

**Tania Zulli, 2014.**  
***Come leggere A Passage to India***  
**(Chieti: Solfanelli)**

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The monograph by Tania Zulli, published by Solfanelli, is part of the prestigious series *Rasselas* edited by Francesco Marroni. Conscious of the complexity of the matter, but nonetheless equipped with a solid scholarly background and a firm resolution to provide a well-reasoned contribution to Forsterian studies, the work of Zulli finds its worthy place among recent essays presenting a complementary reading of *A Passage to India*, such as Fillion (2010), Goldhill (2011) and Leggatt (2012).

A significant aspect in this study is that Zulli does not adopt a fixed model to analyse Forster's novel. Rather, she emphasizes from the beginning and in every phase of her thorough analysis the complex and multi-faceted nature of the novel, which needs to be approached by scholars with a broad range of interpretative tools. As the author claims,

Qualsiasi approccio teorico o metodo di analisi che si voglia applicare in maniera totalizzante finisce in definitiva per porre limitazioni al vasto orizzonte delle possibili interpretazioni, generando linearizzazioni che non giovano ad una comprensione della narrativa stessa. Questo è particolarmente vero per *A Passage to India*, che oppone alla linearità della trama un'articolazione simbolica che è parte attiva e produttiva dell'opera (68).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Any theoretical approach or method of analysis that is to be applied in a totalizing way ultimately ends up limiting the broad horizons of possible interpretations, and generates simplifications that do not benefit the understanding of the narrative itself. This is particularly true for *A Passage to India*, which juxtaposes the linearity of the plot to a symbolic articulation which is an active and productive part of the work" (my translation).

The study investigates a series of aspects concerning *A Passage to India* which have already been under scrutiny by previous academic scholarship but that are nowadays giving birth to new, reasoned considerations.

The notion of *passage* is particularly noteworthy as Zulli traces out its multiple meanings. While in Whitman's verses the reference to a *Passage to India* celebrates the physical and metaphorical conciliation between Asia and Europe which occurred after the construction of the Suez Channel, the Forsterian way to interpret this passage, on the contrary, generates breach and inability to communicate and to bridge cultural and social gaps. The impossibility to build bridges among clashing cultures is witnessed in the final part of the novel with the irreconcilable friendship between the two male characters of Aziz and Fielding, which, in a broader sense, results in the absence of a partnership between the British Empire and its colonies and – more extensively – between the Eastern and the Western worlds. The *passage* testifies also to the crisis of an age where the role of both the novel and the novelist seem to have lost their sense. Simultaneously, the form and the content of the writing process are in an awkward position that seems to oppose the trends of a post-modern and fast-changing reality. Unlike other early-20<sup>th</sup>-century artists, Forster does not indulge in the framework and in the form of the story; rather, he privileges the passions and feelings of the single character which burst and evolve during the narration, locating the human mind and its inner and undiscovered places at the centre of his writing.

In this sense, Zulli paints a vivid portrait of Forster as an author who does not seek a totalizing reality with unambiguous answers. On the contrary, he is deeply aware of the loss of sense and of the instability of the times which led him to engage on a tumultuous mission in search of ideological compromises and, ultimately, unstable and incomplete pictures of an impenetrable reality. The result of such engagement can be a contorted muddle, a confounding echo or an annihilating but still meaningful silence.

In the light of such conclusions and departing from Marroni's (2013) assumptions, Zulli proposes a dynamic critical analysis for a deeper understanding of the Forsterian prose. Taking into consideration the fluidity and precariousness of reality, such an approach does not offer a complete picture or definite solutions, but rather renders it possible to grasp the complexity of both the work of art and the reality in which it is embedded. The final message is that the plurality of the real world does not tend to ultimate

harmonisation; nonetheless, it presents numerous possibilities for building fruitful creative perspectives. As Zulli puts it, “Nel contesto di un’analisi critica dinamica, la “precarietà” interpretativa assume un valore positivo e ogni lettura, nel suo non darsi come definitiva, arricchisce il testo di nuovi orizzonti possibili” (70).<sup>8</sup>

Zulli concludes her study by emphasizing the open and extensive nature of the novel, which is always prone to expansion and re-interpretation, as every literary masterpiece. *A Passage to India* is a novel of ideas, visions, and hypotheses, and as such it should be investigated by a critical and attentive scholar. In this sense, the meticulous study conducted by Zulli seems to pay a remarkable tribute to the complex and multi-layered Forsterian prose, adding a considerable piece of academic research to the always-developing studies centred on this Victorian writer who loved to define himself Anti-Victorian *par excellence*.

**Damon Galgut, 2014.**  
*Arctic Summer*  
**(Cape Town: Umuzi, Penguin Random House)**

**Christo Snyman**

Biography is an interesting literary genre as an account of someone’s life written by someone else. It purports to present a kind of truth. In all likelihood it will present facts about the subject’s education, his work life, and how he experienced relationships. It could also go further by attempting to make sense of these facts. It could, for example, provide the reader with an analysis of the subject’s personality. But the real interest in biography is what it reveals

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<sup>8</sup> “In the context of a dynamic critical analysis, the interpretative ‘precariousness’ has a positive value and every reading, in its non-definitive characterization, enriches the text with new possible horizons” (my translation).