

Introduction

A Novel We Have Loved

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“April is the cruellest month,” T. S. Eliot says; yet spring’s sweet showers fall in April and people, according to Chaucer, long to go on pilgrimages.² The power of pilgrimage permeates the world’s religions, from Canterbury to Vārānasī, and in April 1994, Peter Owen Publishers released Van C. Gessel’s English translation of *Deep River* (*Fukai kawa*, 1993), an emotional quest narrative in which four careworn Japanese tourists journey to India’s holy Ganga in search of spiritual as well as existential renewal.³ The story’s author, Endō Shūsaku (aka Shusaku Endo [1923–1996]), had just marked his seventy-first birthday. That autumn, Stockholm’s literary circles were abuzz with speculation that Endō would be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. It was not to be. Endō’s younger countryman, Ōe Kenzaburō, was the winner. Gessel informs us that journalists were assembled outside Endō’s Tokyo home awaiting the Swedish committee’s announcement that he had won.⁴ When Ōe’s name was broadcast, the reporters pressed Endō to evaluate the decision before they made their way to Ōe’s home. Endō’s tactful response involved noting that Ōe excelled at writing about a world without God. We think that Endō here describes himself, not simply Ōe, since Endō was, at seventy-one, an award-winning writer who had spent his decades-long career, trying to give words to faith, doubt, love, anxiety, and transcendent mystery.

Born in Tokyo in 1923, Endō spent his childhood in Dalian, part of Japanese-occupied Manchuria. After his parents’ divorce, he returned with his

mother to Japan in 1933 and lived in Kobe, where he and his mother, through his aunt's influence, converted to Roman Catholicism.⁵ Endō was baptized in 1934 at the age of eleven, and his experience as a Japanese Catholic, which he described as clothes that were ill-fitting, deeply influenced his later literary art, as the present volume, *Navigating Deep River: New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō's Final Novel*, shows. Endō eventually studied at Keiō University, an elite private institution founded by Fukuzawa Yukichi in 1858, just ten years before Japan's Meiji Restoration, which focused on *rangaku*, or "Western learning." Indeed, Endō received a bachelor's degree in French Literature in 1949, an interest that led him to travel to France where he studied Catholic fiction at the University of Lyon. His experience as a Japanese living in the West and attempting to assimilate French culture informed his writing, as did his regular bouts of illness, some of them serious. The pain and weariness of the numerous surgeries Endō endured galvanized him, since *Deep River* might be seen as Endō's own *Book of Job*, Gessel (chapter 9) argues in our anthology. In chapter 10, Justyna W. Kasza alludes to Endō's interest in the story of Job while focusing on *Deep River's* "autobiographical space," arguing that each of its characters, which we describe in the next paragraph, "embodies a trace of the author."

Endō burst onto the Japanese literary scene in 1955 when *White Person* (*Shiroi Hito*; also, *White Man*) won the Akutagawa Prize, one of Japan's most prestigious literary awards given to young and emerging authors. Over the next forty years, Endō published an extensive body of fiction that includes short stories and novels, which feature wayfarers wrestling with issues of belief and unbelief, Christian presence in non-Christian environments, apostasy and betrayal, indigenous discipleship and Western triumphalism, martyrdom as well as theodicy, and religious pluralism. In *Deep River*, the wayfaring theme emerges through five characters, each one of them walking wounded and wandering through India's solemn geographies, motivated by different reasons and equipped with varied hopes. The assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi punctuates the story of the twists and turns of Endō's pilgrims, but all are inexorably drawn to the Ganga, where their spirituality intensifies. Isobe is a salaryman whose wife has died of cancer. Her deathbed wish urged Isobe to look for her in a future reincarnation, and thus Isobe—a believing skeptic on the subject of the transmigration of souls—visits India, cautiously optimistic of finding her somewhere in the country's felicitous, eulogized spaces. A traumatized veteran of the armed conflict in Burma (now Myanmar), Kiguchi treks to India in search of Buddhist rituals he hopes will soothe the souls of fallen friends and deceased enemies. When a foreign Christian displays many

kindnesses toward Tsukada, a sick man also dealing with severe anxiety brought on by his remembrance of war's terror, Kiguchi feels inspired. Another pilgrim, Numada, was raised in Manchuria, and his childhood was marked by an ardent love for animals. Numada believes his pet bird has died in India, and so he visits a bird sanctuary there. Fleeing a failed marriage, Mitsuko explores India on a quest to ascertain life's significance, and there she reunites with Ōtsu, a former school friend, whom she once seduced and then abandoned. Ōtsu is a failed Catholic seminarian, his priestly promise cut short by church superiors appalled by his unorthodox theological views. Outside the church, where some might say there is no salvation, Ōtsu makes meaning by caring for the voiceless of Vārānasī, a beloved city through which flows the sacred Ganga; in imitation of Christ, he helps the outcastes carry corpses to be cremated at the burning *ghāts*, after which their ashes are scattered over the holy river. Ōtsu's pastoral ministry is precarious. When Sikh militants assassinate Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, for example, he becomes entangled in anti-Sikh skirmishes and protests. Inspired by two nuns associated with Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, Mitsuko begins to work alongside India's indigent, and her appreciation for Ōtsu's pantheistic or panentheistic model of God unfurls in unexpectedly spacious directions.

Deep River is not alone of its kind. Throughout Endō's writing runs a generous curiosity about women and men, seemingly lonely without God, and this curiosity displays itself through an acclaimed storytelling skill—vivid plots, hauntingly suggestive characters, tender pathos, and serene humor. Although Endō did not secure the Nobel Prize in Literature, he was the recipient of other tributes during his lifetime, including the Tanizaki Prize for Japanese Literature, awarded in 1966 for *Silence* (*Chinmoku*), the novel that Martin Scorsese recently adapted for the cinema. We feature Scorsese's "Afterword" in our *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endō's Classic Novel*, an anthology of essays that we designed, among other things, as a movie tie-in.⁶ Our current volume, *Navigating Deep River*, is a bookend to *Approaching Silence*.¹ One reason for our saying this involves returning, in the mind's eye, to Endō's final two years.

April may be the "cruellest" month. Beleaguered by poor health throughout his life, Endō reentered the hospital in April 1995, one year after Gessel's translation, but was released long enough to see two screenings of Kumai Kei's adaptation of *Deep River*.⁷ Endō reportedly wept at seeing the film, observing that some scenes were better realized than in the novel. In September, Endō suffered a cerebral hemorrhage; this stroke left him unable to speak. Just two months later, he received the highest honor Japan bestows on its citizens, the

Bunka Kunshō (Order of Culture). In June 1996, he began hemodialysis, but passed away on September 29 of that year. Several thousand people in attendance at the funeral services at the St. Ignatius Church in Tokyo placed flowers on the altar. Copies of both *Silence* and *Deep River* were placed in the casket.⁸

Bookends and Titles

Whatever else they signify, *Deep River* and *Silence* are novels that Endō loved. And we love them, too, which is why we view *Navigating Deep River* as a bookend to our *Approaching Silence*. In the earlier anthology's title, *Approaching* connotes our collective effort to help our readers draw closer to *Silence*, the novel's single-word title that suggests a state or condition—that is, a lack of sound. The volume's individual chapters reveal the multivalence of this term, including God's *silence* in the face of human suffering but also, writes Gessel, the *silencing* of the protagonist's ego as he witnesses, and ponders his own role in causing, that suffering among Japan's "hidden Christians."⁹ And while that word choice was meant to suggest our movement toward a deeper engagement with the novel, we also understood *Approaching* to signify that which was drawing near to us, from a reverse angle, in relation to George Steiner's arresting metaphor of the *pilot fish*. Steiner thinks the role of the literary critic is like the "pilot fish, those strange tiny creatures, which go out in front of the real thing, the great shark or the great whale, warning, saying to the people, 'It's coming.'"¹⁰ Our use of the word *approach* therefore invoked this metaphorical role of these fish that signal something quite substantial is coming this way—in this case, the fiftieth anniversary of the novel's publication in Japanese but also the *arrival* of Scorsese's adaptation of the novel for the silver screen. In *Approaching Silence*'s "Introduction," we further probed the meaning of *it* as a pronoun standing in for *the real thing*, concluding that Endō's *Silence*, like any great literary work, opens out to the multiple readings advanced by our contributors.¹¹

Interpretive diversity will be evident to readers of the present volume, *Navigating Deep River*, for which we have selected a different word, the verb *to navigate*. We have done so because of the distinct ways in which we conceive of *silence*, a state or condition marked by an absence of sound, and a *river*, a flowing or surging body of water with a distinct semantic range that generates different sorts of figurative associations.

For instance, in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the mighty Mississippi River serves as a metaphor for the freedom that Huck

and Jim must navigate to avoid all manner of dangers. Huck says, “So in two seconds away we went a-sliding down the river, and it did seem so good to be free again and all by ourselves on the big river, and nobody to bother us.”¹² While Huck seeks freedom from an abusive family, Jim, a slave, seeks the same freedom from bondage as was sought by those who sang the African American spiritual from which Endō’s title is drawn; it begins, “Deep river, Lord: I want to cross over into campground.”

Or in Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, a creative retelling of the Buddha’s story recounted in Mark Dennis’s chapter from *Approaching Silence*, the river plays a central role in the novel, serving for most travelers as an obstacle that blocks them from reaching the other shore from which they will continue on their way. But for those who listen intently to the river’s sacred sound *Om*, it becomes, instead, a teacher and pathway to attaining a different sort of freedom than that sought by the African American slaves. Here, it is freedom from the ubiquitous and inevitable suffering that human beings experience in *samsāra*—the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth—a spiritual paradigm accepted by Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, each of which plays a prominent role in *Deep River* and will be the subject of the next section.

To navigate the historical and religious context of the novel, we begin with an introduction to the history and key teachings of these South Asian religions. That material includes a discussion of their roles in the Partition of 1947, which divided the subcontinent into the separate modern states of India and Pakistan, and the religious tensions that have bedeviled the subcontinent ever since. Those tensions led to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, one of the novel’s key plot elements, which is the subject of Ronald Green’s chapter (chapter 4).

Hinduism

As Green and others describe in the chapters that follow, rebirth and reincarnation serve as an important plot element in *Deep River*, especially as they pertain to Isobe, who travels to India in search of his wife Keiko’s reincarnation. Just before dying from cancer, she tells her husband in a gasping voice, “I . . . I know for sure . . . I’ll be reborn somewhere in this world. Look for me . . . find me . . . promise . . . promise!”¹³ After his wife’s death, he joins the tour to India led by the Japanese tour guide Enami—the subject of P. A. George’s chapter (chapter 11)—to look for her reincarnation, having received information on the topic from scholars at the University of Virginia.

The notion of humans and other creatures being born again and again not only serves as background to *Deep River* but also as a key element within a shared South Asian religious paradigm. Trapped in *samsāra* (“wandering” and “world”), human beings transmigrate ceaselessly in the world of birth, death, and rebirth. Although interpreting this cycle differently, each of the indigenous South Asian traditions described below accept the proposition that karma, however understood and calculated, helps determine one’s rebirth in variously conceived cosmological systems. Within this paradigm, the ultimate goal of religious practice is to attain liberation from the cycle of *samsāra*, a state of freedom commonly known as *mokṣa* in Hinduism, *mukti* in Sikhism, and *nirvāṇa* in Buddhism.

Hinduism traces its roots back almost four millennia to the Vedic tradition practiced by Brahmin priests, who memorized and chanted the Vedic texts while performing sacrifices meant to please the gods, such as Agni and Indra, and maintain cosmic balance.¹⁴ Over time, the highly varied group of traditions that constitute modern-day Hinduism produced many other sacred texts, including the *Upaniṣads*, some of which equate the *ātman*, the individual self or soul, to *Brahman*, the ultimate reality. But blinded by *māyā*, or “illusion,” we remain ignorant of this ultimate truth. The *Upaniṣads* and later Hindu texts offer pathways to the realization of the liberated state of *mokṣa* noted above. The *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and other early classical Hindu texts are classified as *śruti*, meaning “that which is heard,” to distinguish them from texts that are *smṛti*, or “that which is remembered.” The former are generally considered to be authorless and unchanging, holding a special position of authority within the six orthodox Hindu *darśanas* (“viewpoint,” “philosophy,” or “teaching”), although interpretations of their provenance and authority vary.

Since Hindus believe the *smṛti* texts are of human authorship, they are subject to change and reinterpretation; they thus possess, for some, a lower degree of religious authority. These texts include the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*, two epics (the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), the *Dharmasūtra* and *Dharmaśāstra*, the wide-ranging corpus of the *Purāṇas*, and many others. For instance, the *Manusmṛti*, one of the *Dharmaśāstra* texts, detail one’s duty, or *dharma*, within the hierarchical caste system that developed over a long period of time and still exists today. In *Deep River*, the Japanese tour guide Enami tells the group in the informational session before their departure:

In India there is a religious system of social ranking known as the caste system. They call it *varna jati*. It is very complex, and I can’t explain it in simple terms. But it would probably be useful for you to know that there is a group of people who do not fit into

even the lowest varna. These people are known as outcasts or as untouchables. Today the untouchables are called Harijans, a perfunctory title that means “children of God,” but in reality they are a people who have been subjected to bigotry from early times. As you witness this discrimination on your trip, it may be disturbing to you, but please bear in mind that there is a long religious and historical background to this situation.¹⁵

While much more complex on the ground as Enami suggests, the system places the Brahmin priests at the top, followed by the warriors (*kṣatriya*), merchants and farmers (*vaiśya*), and laborers (*śūdra*). Hindus describe the top three castes as *dvija*, or “twice born,” since children of each group go through a caste-specific initiation ceremony in which they undergo spiritual rebirth. But these texts also describe the outcasts, noted by Enami, as occupying a social space beneath even that of the *śūdras*.¹⁶ The *Dharmaśāstra* and other texts addressing this system assert members of this caste are born into this lowly position because of a negative karmic debt carried forward from a previous lifetime; as such, their duty is to perform the polluting jobs shunned by the other castes, such as cleaning latrines, working with leather, and, as we see in *Deep River*, carrying corpses to the burning *ghāts* and cremating them beside the Ganga. Ōtsu, whom several essayists take up, joins them in this activity in imitation of Christ; at the end of the novel, while helping carry a corpse, a mob mistakenly attacks and seriously injures him.

The *Purāṇas*, part of the *smṛti* literature, and other texts put forth *bhakti*, or “devotion,” toward a particular deity as a central Hindu religious practice. Hindus can express *bhakti* through *pūjā*, the ritual bathing of statues; *bhajans*, singing hymns dedicated to that deity; and *yātrā*, or pilgrimage, to the temples and other sites associated with a particular deity. In the *bhakti* traditions, many Hindus express devotion to the *deva*, male deities like Śiva and Viṣṇu, and to the latter’s *avatars*, or “descents” into the world, such as Kṛṣṇa, an *avatar* of Viṣṇu. Devotees also express devotion to the *devī*, female deities who manifest in multiple forms, both warm and compassionate as well as fierce and wrathful. Possessing *śakti*, or divine feminine energy and power, the *devī* include Kālī and Chāmundā, two goddesses who figure prominently in Endō’s novel.

At the informational meeting before the tour to India, Enami advises the tourists-pilgrims as follows:

“Hinduism is very complex, and I can’t explain it in simple terms. I think the best way is to have you look at the images of their

gods after we actually arrive there. They believe in many different gods, and let me show you a few slides right now.”

A peculiar female image was projected on to the screen. With one foot she trampled on the corpse of a man, and her neck was adorned not with a necklace but with severed human heads that she had flung over her shoulder with one of her four arms.

“This is a representation of the goddess Kālī, which often adorns temples and homes in India. The holy mother Mary in Christianity is a symbol of tender maternal love, but the goddesses of India are for the most part called earth-mother goddesses, and while they are gentle deities at times, they are also fearsome beings. There is one goddess in particular, Chāmundā, who has taken upon herself all of the sufferings of the people of India. I want to be sure to take all of you to see her image.”

When the lights came on, Mrs Okubo exclaimed, “Whoo, that was scary!,” making everyone chuckle.¹⁷

During the tour, some members of the group become fascinated by images of these deities in the Hindu temples they visit while others find them repulsive. For instance, Mitsuko becomes intrigued by Kālī and Chāmundā and, in the final scene, immerses herself in the deep waters of the Ganga, which is the subject of Mini Chandran’s chapter (chapter 2). Chandran mentions a scene, which Mark Dennis returns to in his chapter (chapter 1), in which Mitsuko says to herself:

*What I can believe in now is the sight of all these people, each carrying his or her own individual burdens, praying at this deep river. At some point, the words Mitsuko muttered to herself were transmuted into the words of a prayer. I believe that the river embraces these people and carries them away. A river of humanity. The sorrows of this deep river of humanity. And I am a part of it.*¹⁸

As Chandran explains, the river is also known as Ganga Devi, the goddess whose sacred waters are the destination of one of the most popular Hindu pilgrimages, a key form of *bhakti*. Indeed, India’s landscape is dotted with sacred sites that serve as pilgrimage destinations (*tīrtha*), including the Dakshineswar temple dedicated to Kālī and the many Kṛṣṇa temples of Vrindavan in the north and the Ayyappan pilgrimage in the south.¹⁹

In anticipation of death, many Hindus hope to make their final pilgrimage to the Ganga, where it flows through Vārānaśī (also known as Benares

and Kashi), believing that to die in the city and have one's ashes sprinkled on the river's waters guarantees liberation, or *mokṣa*. Mini Chandran observes, "The Ganga is not just a river to the Hindus of India. She is a goddess to be worshipped, the deliverer from the mortal coil of birth and rebirth, and a presence in the mind of each believer even if far removed from her physically."

Sikhism

Sikhism, another South Asian religious tradition, plays a key role in *Deep River*. As Ronald Green discusses in his chapter, Indira Gandhi's 1984 assassination precipitates the novel's climactic events, in which a mob attacks Ōtsu, who had been carrying corpses with the Harijans to the burning *ghāts*.²⁰ Gandhi's assassination unleashed an orgy of religiously inspired violence against the Sikh community, which traces its origins to Guru Nanak (1469–1539).

Born near the modern Pakistani city of Lahore into the merchant caste of a Hindu family, Nanak and his friend Mardana, a Muslim, first gained notice by playing music to express their devotion to God. One day, Nanak disappeared into the River Bein, only to surface some three days later, having experienced a spiritual transformation. For the rest of his life, he traveled in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent to teach the oneness of God, which served as the central tenet of Sikhism, a word derived from the Punjabi *sikh*, which means "disciple" or "student."

Guru Nanak and his successors viewed the one God as eternal, existing beyond the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth described above, thereby offering a fascinating mix of beliefs in both monotheism and transmigration within *samsāra*. Some observers also describe Sikhism as a panentheistic religion,²¹ which Darren J. N. Middleton (chapter 13) defines as "the participating of everything in God." Sikhs refer to the oneness of God as *Waheguru*, the "Wonderful Lord," but also as *Satnām*, "True Name," and *Akal Purakh*, "Immortal, Timeless Being," among others. Sikh teachings appear in the *Guru Granth Sahib* (also known as the *Adi Granth*), the tradition's central text, written in the Punjabi language using the Gurmukhī ("[from the] mouth of the guru") script. Central Sikh practices articulated in the *Guru Granth Sahib* include *nām japō*, the repetition of God's name; *kirtan*, the recitation of sacred hymns; *simran*, meditation on passages from the text; and the pursuit of selfless service and social justice.

Guru Nanak and the other nine human gurus of Sikhism lived during the Mughal era (1526–40 and 1555–1857), a period of Muslim rule that begins with Emperor Babur (1483–1530), who defeated the last ruler of the

Delhi Sultanate in 1526 in the First Battle of Panipat. The Mughal Empire survived for more than three hundred years with shifting borders and varying degrees of power. At its zenith, the empire controlled almost the entire Indian subcontinent, except for a small section in the very south and parts of modern-day Afghanistan. Building capitals in Agra, Lahore, Delhi, and other cities, the Mughal emperors varied greatly in their degree of religious tolerance.

For instance, Akbar (1542–1605) and his son Jahangir (1569–1627), the third and fourth emperors, respectively, expressed deep interest in other religions, and the former may have even started a new ecumenical religious movement known as the *Din-i-Ilahi*, or the “Religion of God.” But other Mughal emperors were less tolerant and, in some cases, persecuted the Sikhs. For example, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, was executed by Aurangzeb (1618–1707) for refusing to convert to Islam. In response, Bahadur’s son, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and final human guru, founded the Sikh warrior community known as the Khalsa in 1699 and introduced the Five Ks traditionally worn by Sikhs initiated into that community: uncut hair (*kesh*), a wooden comb (*khanga*), a cotton undergarment (*kachera*), an iron bracelet (*kara*), and a dagger (*kirpan*). The *kirpan* serves as both a weapon and a symbol of defending the faith against external threats. Indeed, over time, the Sikhs developed a strong martial tradition and gained wide recognition as effective soldiers, serving in various roles in the armies of the British East India Company and, after the establishment of direct rule in 1858, the British government, as described below.

Before his death, Guru Gobindh Singh bestowed guruship onto the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which contains 1,430 pages divided into thirty-one sections. Sikhs refer to its words and content as *gurbāni*, or “the speech of wisdom,” pointing toward the religious insights of the six Sikh gurus whose hymns the text includes. Although the bulk of the text comes from these six teachers, it also contains hymns from Hindu *bhakti* saints and one Muslim Sufi saint. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is installed in a *gurdwara*, or temple, with the Harmandir Sahib (Temple of God)—known as the Golden Temple in English—serving as the tradition’s central temple. Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh guru, conceived of the temple, located in Amritsar, a city in the Punjab region of northwest India and eastern Pakistan; its construction began, however, under the supervision of his successor Guru Ram Das.

The temple was the location of a violent encounter between Sikh militants and the Indian military that preceded Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination on October 31, 1984. As Ronald Green elaborates in his chapter, the Sikh militants were led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who sought to purify

the tradition by emphasizing traditional Sikh practices, eschewing alcohol and other mind-altering substances, and supporting the implementation of the 1974 Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Created by the Akali Dal, a Sikh political party, the resolution called for free expression of Sikh identity and greater autonomy. The Sikhs intended the resolution to address numerous religious and political grievances, but it did not go so far as to call for the creation of Khalistan (Land of the Pure), a separate homeland for the Sikhs that had been an issue at the time of Partition. In response to Bhindranwale's stockpiling weapons in the Golden Temple, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi authorized the use of force as part of Operation Blue Star. Many Sikh militants, including Bhindranwale, and Indian soldiers died in the attack, which destroyed large sections of Sikhism's holiest site. In retaliation, two Sikh bodyguards shot her at close range as she walked through the garden of the prime minister's residence to an interview with the English actor Peter Ustinov. This attack unleashed the ferocious anti-Sikh violence that is a central event in the last section of *Deep River*.

Partition 1947

As Sikhism was growing during the early part of the Mughal period, so, too, were Britain's ever-greater commercial ties to the subcontinent. Over time, the British East India Company established a strong commercial presence in Mughal India,²² slowly building up an army comprised mainly of Indian soldiers, known as *sepoys*, who came from various religious and ethnic groups. Eventually, as the power of the Mughals waned, so did the power of their emperors, reduced to the status of pensioners of the company with little actual power.

In 1857, Hindu and Muslim *sepoys* became incensed by a rumor that the new cartridge of the Enfield rifle was being coated with the fat of cows and pigs. Since soldiers had to bite into the greased end of the cartridge to release the gunpowder, which they then poured into the rifle's muzzle, *sepoys* of both religions felt deeply offended by being put in the position of performing a sacrilegious act. For this and other reasons, large numbers rebelled against the company in the north, a momentous event of South Asian history remembered by many in India as the First War of Liberation but by the British as the Sepoy Rebellion.²³ The company eventually crushed this uprising, in part with the help of Sikh soldiers who had remained loyal to it.

In the aftermath, the British government passed the 1858 Government of India Act that placed India under direct governmental rule. It would remain so for a period of almost ninety years that is described as the Raj, or "rule,"

in which India served as the crown jewel of the British Empire. During this period, protests against British rule intensified under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who had spent some twenty years advocating on behalf of Indians living in South Africa, Jawaharlal Nehru (Indira Gandhi's father), Muhammad Ali Jinnah (leader of the Muslim League), B. R. Ambedkar (leader of the Dalits), Master Tara Singh (a Sikh leader), and many other deeply fascinating figures from the Indian independence movement.

Moreover, once it became clear that the British were leaving, the many factions who had fought for independence sought to secure their own, generally contradictory, visions of an independent country. For instance, Gandhi, Nehru, and the leadership of the Congress Party pushed hard for a unified India, recognizing that Hindus, possessing a vast majority, could shape independent India's development to their own liking. Many, but not all, Muslims sought an independent Muslim state, which their leader Jinnah called Pakistan (Land of the Pure). But different Hindu and Muslim groups engaged in impassioned disagreements, and many other voices advocated alternative visions of postindependence India, including the Sikhs, Dalits, communists, the so-called Princely States, and others.

Finally, on August 15, 1947, when the British "quit" India, the country was divided in two: the Dominion of India and the Dominion of Pakistan. Nehru, the leader of independent India, famously described this moment in his "Tryst with Destiny" speech that reads, in part:

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.²⁴

As noted above, this division, commonly referred to as "Partition," was a cataclysmic event in modern South Asian history that convulsed the region and whose effects still resonate in the present day. It would be difficult to overstate the trauma that accompanied the immense violence and human suffering that Partition unleashed on the Indian subcontinent, with estimates of six million Indians displaced and at least one million more—Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and others—losing their lives in a tidal wave of attacks and reprisals. Many critical

events from South Asian history that followed, including the assassination of Indira Gandhi, have antecedents in the poisoned soil of Partition.

Those events include the 1948 assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a member of a Hindu nationalist organization who, in his final address to the court titled “Why I killed Gandhi,” explained that he believed Gandhi was giving too much away to the Muslims. Unfortunately, Gandhi’s murder was just one in a long history of politically and religiously motivated assassinations on the subcontinent, a seemingly insatiable demon who stretched its ugly fingers forward into the 1980s, when Indira Gandhi, a Hindu, was gunned down in her garden. Afterward, her son Rajiv scattered her ashes over the Himalayas from an Indian transport plane flown at twenty-five thousand feet “between Gangotri, the source of the holy Ganges River, to Amarnath, a traditional shrine for Hindu pilgrims.”²⁵ In 1991, just seven years later, Rajiv Gandhi would also become the victim of assassination, killed by a suicide bomber from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in retaliation for his sending to Sri Lanka the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), which, claimed Sri Lankan Tamils, committed atrocities against their community.

Buddhism

The climax of *Deep River*, which occurs soon after Indira Gandhi’s assassination, takes place in Vārānaśī along the banks of the Ganga, which flows through the city and offers a fascinating and cacophonous mix of sacred and secular activities. Mark Williams (chapter 5) and other contributors note that it serves as the novel’s locus for the main characters’ spiritual reflection and insight. For instance, while Mitsuko immerses herself in its holy waters as described above, Kiguchi, a soldier who survived the Japanese army’s retreat during World War II through the Burmese jungles, stands beside the river and chants from Pure Land Buddhist texts. At the information session before the trip, he tells Enami and the others, “I lost a lot of friends during the war in the fighting in Burma, and I fought against some Indian soldiers myself, so I thought maybe I could request a memorial service on behalf of comrade and foe alike.”²⁶ Williams interprets this scene as follows:

But it is only as he himself stands beside the river that he senses that he can now “understand for the first time why Shakyamuni appeared in this land.” Here, for the first time, his journey assumes

a spiritual dimension, enabling him to intone the *Amida Sūtra*. This may be a passage that he had “committed to memory”; at this point, however, it comes to assume a new meaning for him, as the esoteric text comes to assume a more personal significance. More specifically, he is now in a position, for the first time in his life, to make sense of the scripture, so familiar and yet somehow so foreign to him, that “Good and Evil are as one”—to acknowledge the presence of the “seeds of salvation buried in every act of evil.” Only now do the words and actions of Gaston, the hospital volunteer with whom he had shared some fleeting exchanges as the two cared for the dying Tsukada, begin to take root in his heart; only now does the narrative hint at a newfound inner peace that will remain with him as he returns home.

The *Amida Sūtra* mentioned by Williams is a central text in the Japanese Pure Land Buddhist tradition, which is one of many Buddhist schools that trace their origins, in distinct ways, to Śākyamuni, the “Sage of the Śākya” clan, whose appearance in the world Kiguchi has understood, having approached the deep river and chanted the sūtra’s sacred words. Better known as the Buddha (the “Awakened One”), Śākyamuni lived in the Ganga region and would have crossed that same deep river a number of times, including on his last journey from Pātalipuṭra (modern-day Patna) to Vaiśālī (now an archaeological site in Bihar state), passing into final *nirvāṇa* at Kuśinagara, not far from Vārāṇasī, some 2,500 years ago. Before his death, he put forth a distinct vision of the path to liberation from what Mini Chandran describes as “the mortal coil of birth and rebirth.”

Śākyamuni was born in Lumbinī, located in modern-day Nepal, one of the Buddhist pilgrimage sites that the tour visits in the novel that also include Bodhi Gayā, the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment, Sarnath, where he delivered his first lecture, and Kuśinagara, noted above, where he died, entering *parinirvāṇa*, the final *nirvāṇa*. Given the name Siddhārtha (“One who Attains the Goal”), he belonged to Hinduism’s warrior caste and grew up leading a sheltered life of luxury and sensual indulgence inside his father’s palace. Venturing outside the cloistered palace walls, however, he witnessed “four passing sights”: a sick man, an aged man, a dead man, and a wandering ascetic who was “dead to the world.” The first three, which represent common sorts of human suffering, agitated his mind, while the fourth planted the seed that would lead him to abandon his life of luxury and seek out the cause and cure for the suffering he had witnessed.

Having left the palace in pursuit of such understanding, he studied with several teachers but was unable to discover the spiritual insights he sought; he then joined a group of five ascetics and practiced severe spiritual austerities. But he eventually abandoned that lifestyle too, taking up a “middle path” that moderated these extremes between sensual indulgence and asceticism. He then sat in meditation beneath the *bodhi* (wisdom) tree, seeking answers to his questions about the cause of human suffering and the nature of reality. Buddhist texts describe Siddhārtha being subjected to ferocious attacks by Māra (Death) and his minions; a central figure in Buddhism, one can understand Māra to represent our negative mental states—especially the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance—that lead to actions that generate bad karma. But Siddhārtha remained steadfast in his meditative state and experienced a spiritual awakening wherein he understood the cause of and the cure for human suffering.

This epiphany marked his transformation from Prince Siddhārtha to Buddha, the teacher who would, over the next forty-five years, travel in the region near Vārāṇasī and the Ganga, teaching all who would listen.²⁷ Soon after his enlightenment, he found his former ascetic companions in the deer park of Sarnath, located not far to the northeast of Vārāṇasī; he taught them about the nature of reality encapsulated in the so-called Four Noble Truths whose promulgation is remembered by Buddhists as the “First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.” The truths he expounded describe the cause of human suffering in *saṃsāra* and the path to freedom from it—the state of *nirvāṇa*. Before addressing those teachings, which Mark Dennis will use to interpret several themes taken up by our essayists, we will first examine the transmission of Buddhism outside of the subcontinent where its many schools, including Pure Land, took root.

Although Buddhism would thrive outside of India, it lost much of its vitality in the land of its birth. At the informational meeting before the trip, Enami explains this development to the group: “The caste system has, in any case, been a pillar that has supported Hinduism and supported Indian society, and as a result Buddhism has weakened there.”²⁸ He cites the figure of just some 3 million Indian Buddhists at a time when the population would have been about 750 million, surprising some of those going on the trip, whose “main purpose in traveling to India was to visit famous locales associated with Buddhism, and the impression was strong in their minds that India was the land of the Buddha, the land of Sakyamuni.”²⁹

From the Buddha’s initial teaching offered to his five ascetic companions, distinct schools developed as teachers and practitioners traveled south from

the northern part of the subcontinent to Sri Lanka and then eastward to the area occupied by the modern southeast Asian countries of Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. In contrast to these schools, commonly referred to as the Theravāda (School of the Elders), a distinct tradition moved north and east through Central Asia into China, and from China on to the Korean peninsula, and then to the Japanese archipelago. This latter tradition proclaimed itself the Mahāyāna, or “Great Vehicle,” ramifying into distinct schools and sub-schools, mostly in East Asia, including the Japanese Zen and Pure Land schools from the Kamakura era (1185–1333).

The Mahāyāna schools put forth the *bodhisattva* (wisdom being) as their ideal in contrast to the *arhat*, or “worthy one,” of the Theravāda traditions. The Mahāyāna schools imagined buddhas in addition to Śākyamuni, including the Buddha Lokeśvararāja, the teacher of the Bodhisattva Dharmākara, taken up below. Buddhists have used this multivalent term *bodhisattva* to describe the Buddha in his previous lives, kings and emperors who patronize the Dharma, and those who, having generated the mind of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), vow to postpone final liberation until all sentient beings have attained freedom from suffering. Among this third group, some embody key Buddhist principles, such as the compassion of Avalokiteśvara and the wisdom of Mahāsthāmaprāpta. Indeed, these two *bodhisattvas* often appear in Buddhist iconography seated on either side of the Buddha Amitābha, the central figure of Pure Land Buddhism, which provides the lens through which Dennis Hirota (chapter 14) reads *Deep River* but is also touched upon by Mark Williams, Zhange Ni (chapter 3), and other essayists.

Pure Land Buddhism

Hirota’s chapter draws from the work of Shinran (1173–1263), the founding figure of Jōdo Shinshū, one of the two main forms of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism.³⁰ Particularly popular in East Asia, the Pure Land schools trace their origins to a set of forty-eight vows made by the bodhisattva Dharmākara predicated on his attaining buddhahood. Those vows include the eighteenth vow, which guarantees that if he were to attain buddhahood, then all sentient beings who call out his name with sincerity just ten times would be reborn in his land. Upon making these vows, Dharmākara’s teacher, the Buddha Lokeśvararāja, prophesied that his student would eventually rule over a pure land called Sukhāvātī, the Pure Land of the West (literally, “Land Filled with Bliss”) as the Buddha Amitābha (Buddha of Infinite Light).

Indeed, having practiced the “perfections” of the *bodhisattva* for a very long time, Dharmākara realized his teacher’s prediction and, through that arduous practice, created a huge store of merit from which sentient beings can benefit simply by calling out his name. This practice, known in Japanese Pure Land traditions as the *nembutsu* (remembering the Buddha), involves reciting the simple mantra, *namu Amida Butsu* (I pay homage to the Buddha Amitābha). The goal of this and other Pure Land practices is to be reborn in Amitābha’s Pure Land of Sukhāvātī. Another such practice is to chant, as Kiguchi does near the Ganga, passages from the *Amida Sūtra* or one of the tradition’s other key texts.³¹ Since Pure Land practitioners rely on the stored pool of merit and salvific power of the Buddha Amitābha in these and other ways, their practice is oriented toward *tariki*, or “other power.” In contrast, scholars describe *jiriki*, or “self power,” as the central orientation of Zen Buddhism and other Japanese Buddhist schools since liberation is attained through the self-effort associated with seated meditation, following the ethical teachings, and so on. Despite such differences, these and other schools of Buddhism share a core set of ideas, touched upon above, about the nature of reality expressed in the Four Noble Truths and the other doctrines that Mark Dennis takes up in his (the anthology’s first) chapter.

Catholic Sensibilities

Faith in the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ represents the basic, energizing impulse behind the many as well as varied Roman Catholic contributions to culture, including literary art, Robert Barron declares:

Essential to the Catholic mind is what I would characterize as a keen sense of the prolongation of the Incarnation throughout space and time, an extension that is made possible through the mystery of the church. Catholics see God’s continued enfleshment in the oil, water, bread, imposed hands, wine, and salt of the sacraments; they appreciate it in the gestures, movements, incensations, and songs of the Liturgy; they savor it in the texts, arguments, and debates of the theologians; they sense it in the graced governance of popes and bishops; they love it in the struggles and missions of the saints; *they know it in the writings of Catholic poets* and in the cathedrals crafted by Catholic architects, artists, and workers. In short, all this discloses to the Catholic eye and mind the ongoing presence of the Word made flesh, namely Christ.³²

For our purposes, Barron's observations may be summarized thusly: Catholic aesthetics flow from belief in the Incarnation as a perpetual reality. Mary R. Reichardt concurs. In her view, Catholic artists find God everywhere:

The vital Catholic sense of Jesus dwelling with us on earth, animating and transforming everything that exists, and the consequent sacramentality of all creation, permeates Catholic literature. All things, events, and experiences "tell" of God and can lead us to God if we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear. By grounding their work in the concrete, material world, literary artists in the Catholic tradition can reveal the supernatural and convey spiritual truths. Thus literature, too, can serve as a sacramental, a vehicle of grace for those disposed to receive it.³³

If Catholic writers like Flannery O'Connor grasp literature in this way, and Elizabeth Cameron Galbraith (chapter 7) compares O'Connor and Endō in her chapter, then it is because they open their eyes wide and describe how life is awash with signs and wonders of God's graces and goodness.

Navigating Deep River accentuates how Endō models such incarnational aesthetics. We see it in the longing and loss at the heart of the five main characters in *Deep River*, for instance, and how every gesture they make is an outward sign or, better put, a sacramental, of their inner disposition. We witness it in the novel's imagery of the servant-God, taken from Isaiah 53, which recurs throughout Endō's novel, beginning with Mitsuko's chance discovery of the biblical text in a chapel and ending with the *alter Christus* Ōtsu struggling to empty himself by attending to the sick and the dying at the river of cleansing and rebirth. Furthermore, the divine sacrament is in the wider world, careening and then releasing itself through mountains, trees, and those rivers, like the Ganga, which are an extension of God and repeat the divine glory, disclosing the holy in the common. Catholicism's pansacramentalism floods *Deep River*, and our essayists appraise as well as probe the part that this particular overlay plays in Endō's lifelong artistic and spiritual quest to craft a version of Christianity that made most sense to him.

Mark Bosco and Christopher Wachal (chapter 6) note that the stress on sacramentalism that revitalized the Second Vatican Council (aka: Vatican II [1962–65]), which inspired Catholicism's wider sense of divine mercy as well as a fresh openness to non-Christian faith traditions, was not lost on Endō. *Deep River* denotes a convergence of Endō's long-standing theological challenges, they argue, and certainly the challenge of religious diversity or pluralism,

metaphorically situated in the confluence of the Ganga. Mark Williams and Darren J. N. Middleton also touch on Endō's Vatican II–inspired Christian inclusivism. Middleton contextualizes Endō's belief in God's ubiquitous grace within the context of post–Vatican II thought, for example, and he notes that such thinking displays pansacramental or, as he puts it, panentheistic considerations. If we speak of the Incarnation as a perpetual reality, realized through the mystery of the church across the ages, then the church may best be grasped as a pilgrim people; and, the church's evolution is the evolution of its parishioners, and it is a part of God's evolution, but the church does not and need not monopolize divine grace. Ōtsu's panentheistic God dwells in all things, all people, and in all religions.

Endō's Catholic sensibilities were never fixed; rather, they flowed like a river. Maeri Megumi (chapter 8) announces, for example, that in the autumn of his life, Endō seemed to be “catholic” with a small “c,” which is to say: Endō welcomed and incorporated a wide variety of ideas. Emi Mase-Hasegawa agrees (chapter 12). She reveals that Endō read and admired Protestant, as well as Catholic, writers, including the British theologian John Hick, who identified with Great Britain's United Reformed Church³⁴ until he joined the Quakers shortly before he passed in 2012. Hick's often-controversial belief that God has many names influenced Endō's imagination, as we discover, even if we also learn that our essayists agree to disagree on the theological appropriateness of Hick's theocentric model of global faiths.

Megumi sympathizes with theocentrism, though it must be said that her focus involves showing how Endō's small-c catholicism helped him succeed in pushing beyond his lifelong fascination with religious and national identity formation. *Deep River* delineates universal or basic human problems, she maintains, and in ways that seem meticulous and exigent and true, using India as a microcosm of our world. Put differently: Catholicism always appeared to have a hand at Endō's elbow, as it were, yet toward the end of his life it was a gentle touch rather than a firm push.

With Endō at his elbow, S. Brent Plate's writerly imagination also appears to move from Catholicism to small-c catholicism. In our volume's Afterword, for example, he reflects on his experiences walking the Camino de Santiago, a traditionally “Catholic” pilgrimage route in Spain that today attracts hundreds of thousands of Buddhists, atheists, secularists, Jews, and Christians from around the world. Plate reads *Deep River* through this lens, finding a deeply human quest for fulfillment in the act of traveling. This quest, he finds, has very little to do with doctrines, dogmas, or even beliefs. Instead, the cross-cultural activity of today's spiritual travels, whether to Santiago or the Ganga, reaffirms

the physicality of human bodies moving across landscapes—wayfarers sensing the sacred in the everyday. In the deep regions where human bodies, with their sore feet and blisters, meet the earth, sky, and waters of landscapes, a sacramental interreligious activity can be found.

Faith, Hope, Love, and Reading

“Faith and fiction alike deal with a greater mystery than either fully appreciates,” Paul Lakeland says, “and each has much more in common with the other than it suspects.”³⁵ Essayists in our volume agree. And we love *Deep River* for its attractively wide and compellingly varied approach to telling a tale that blends human meaning-seeking and divine transcendence in a way that avoids crude conflicts or reductionistic hostilities between the two. We hope that this novel, crafted in the seclusion born of Endō’s infirmity will, through our anthology, reach new readers, achieving communion and, of course, love.

We have divided the collection’s essays into two categories: historical and comparative approaches (chapters 1–5) and literary and theological approaches (chapters 6–14). As is evident from the material above, we have not offered a synopsis of each chapter, a common and useful technique we employed in the Introduction of *Approaching Silence*. Here, we have decided instead to cast the work as an imagined literary pilgrimage to but also within the deep river Ganga, wherein each essayist helps our readers *navigate* a portion of the novel. As such, the tidiness and linearity of our previous approach seemed incongruent with the fascinating intermingling of clamor and solemnity, raucousness and reverence the novel’s characters experience at the river’s sacred banks, described eloquently by Julian Crandall Hollick in his Foreword. To honor that strategy, we have briefly mentioned each contributor’s chapter above as a signpost pointing forward to a particular piece of the journey. Mark W. Dennis’s first chapter offers additional context by discussing those chapters using a Buddhist reading of the novel.

The volume is meant to serve not only as a bookend to our previous *Silence* anthology, but also as a testament to the enduring significance of this beautiful novel beloved by each of the contributors. While *Navigating Deep River* offers a wide range of interpretive approaches, it naturally is not exhaustive, including but a few contributions from Japan where scholarly interest remains robust. Indeed, recent Japanese-language scholarship addresses a wide range of topics, including the broader significance of the novel within Endō’s literary art.³⁶ These studies investigate how *Deep River* represents the “closing of the