

thoughts and impulses. At one point in the narrative, in fact, the narrator rather coyly suggests that he may resemble the Reader more than one realizes. When he initially refers to Ludmilla as *you*, he observes that "it is time for this book in the second person to address itself no longer to a general male you, perhaps brother and double of a hypocrite I" (p. 141).

Like many aspects of the narrative, however, this potential doubling is only an illusion of sameness. By establishing the Other Reader as a secondary narratee and then addressing her first individually and then together with the Reader in bed, the narrator operates at a distinct authorial distance from his smitten characters. He is neither the Reader nor the Other Reader. Yet narrator and Reader are inextricably bound together by the narrative itself, for the Reader acts out the story of his life as the narrator simultaneously recounts the story to him.

## Two Forster Novels and an Indian Prince

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From December 1923 to May 1924, J. R. Ackerley was in India acting as Private Secretary to the Maharajah of Chhatarpur, the central figure in his book *Hindoo Holiday* and the man who is generally conceded to have sparked E. M. Forster's characterization of Godbole in *A Passage to India*. He may also, as we shall see, have influenced characterization in *Maurice*. Forster himself stayed with the Hindu prince twice—in 1913 when he visited India with Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and in 1921 when he returned to serve as interim Private Secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas. He found the man odd and compelling: "He is 5 feet high and has no bridge to his nose, and he usually wears a frock coat of magenta velvet, and earrings of diamond;"<sup>1</sup> he has "a most unusual character—mystical, and sensual, silly and shrewd;" "India will certainly never look upon his like again."<sup>2</sup> It was, in fact, Forster who pressed his friend Ackerley to take the position as the Maharajah's Private Secretary.

In 1932 Ackerley published *Hindoo Holiday*, his account of his stay in Chhatarpur. Forster, of course, would not have had access to the book before he published *A Passage to India* in 1924, but he did have at least two of Ackerley's long letters from Chhatarpur to help recapture the flavor of the intriguing monarch. Forster prized these letters and even read passages to others, praising the impression they gave of "someone who had lived in the country for years."<sup>3</sup> He was frankly pleased to share vicariously in court life, and he welcomed the spur the letters gave to his own work on *A Passage to India*. In January 1924 Forster wrote to Ackerley, "Your letters were a godsend to my etiolated novel."<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Forster appreciated

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to J. R. Ackerley, qtd. in *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, 2 vols., Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank, eds. (Cambridge: Belknap, 1983), II, 35.

<sup>2</sup>E. M. Forster, *The Hill of Devi* (New York: Harcourt, 1953), pp. 196-97.

<sup>3</sup>Neville Braybrooke, ed. *The Letters of J. R. Ackerley* (London: Duckworth, 1975), xxv.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to J. R. Ackerley, qtd. in Lago and Furbank, II, 48.

first-hand observations of the person who was the inspiration for the puzzling Hindu, Godbole. Today's readers of *Hindoo Holiday* can enjoy the same immediacy, as a few selections may suggest.

Forster noted in his own writings that the Maharajah was seriously devoted to Krishna: " 'I worship and adore him as a man. If he is divine, he will notice me for it and reward me; if he is not, I shall become grass and dust like the others.' " <sup>5</sup> But, as *Hindoo Holiday* stresses, the Maharajah also had a keen appetite for eclectic philosophical discussions, and Ackerley aptly captures the flavor of his thinking. Ackerley, for example, recalls being pressed with a barrage of bizarre questions at his first meeting with the Maharajah—Was he religious? Did he believe that the tragedy of Jesus Christ was the greatest tragedy that had ever happened? Was he a pragmatist? Had he read Hall Caine? Had he read Darwin, Huxley, Marie Corelli? <sup>6</sup> The seeming muddlement of this approach to thinking is no doubt mirrored in what seems, to Westerners, Godbole's labyrinthine discussions of religion and philosophy.

Not only were the Maharajah of Chhatarpur's religious devotion and philosophical curiosity remarkable; so too was the fastidiousness of his court. Before Ackerley left for his post as Private Secretary, Forster sent him some tips on proper etiquette: "While among them, don't eat beef or even say 'beef' unless they say it first. You can say 'cow,' and milk and you can both say and drink." <sup>7</sup> In *A Passage to India*, Forster, of course, exploited what is to the Westerner the mild humor of all these religious and dietary idiosyncrasies by having Godbole always eating aside, always requiring his own vegetarian savories. But Godbole's wariness is nothing compared with the scrupulous attitude of one of the Maharajah's retainers, an attitude which Forster must have enjoyed having Ackerley record so amusingly. Complaining about the Europeans' "disgusting custom of afternoon tea," the retainer explains why "though he had sometimes consented to drink tea with Europeans, he had never once accepted a second cup. What happened? When the cups were refilled . . . the mixture composed of new tea, dregs, and sputum would rise and touch the strainer, which would then be transferred to the next person's cup, and so on!" <sup>8</sup>

Certainly Forster had Godbole reflect the Maharajah of Chhatarpur's religiosity, his philosophical bent, and the orthodox eating habits of his court. But he had no reason to incorporate the Maharajah's homosexual leanings into his fictional Hindu. It was, in fact, Ackerley's thinly veiled descriptions of the Maharajah's homosexuality that caused Forster to blanch at Ackerley's request to write a foreword to *Hindoo Holiday*. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine Forster endorsing a book which has the Maharajah discovering the equation between cupidity and lust and then tossing off the comment to Ackerley: " 'Now, take Mr. Lowes Dickinson. I like him very much; very, very much, and honour and respect his wisdom and goodness . . . but he does not excite my cupidity.' " <sup>9</sup> If, however, we read *Hindoo Holiday* back-to-back with *Maurice*, Forster's posthumous novel written in 1913-1914 shortly after his first Indian trip and his initial meeting with the Maharajah, we find some particularly striking and previously unnoticed parallels between Ackerley's account

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<sup>5</sup>Forster, *Devi*, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup>J. R. Ackerley, *Hindoo Holiday* (1932; rpt. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1979), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup>E. M. Forster, letter to J. R. Ackerley, 24 October 1923, Harry Ransome, Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>8</sup>Ackerley, p. 220.

<sup>9</sup>Ackerley, p. 27.

of this strange prince and Forster's novel. Both language and theme in *Maurice* hark back to the Maharajah—and then point in surprising ways to Godbole.

“‘Goodness, wisdom, and beauty—that is what the Greeks worshipped, and that is what I want . . . a good, wise, and beautiful friend,’”<sup>10</sup> the Maharajah explained to Ackerley. How reminiscent these sentiments are of those of the lonely, young homosexual, Maurice, who, as a boy, had a vague but haunting dream in which he “scarcely saw a face, scarcely heard a voice say, ‘That is your friend.’” The dream filled Maurice “with beauty and taught him tenderness,” and, not unlike the Maharajah, Maurice links these virtues with the Greeks. Was the friend “a Greek God . . . ?” he wonders. Later Maurice is “called out of dreams” by various male friends: “‘You must come,’” Maurice’s friends insist. “‘He did come.’”<sup>11</sup> Leaving aside the sexual overtones, we note how this language anticipates sections of *A Passage to India* in which Godbole also longs for a friend, though he calls to a god who never comes: “‘I say to [Shri Krishna], Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come.’”<sup>12</sup> In both Maurice and Godbole, we surely find echoes of the Maharajah’s loneliness and of his need for friendship—and perhaps even of his language itself. Dickinson jotted in his Indian journal that the Maharajah’s refrain “was always for Krishna to come—the ideal friend,”<sup>13</sup> a phrase which again underscores the ties between the Maharajah and Forster’s fictional characters.

Yet differences surface. For the Maharajah, sex and religion went unblushingly hand-in-hand; he kept a troupe of Krishna dancers and relished the company of these young men. Forster, however, divided religion and sex down the middle as he drew on the Hindu prince for two of his novels. The Maharajah’s religious tendencies clearly influenced Forster’s characterization of Godbole. The Maharajah’s sexual tendencies, on the other hand, seem to have left an imprint on Maurice’s musings about his need for male friends. There may be more of Chhatarpur in Forster’s homosexual novel than critics have recognized.

## Reclaiming A Canadian Heritage: Kogawa’s *Obasan*

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The present state of Canadian letters might best be described as a state of elation. In the 1973 edition of the prestigious *Times Literary Supplement*, Ronald Sutherland declared this renaissance “Canada’s Elizabethan Age” and Margaret Atwood declared it “a literary expansion of Malthusian proportions.”<sup>1</sup> Chief among

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<sup>10</sup>Ackerley, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup>E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (New York: New American Library, 1971), pp. 22, 66, 72.

<sup>12</sup>E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924; rpt. New York: Harcourt, 1952), p. 80.

<sup>13</sup>G. Lowes Dickinson, *The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson and Other Unpublished Writings*, ed. Dennis Proctor (London: Duckworth, 1973), p. 180.

<sup>1</sup>Claude Bissell, “Politics and Literature in the 1960’s” in *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), III, p. 15.