

To whom it may concern

The purpose of this note is to make unmistakably clear that I intend to commit suicide by taking an overdose of drugs with

Self-Deliverance

The Death and Life of Arthur Koestler

... as to her she owe
the relative peace and happiness that I
enjoyed in the last period of my life - and
never before.

Arthur Koestler

Double suicide has never appealed to me; but now Arthur's incurable
diseases have reached a stage where there is nothing else to do.

Cynthia Koestler

Bernard Otterman

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WHY-DUNIT . . . CARRIES SOME REAL EMOTIONAL WEIGHT."

— KIRKUS REVIEWS

SELF-DELIVERANCE
THE DEATH AND LIFE OF
ARTHUR KOESTLER

Bernard Otterman

Liber Novus Press
Old Westbury, New York

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Book cover design by Marcin Koziello/Grafire Studio

Book layout by BookDesignTemplates.com

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Liber Novus Press
29 Meadow Road
Old Westbury, New York 11568
www.libernovuspress.com

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Self-Deliverance: The Death and Life of Arthur Koestler

Bernard Otterman. — 1st ed.

ISBN 978-0-9906747-1-9

To my family

PROLOGUE

On the third of March, 1983, Londoners reading their evening newspapers were surprised to learn of the deaths of seventy-seven-year-old Arthur Koestler and his much younger wife, Cynthia. The bodies were found in their house on Montpelier Square in the fashionable neighborhood of Knightsbridge. There were no signs of forced entry or struggle.

Arthur Koestler was as well known in London as Jean-Paul Sartre was in Paris. He authored many essays, memoirs, and novels, including *Darkness at Noon*, judged by many to be one of the most important books of the twentieth century. He had also penned *The God That Failed*, a memoir of Communist faith and disillusionment. Critics claimed that *Spanish Testament*, his autobiography about his experiences fighting in the Spanish Civil War and his imprisonment there, ranked with the war reportage of George Orwell. Later in his life, Marga-

ret Thatcher, shortly before becoming prime minister, requested that Koestler pay her a visit. Rumor has it she asked for his blessing.

Amelia Marino, a maid who visited the Koestler household once a week, discovered the bodies and called the police. They found Arthur slouched in his living room armchair, dead, a whiskey glass in his hand. Cynthia was lying on the sofa, facing him, also dead. Two wine glasses, an empty bottle of the sedative Tuinal, and a jar of honey sat between them on the coffee table. Dr. John Williams performed the autopsy and estimated that Arthur and Cynthia had died on the evening of Tuesday, March 1. Although initial police reports suggested suicides, Coroner Jack Candrel, who was responsible for overseeing the inquest and presenting his findings to the court, was troubled. Why did Cynthia, nearly twenty-five years Koestler's junior and in good health, kill herself?

CHAPTER ONE

Jack Candrel had served as a coroner in Westminster Coroner's Court for the past twenty-two years. He was a big man, six feet three inches, broad-shouldered. He had a large head with respectable, though thinning, reddish brown hair and an open, round face on which thick ash blonde eyebrows appeared to be glued above gray eyes.

Two days after Jack had assigned this case to Junior Deputy Rita Rosecliff, he was waiting impatiently in his office to hear her initial report. She walked in ten minutes late for their three o'clock appointment, looking even more sexy than usual.

"There is a problem," she announced before sitting down.

Jack was relieved that Rita's concern seemed to match his.

“Cynthia. She was only fifty-five years old and in good health.”

“And you’re implying?” Jack asked, trying to focus his full attention on the case and not on Rita’s appearance.

For a second or two his question was left unanswered. Then Rita said, “It defies logic that she would kill herself.”

“Not everything in life has to be logical,” Jack replied, playing devil’s advocate and thinking about his own love troubles. He realized that not one of his relatives, friends, or any staff member knew about the turmoil he felt over his wife.

“We are talking about choosing death over a comfortable, healthy life in a beautiful home in one of the world’s great cities.”

“I also think it’s strange,” Jack agreed, in spite of his almost daily contemplation of leaving his own comfortable home.

“I think Arthur tricked or talked her into it,” Rita said, as she adjusted herself in the chair and crossed her shapely legs.

Leaning forward, Jack asked, “And why do you suppose he would do that?”

“My initial sources state that Arthur was a sexist who bullied women.”

Jack winced. He recalled that his deputies had branded Rita a “feminist” on more than one occasion.

Since the obituaries had printed only a few lines about Cynthia, Jack wanted to learn more about her. With this in mind, he asked, “When did they marry?”

“Before I answer, let me give you a bit of background. Cynthia and Arthur met for the first time in July, 1949, in Paris. Six months earlier, she had arrived there from South Africa, while Arthur, together with his second wife, had come to Paris from London. Arthur advertised for a part-time secretary and Cynthia, then twenty-two, applied for the job. She wrote in her diary that the interview was ‘unpleasant.’” Rita glanced at her notes. “At one point, Arthur said, ‘Do you think you will be able to do the job? You don’t seem to have much confidence.’ In spite of that, Koestler agreed to give her a chance and invited her the following day to his house outside Paris, at Fontaine-le-Port, to test her dictation and typing skills. Cynthia was good and Arthur hired her. Thereafter, for about a year, she traveled twice a week by Metro and train to her job. It’s probably during this period she fell in love with him.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Woman’s intuition.” Rita flashed a sly smile.

There followed a silence. “But do you think Arthur loved her?” Jack asked.

“I don’t think so. For him, this was a marriage of convenience.”

“The question is, at the time of the suicides, did she love him?”

“Yes, she was totally devoted to him. But I don’t think she was your Juliet type.”

“Suicide is almost never a rational act. However, in the case of Arthur’s illness, it might have been. Consider this: Why couldn’t Cynthia, after seeing Arthur dead, be overcome by grief and impulsively decide to kill herself?”

“Because she probably died while Arthur was still alive.”

“Are you aware that, according to Inspector Thomas’ report, by the time the police arrived on the scene, on Thursday at nine-thirty a.m., they had been dead for thirty-six hours?”

“We both know that’s a postmortem estimate. There’s a window of uncertainty of at least three hours.”

“Quite true,” Jack agreed reluctantly.

“I spoke with Dr. Williams. His guess is that Cynthia died before Arthur.”

“His assessment is based—”

“The level of Tuinal in her bloodstream was greater than Arthur’s. He must have paced himself until he was sure that Cynthia passed out. Short-acting phenobarbiturates absorb differently into each person’s bloodstream.”

As a test of Rita’s determination to pursue this line of investigation, Jack asked, “Nevertheless, perhaps it’s best to treat this as a simultaneous double suicide?”

“But, sir, in his suicide note, Arthur stated that he provided the drug. Therefore, it’s a case of suicide and homicide.”

“Although Arthur provided the drug, in order to determine legal culpability, we would have to know if Cynthia took the drug voluntarily or if she was forced or tricked into taking it.”

“Sir, I’m not sure that makes much difference since in both cases the outcome is the same. Perhaps Cynthia’s family would like to pursue this matter in civil court. It’s my impression that Arthur died a relatively rich man.”

“Yes, we will have to request a reading of the will,” Jack said, leaning back in his chair and resting his eyes on Rita. The rumor in the office was that Rita was “easy.” As her boss, he had kept his distance, though had allowed himself to be mildly flirtatious. Being so near to her now, he felt his vigor renewed. Prompted by the change in his mood, he asked Rita, “What do you need to work this case?”

“There may be more than alcohol and Tuinal involved; therefore, I recommend a complete toxicology report. I will also need help with interviews of both family members and neighbors. And, perhaps, an outside consultant to examine the literary material in the apartment, and I’d like to interview Arthur’s literary friends, if that’s all right with you?”

“Indeed, but I’m releasing the bodies for burial or cremation.”

“I don’t disagree with that.”

“Good. When questioning their friends, be sure to ask if they might have missed warning signals, such as depression.”

“Yes, I certainly will,” Rita assured Jack.

Pleased with Rita’s aggressive, although not necessarily objective, approach, he said without further hesitation, “Fine. I’ll see to it you get what you need.”

At that moment, the telephone rang. On the line was Melissa, Jack’s wife. Jack made a face but indicated to Rita to stay. The voice on the speakerphone said, “Jack, I need help. The car stalled and is being towed to the garage.” Clearly annoyed, Jack picked up the receiver and started asking questions. As he talked, Rita marveled at how well Jack looked for a man of almost sixty. In the past year he had lost weight. When she had asked him about his diet, he’d answered, “Wife troubles.”

“Yes, Melissa, I will speak to the mechanic and pick you up in about an hour,” Rita heard Jack say before he hung up the phone. Turning to Rita, he said, “One more thought—find out if Cynthia was taking any female hormones.”

“Hormones?”

“Estrogen and other medications women take to minimize the effects of menopause.”

Confused by his point, though having achieved the go-ahead she had wanted, she replied, “Yes, sir,” and stood up and left.

Jack felt annoyed. He had looked forward to more banter with Rita. It seemed that whenever he wanted to have a little innocent fun with a woman, Melissa would make an appearance and frustrate him.

Driving to pick up Melissa, Jack felt even more stressed than usual. Since the start of his love troubles, he had lost twelve pounds, hovering around two hundred. In his rugby days, he had been heavier and since then he had developed arthritis, which had been aggravated by injuries from when he had played. He was swallowing two extra-strength ibuprofens twice a day, though still felt mild pain, which Melissa claimed made him impatient, and Jack didn't disabuse her of this notion. He *had* become more impatient recently, but that was likely due to his waning commitment to their marriage.

In addition, he considered the Koestler case most unwelcome. Since the deaths appeared to be suicides, he knew that his recommendations would receive close scrutiny, both from the coroner court judges and the voracious London press. In addition, his deputy was ill with pneumonia and two other deputies had full caseloads. Thus, Jack didn't have a choice but to assign this case to his newest assistant deputy, Rita. She had, though, quickly developed a reputation for producing brief, accurate reports with few of the speculations and suppositions often injected by his more senior deputies. Jack was not in the mood to present to the court a report that was full of equivocations: "It's likely that, but it's also possible—"

And as the only female investigator in his office, he considered that she might introduce psychological insights into Cynthia's suicide that a male investigator would overlook. Truth be told, Jack was happy with his choice of Rita. Given his *troubles*, though, Jack was not sure where this flirtation would lead. Nevertheless, at the moment, he felt cheated that he was on his way to help Melissa and not engaged in repartee with Rita.

CHAPTER TWO

Jack's nature was to dig in and work on a problem until it was solved. It was not in his character to seek personal advice from friends or colleagues, nor did he share his thoughts of infidelity with Melissa. These feelings of doubt and yearning to love and possess other women were new mysteries.

Over the course of countless inquests, he had found that most deaths begin as mysteries and end resolved. And like his love troubles, many homicides or suicides involved sex and love and their cousins—jealousy, betrayal, and desperation. Despite having issued opinions in these cases, he had not given these emotions much consideration. They had remained verdicts, usually enumerated by his staff, on which he'd signed-off. He decided to deal with his love troubles as he would with any other coroner investigation for which he was ultimately responsible.

Jack called his personal investigation the J. Melkin file, using a combination of letters from his and his wife's names. He kept this file in his office desk and in it placed hand-written notes that described his love troubles, along with statements made by others or that he encountered in readings that triggered his doubts, as well as material relating to the subject of love and nonpornographic articles on sexual desire. He hoped solving his love troubles would result in reaching an understanding of the relationship between lust, love, and commitment.

Early in his research, Jack found a library book by the psychiatrist, Robert Stoller, M.D., titled *Sexual Excitement: Dynamics of Erotic Life*. After reading it a number of times, he photocopied many passages for his file. He underlined the sentence: "For most individuals, those qualities in another that produce a feeling of love work against being able to lust for them." Jack wondered if the converse of this hypothesis was also true. Did his current feelings of not loving Melissa stem from his early feelings of lust for her? According to Dr. Stoller, love and lust were mutually exclusive, except for a small, lucky minority, and Jack, unhappily, felt he was no longer part of that fortunate group.

He thought back upon his long marriage. Melissa, who everyone except Jack called Mel, was a sensible, no-nonsense woman. As a toddler she would sit contentedly for hours playing with bulldozers, train sets, and other "boy toys," while her nanny read romance novels. As a

teenager and young woman, she was called “plain.” She grew into a large woman of five feet eight inches with full breasts, wide hips, and strong arms and legs.

For Jack, it was desire, not love, at first sight. At the time, the *idea* of love—love in the sense he was seeking to understand presently—was not among his concerns. His passion had been exclusively for rugby, and focusing on his law studies did not come easily to him. From the moment he saw Melissa, he imagined having sex with her, pushing his strength into those broad hips and marvelous thighs. The question he faced was not *if* he wanted her but whether he would be able to have her.

Jack was not a member of the Berkshire Golf Club; he had been brought there by a wealthy teammate to celebrate Jack’s winning kick at their rugby game. Melissa was standing alone at the bar, drinking an iced tea as a membership croquet game was in progress on the back lawn. His friend introduced them, and they talked for a while. Melissa was attracted to Jack. When they parted, she was happy that he asked for her telephone number. A year later, after a smooth courtship, they married in 1956 on the third Sunday in June.

Unlike others in her social circle, Melissa wanted a large family, and on their honeymoon, Jack enthusiastically agreed to try for at least four children. But Melissa, although in good health, had trouble conceiving and once pregnant was prone to miscarriages. It was a cruel trick of nature to make fecundity so difficult for the pair.

During their marriage, Melissa suffered two miscarriages before Dorothy, their only daughter, was born. To their disappointment, and not for lack of trying, Melissa did not become pregnant again.

When her periods stopped and Melissa was certain she could no longer bear children, she lost interest in having sex. Before then, in spite of the miscarriages, they had intercourse often, never fewer than three times a week. Melissa was driven by her desire to conceive, and Jack was propelled by the insatiable pleasure he derived from sex—a pleasure which, for him, had become an obsession, bordering on an addiction. Jack, two years younger than his wife, needed to feel her body crushed under his, to smell her hair, to lie exhausted and satisfied next to her. After many tense discussions, which included a statement by Melissa that her body was her own, they agreed to have what Melissa now called “coitus” (previously she had referred to it as “making a baby” or “making love”) once or twice a week. Jack grudgingly accepted this arrangement, blaming Melissa’s attitude on the wave of feminism that was sweeping the nation.

Approximately six months later, Jack, although only fifty-eight, had a minor heart attack. After recovering, he started having trouble getting hard. Although his desire did not diminish, what had always been a very pleasurable experience was one filled with anxiety and occasionally embarrassment. At first he blamed Melissa for his predicament. Indeed, she had never been titillating. In

the early years of their marriage, the fullness of her body, her eagerness to conceive, and the knowledge of her ready and willing availability had been sufficient to get him excited. Later, to add to his excitement, he had persuaded her to let him go down on her, although she didn't particularly enjoy it.

Next, Jack suggested introducing variety to their sex lives with different positions and techniques. He was certain that fellatio would be good for his flagging libido and begged Melissa to perform it, but she replied that although she loved him, she could not oblige, saying that she found the thought of his penis in her mouth "distasteful." Nor would she consider a position other than missionary. "You don't have sex with your wife in those other ways," she said. For the past twenty-five years, they had had normal and good sex, she insisted, and that was how they'd continue for as long as he wanted. Her only concession was to wear sexier nighties to bed instead of her long linen nightgowns.

Jack's troubles persisted, and after a number of frustrating and tension-filled weeks with infrequent, unsatisfying sex, he decided to visit his doctor. It was difficult for Jack to open up to Dr. Cassel about his problem, despite receiving yearly physicals from him for more than a decade. After a few false starts—attempting to mention his problem—Jack looked down at the examination room's pale yellow linoleum tiles and meekly uttered, "I've had difficulty maintaining an erection."

“This is nothing to be ashamed of. There are some men who accept this condition, which is inevitable as we age,” replied Dr. Cassel.

“I cannot,” replied Jack. “Please, I’ll take whatever course of action is needed.”

“A possible solution is injections.”

“Injections?”

“Yes, testosterone injections.”

“Into the scrotum?” Jack asked as he looked up from the floor, a little frightened by such a procedure.

Surprised at Jack’s lack of knowledge, Dr. Cassel laughed. “Ha, ha, no, no, my dear fellow, into the bloodstream. The buttocks, for example.”

“That’s a relief,” Jack said, exhaling deeply.

“There are potential side effects.”

“And what might they be?”

“Prostate cancer, weight gain, and psychological—”

Jack interrupted and, looking Dr. Cassel in the eyes, said, “I will take my chances.”

From the outset, Jack suspected the testosterone injections were mainly responsible for his emotional upheaval, just as menopause had been difficult for Melissa. But what troubled him was that except for her initial change in attitude toward sex, Melissa, as far as he observed, had not undergone any fundamental emotional shifts after menopause. Melissa had remained Melissa, while he felt physically and emotionally like someone in his late forties. His walks became brisk, and for the first time in

many years, he considered resuming the running regimen he had followed in his rugby days. He wanted to experience life with the vitality he found so many others around him were enjoying. Jack's daily emotional life was becoming turbulent and his lust was taking over his personality with overwhelming force. Frequently he tried to reject these emotions—for they threatened to disrupt the life he had built during the past three decades—but his efforts were to no avail. And equally upsetting, he felt guilty for allowing them to sweep over him.

It was true that his married life had progressed happily; the traumas he and his wife suffered were the death of his parents and Melissa's miscarriages. However, looking back, Jack felt that in the main, he had lived in a state of metastability. As the years passed, he had changed slightly, adjusting, almost imperceptibly, to life's conditions and demands, always feeling comfortable and able to cope rationally. Until now. Nevertheless, he was confident that in time, the evidence he was gathering would coalesce into an understanding, or at least a good guess, of the cause of his love troubles and an appropriate solution.

About a week after he opened the J. Melkin file, Jack learned that Freud did not attempt to define love, only suggested that one consult poets and philosophers for its meaning. Jack didn't attempt to look up love in the dictionary—he was smart enough to know that a single definition could not possibly explain the many different

kinds of love that existed. Surely, the word “love” must be preceded by an adjective, namely, “erotic,” “fraternal,” “platonic,” “patriotic,” “sensible,” “nostalgic,” “romantic,” etc.

With this in mind, he turned to *Roget’s Thesaurus*. It placed love in the category of “social affections” and provided the following literary quotes for its definition: “An insatiate thirst of enjoying a greedily desired object” (Montaigne); “the heart’s immortal thirst to be completely known and all forgiven” (Henry van Dyke); “the fulfilling of the law” (the Bible); “the reflection of a man’s own worthiness from other men” (Emerson); “a spiritual coupling of two souls” (Ben Johnson); “two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one” (Bellinghausen); “what makes the world go round with that worried expression” (Fred Allen); and “endless bliss associated with the possession of one particular person and unutterable pain associated at the thought that the possession is unattainable” (Schopenhauer).

It occurred to Jack that Schopenhauer’s rather sardonic definition of love might be applied to Cynthia Koesler’s suicide. For regardless of how imperfect her marriage to Arthur might have been at first, in the end, because of his age and illness, she could no longer possess him, and she may have chosen death over the unbearable grief and pain.

Jack also recorded Roland Barthes’ definition of love, as stated in *A Lover’s Discourse*: “I encounter millions of

bodies in my life; of these million I desire some hundreds: but of these hundreds I love only one.” Jack felt that such sentiments were rarely if ever true and were most common to adolescents and young lovers. “Young fools,” he had referred to them in the past. Though he had to admit to himself that, as a young man, he had not searched for or experienced that type of passionate love.

Clearly, the mystery of love and desire was why, in the late stage of life, this type of love had become important to him. How he envied those who experienced such emotions, and he felt he was not too old to experience them. He concluded that the *Roget's* quotations were, at best, describing the symptoms of love and only approached its essence. It would be as if he, as coroner, reported to a court that a victim's death was caused by a wound to the chest while failing to state that the bullet had penetrated the victim's heart, and the actual cause of death had been heart failure. Of course Jack knew that this kind of vital information could only be obtained from an autopsy. Therefore, he would likewise have to perform an autopsy on love and discern the anatomy to learn what kind of “bullet” was the cause of his love troubles and, hopefully, simultaneously reach an understanding of Cynthia's decision to kill herself. If indeed, that was the case.

About the same time that he read Barthes, he came across *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton—an exhaustive survey of medical, philosophical, and poetic

writings on melancholia, with its third section devoted exclusively to the causes and cure of love melancholy. To his surprise, it was first published in 1621. Jack found it fascinating that Burton never married but had devoted his entire adult life to his *Anatomy*, whose last and final edition appeared in 1651—eleven years after his death by suicide. Jack speculated if this was yet another case of unrequited love.

As for the book's contents, although much was dated, Jack recognized it was full of amazing theories and anecdotes. For example, Burton explained the symptoms of love melancholy with recourse to the "humoral model." In the same way that heat causes water to evaporate, passion dries up the body's fluids, leaving it depleted. To support this position, he cites evidence from an autopsy conducted in ancient Greece on a man reputed to have died of love. According to witnesses, the autopsy revealed that the man's heart had combusted, his liver had become smoky, his lungs dried. This led to the conclusion that this unfortunate man had been "roasted through the vehemency of love's fire." Jack, feeling exhausted and irritated, almost empathized with this ridiculous conclusion.

Jack frequented the British Library during lunchtime. A search of its vast holdings didn't contain a single title with the words "love" and "anatomy" in it. A recently published book, *Falling in Love*, by Francesco Alberoni and another volume, *On Love*, published in 1822 by Sten-

dhal, showed promise and Jack checked them out. What he liked about the latter one was that Stendhal may have been the first to attempt to classify love into types: four in his case. In addition, he posited the concept of crystallization of love. Every love, according to Stendhal, begins with admiration, which, under proper circumstances, crystallizes into bliss. In his opinion, love can only be experienced in full ardor when it is associated with fear and doubt of the reciprocity of the beloved. Once the fear of losing the beloved is gone, confidence and sweet familiarities deaden the ardor of love. Assuming that Stendhal was right, Jack thought, it was not surprising the way he felt now about Melissa. Paradoxically, because he was assured of Melissa's love, his ardor was suppressed and was the very source of his recent doubts. Moreover, application of Stendhal's theory to the Koestlers also made sense. With Arthur's decision to commit suicide, Cynthia's fears of losing her beloved grew. Ultimately, they increased to the point where she could not see herself living without him.

Even before reading Alberoni's book, Jack wasn't fully satisfied with Stendhal's explanation. It did not explain the inner turmoil he was experiencing. And Alberoni's book was not of much practical help since it was filled with psychoanalytical explanations that Jack found difficult to follow. It left him with a feeling that falling in love and loving were much more complicated than Stendhal had presented. For the record, Jack wrote down

what Alberoni had defined as “falling in love”: “a nascent state of collective movement involving two individuals,” and the definition of “love”: “extraordinary sexuality, when life explores the frontiers of the possible.”

For the moment, Jack was skeptical of these definitions. Could it be, Jack asked himself, that he was in love with “love” itself?

Arthur Koestler slouched in his living room armchair, dead with a whiskey glass in his hand. His wife Cynthia was found lying lifeless on the sofa, facing him. Two empty wine glasses, a jar of honey, and an empty bottle of Tuinal—a powerful sedative—stood between them on the coffee table. Double-suicide was suspected, but Westminster Court Coroner Jack Candrel was troubled. Why did Cynthia, twenty-five years younger than Arthur and in good health, kill herself?

A bold work of historical fiction, *Self-Deliverance: The Death and Life of Arthur Koestler*, explores the circumstances and unexpected consequences of the real-life Koestler suicides. In his search for the truth, Jack Candrel is drawn closer to two dynamic women: Rita Rosecliff, a beautiful and talented investigator in his office, and ballerina Kristie Kertz, Arthur Koestler's illegitimate daughter. Both have their own unique preoccupations—Rita, justice and Kristie, abandonment—that shape Jack's formal investigation and his own personal search for meaning and fulfillment. Combining mystery, romance, and history, *Self-Deliverance: The Death and Life of Arthur Koestler*, probes the true nature of love—and the ultimate sacrifices we take to find it and hold it close.



Bernard Otterman is a child Holocaust survivor born in Lodz, Poland, whose award-winning short stories and poems have appeared in *New Millennium Writings*, *Word/Slovo*, *Poetry*, and *Jewish Currents*. *Inmate 1818 and Other Stories* (Liber Novus Press 2014) is his most recent collection of Holocaust-related short fiction. *Self-Deliverance: The Death and Life of Arthur Koestler* is his debut novel.

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Self-Deliverance is a novel that touches upon the historical and fictional/imaginative lives of its fascinating characters. Otterman writes with authority and elegance and this book has it all—desire, love, illness, intrigue, loss. Yet nothing here is gratuitous. The prose is descriptive and lovingly wrought.

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Bernard Otterman's *Self-Deliverance* is a thoughtful, sensual, and emotionally probing exploration of the relationship of violence and love... If *Midnight's Children* had been written by Chekhov it might well resemble this book.

- Harold Braswell, Assistant Professor of Health Care Ethics, Saint Louis University

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