moslim religion some 30 years ago and is actually the director of the Teheran ethnological Museum).

I could pay you a lot of compliments, and utter some minor criticism, for your beautiful Autobiography, but that would take too long a time. Anyway, I was very interested in learning about the 'Chopin' in February 1919. As you perhaps remember, about 15 years ago I worked on a 'Thèse – Histoire de la Commune hongroise'. – I never published it, because after the war I succeeded to buy in Budapest a tremendous amount of "documents" (books, leaflets, newspapers a.s.f.), which I did not have at my disposal in Paris, to a comparable extent, and which would compel me to rewrite the manuscript, should I ever be tempted to give it to a Publisher.

23 Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL).

24 Fulvio COLTORTI, „Leo Valiani ed Enrico Cuccia: l' Iran degli anni '50,” *Annali della Fondazione Ugo La Malfa*, Storia e politica, XXVI-2011, Gangemi Editore, 45-70

My best greetings to Mamaine, Yours ever Leo Valiani.²⁵

The letter that follows was written more than 25 years later. I find it interesting to refer to, so as to understand Valiani's stand in the later years, his courageous fight against terrorism, and his friendship unchanged towards Koestler.

Dear Arthur,

Milan, May 29th 1979

I was very happy to receive your card. Of course, we are old bisons now, or even mammoths. Times are different from ours. In Italy they are difficult again, but in the opposite sense. We have to fight the Red Brigades, which are worse than the Fascists – more resolute killers indeed. Whether the Soviets are behind them is still uncertain, but quite possible. In order to fight them, I am working as a journalist again, i.e. as the editorialist of the biggest liberal daily here, the «Corriere della Sera». This leaves me no time to travel, otherwise I would come to London in October, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our meeting in Roland Garros. But I'll try to come, perhaps in the spring of 1980.

Best greetings to Cynthia, with love yours ²⁶

This is the last letter we know about written by Valiani to Koestler. Valiani, one of the “old bisons” was 70 when he wrote the letter, the friendship ended with Koestler's death four years later, the great writer and intellectual committed suicide in 1983.

25 On the sheet of Banca Commerciale Italiana. Società per Azioni – Sede in Milano –Capitale Sociale Lit. 2450.000.000 Riserva Lit. 1000.000.000 Banca di Interesse Nazionale, Koestler Fund in Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL).

26 Arthur Koestler, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections (EUL), 1979. See also, Ilona FRIED, *Lettere da un'amicizia: Leo Valiani e Arthur Koestler*, op. cit.