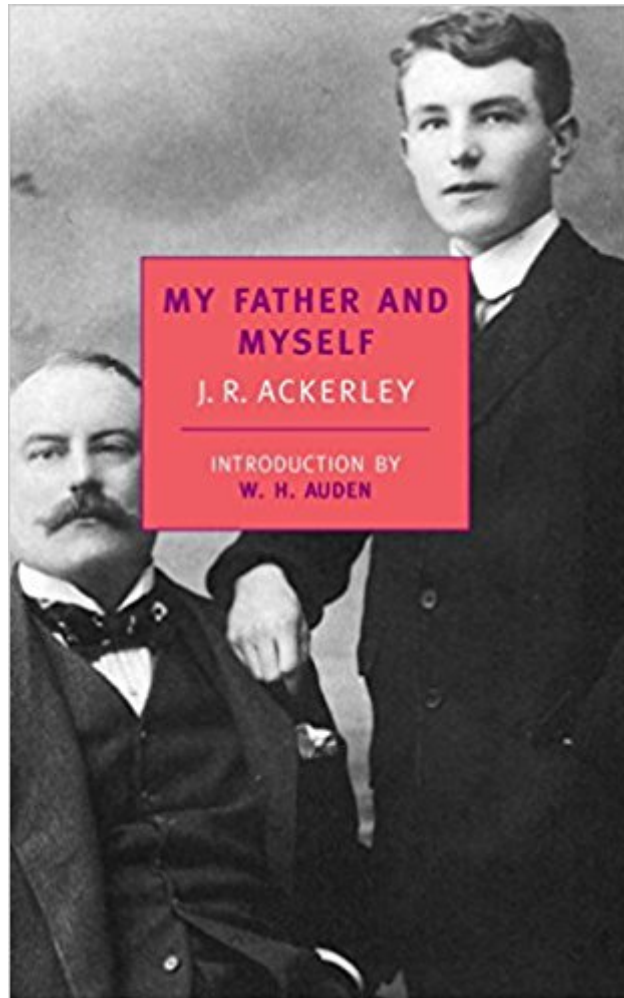




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My Father And Myself (Nyrb Classics S)



Synopsis

When his father died, J. R. Ackerley was shocked to discover that he had led a secret life. And after Ackerley himself died, he left a surprise of his own—this coolly considered, unsparingly honest account of his quest to find out the whole truth about the man who had always eluded him in life. But Ackerley's pursuit of his father is also an exploration of the self, making *My Father and Myself* a pioneering record, at once sexually explicit and emotionally charged, of life as a gay man. This witty, sorrowful, and beautiful book is a classic of twentieth-century memoir.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It makes today's memoirs look pallid. -- Emma Tennant, *British Vogue*
J.R. Ackerley's humor is unique; his truth is stranger--and funnier--than fiction. *My Father and Myself* is a cross between Dickens's *David Copperfield*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, and the new pornography. -- Donald Windham

J.R Ackerley (1896-1967) was for many years the literary editor of the BBC magazine *The Listener*. A respected mentor to such younger writers as Christopher Isherwood and W.H. Auden, he was also a longtime friend and literary associate of E.M. Forster. His works include three memoirs, *Hindoo Holiday*, *My Dog Tulip*, and *My Father and Myself*, and a novel, *We Think the World of You*.

My Father and Myself is a memoir published posthumously. In its pages Ackerley outlines his

suspicious about his father's life before marrying his mother. He begins by examining some photographs that document his father's friendship with a number of other handsome young men back at the turn of the twentieth century. As one who embraces his homosexuality (with hundreds of partners over several decades), Ackerley sets about to see if he can discover if his father was also gay. What makes him suspect? Well, for one, unlike many British men, his father seems not to possess the usual homophobia but rather indicates to Ackerley that he has the freedom to pursue whatever life he wishes. And Ackerley feels compelled to take his father's advice: "I was now on the sexual map and proud of my place on it. I did not care for the word homosexual or any label, but I stood among the men, not among the women. Girls I despised; vain, silly creatures, how could their smooth soft, bulbous bodies compare in attraction with the muscular beauty of men? Their place was the harem, from which they should never have been released; true love, equal and understanding love, occurred only between men. I saw myself therefore in the tradition of the Classic Greeks, surrounded and supported by all the famous homosexuals of history • one soon sorted them out and in time I became something of a publicist for the rights of that love that dare not speak its name" (154-5). His understanding of his condition seems to belong to its largely misogynist period, eh? But he is indeed living his life with a certain guilt-free abandon that was not to be widely duplicated until the 1970s. He also confesses to throwing aside certain individuals in search of his *ignis fatuus*. Yes, always, he is in search of his Ideal Friend, a perfect lover, one he never finds. The climax of the memoir may occur when Ackerley tells of searching out one of his father's old buddies, one who is now near death. After heckling the elderly man with the question of whether his father may have liked men, he finally shouts at Ackerley, "Oh, lord, you'll be the death of me! I think he did once say he'd had some sport with him [Count de Gallatin]. But my memory is like a saucer with the bottom out" (262). But Ackerley is still unsure. "May have simply isn't enough proof for him. The book is complete with an Appendix that dares to speak its name more graphically about Ackerley's sexual difficulties. In all, the memoir is one of those fascinating books one should read: witty, devilish, and yet sad, too. Though Ackerley acts freely for his context, a dangerously homophobic England, he never quite achieves an approximation of happiness. One hopes that gay men never again have to live in such gloom anywhere on this earth. It simply isn't fair.

It's a great story - an account of an unusual family. When I first heard of JR Ackerley I was impressed by his brave "outness" and had assumed that his parents' delayed marriage was a similarly brave defiance of social norms in a most constricting era. But I was wrong. Instead they secreted the reality behind a dull ordinariness. Here the author somehow makes amends.

The NYRB Classics series pretty much started out with a slew of reprints of the cult writer J.R. Ackerley, including his three memoirs (this, *MY DOG TULIP* and *HINDOO HOLIDAY*) and his one novel (*WE THINK THE WORLD OF YOU*). This, I would say, is easily his finest work. Ackerley's masterful reconstruction of his father's mysterious lovelife (comprising two unwed households and several unexplained longterm "friendships" with wealthy men) and his own conflicted sex life as a gay man in early twentieth-century London. Ackerley's tone always seems extremely honest, and while the narrative never comes to any absolute conclusions about Ackerley's father you're left convinced that these omissions and gaps are meaningful in and of themselves. This is as about a fine and interesting a memoir as I can imagine.

With the author so acclaimed in some circles, I was really surprised that this book is so bad on so many levels. The first requirement of a memoir is that the writer remembers. All too often, Ackerley says that he can not recall key information about a scene that he has set in writing. Even worse, he often times also confesses to not understanding what he meant by his own diaries and notes to which he referred, and therefore excuses his gaps in certain information. The book is poorly written and poorly organized. He fills far too many pages with extraneous information about other familial information that has little or no bearing on his supposed inquiry into his father, and Ackerley's relationship with him. One gets quite tired hearing about his general lack of a love life, and his psychological - pathological requirements in the "Ideal Friend". The final guffaw comes when you read the details of his obsessional love with his dog Tulip, to whom the book is dedicated. If there is any doubt that you had about Ackerley's psychological state as you tread through this book that promised so much and delivered so little, it is more than confirmed when you read the confessional, labeled "Appendix".

A must read for any student. In the top 100 list of best books ever written. Excellent value for money. Fast shipping and wonderful customer service. Thank you!

The writing is very superior to most autobiographical works. Ackerley did not follow his father's footsteps and enter the business world but followed his own siren and became a poet, writer and editor (for the BBC). He is amongst my favorite authors. Animal lovers, especially dog lovers, should pick up "My Dog Tulip," a classic and now, possibly, has a cult following.

I read this in my effort to learn how to write memoir, recommended by an instructor. Ackerley learns a good deal about himself from writing his memoir and the writing is excellent.

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