

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).⁸

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

⁸ “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).

about the audience for which it is written. Consequently, a biography of a famous gay author, written at a time when homosexuality is considered taboo (and for an audience which supports the taboo), would be very different from one written for a more enlightened readership.

The writer of biographical fiction has greater freedom than a biographer because the objective of presenting “the truth” is no longer the main focus. Rather, these novels construct the personality of the subject. The author can use the facts to present a particular interpretation of the subject’s life. Damon Galgut’s novel *Arctic Summer* is an affectionate, reverential tale of Forster’s life from about 1912 to 1921. Divided into seven chapters with short, clear titles, it makes the reading experience enjoyable and interesting. The titles function as markers which help the reader clearly identify the young Morgan’s preoccupations at certain times within this eleven-year period, which would culminate in the writing of *A Passage to India*. Although Morgan meets several persons in *Arctic Summer*, I found his encounters with Captain Kenneth Searight and Edward Carpenter the most relevant. They reveal much about how Morgan sees himself because Searight and Carpenter, like Forster, are Englishmen. Morgan’s Englishness inhibits him in the course of the story. Searight and Carpenter appear as positive early role models for gay men while Morgan fails dismally.

The first chapter, “Searight”, recounts Forster’s journey on the SS City of Birmingham to India. On board he meets Searight—“a handsome fellow with backswept golden hair and numerous white teeth” (2). At this time, Morgan is seeking some respite from his fellow passengers, and even from his three travel companions who are his good friends. When he sees Searight act kindly towards the single Indian passenger on board (which is completely unlike the behaviour of the other passengers), he finds it touching. He believes the two of them may have more in common than the others. This is because Morgan himself is upset by the “casual vilenesses, flung out in airy asides at the dining table” (3), so Searight proves to be a natural ally in an otherwise hostile, unwelcoming environment. Although Searight is a military type, he is unlike the other passengers, and soon Morgan discovers that Searight is also attracted to men and boys. He is described as having a poetic, romantic soul under the “bluff military exterior” (14).

There is a powerful image at the start of the chapter which captures, quite brilliantly, Morgan’s sense of isolation. It is a description of Morgan observing the marine life in the sea. He sees:

[...] tracts of scarlet billowing in the swell, which he was told were fish spawn, waiting to hatch. Life that wasn't human life, maturing and breaking out and expending itself, in a medium that wasn't human either.

He was stuck with the humans, however. [...] The ship was like a tiny piece of England (2).

Morgan's isolation will resurface in the book, time and again.

In Chapter 4, Morgan meets Edward Carpenter, an English philosopher and an early activist for gay rights. This is made possible as Morgan and his mother, Lily, take a trip to Harrogate, owing to her rheumatism. Harrogate is not far from where Carpenter lives with his partner, George Merrill. Like Morgan, Carpenter has been to India. And like Morgan, he was more interested in the people, the culture, and the ordinary workers than in the conventional English notions of that time: colonies and conquest. As with Searight, Morgan has found a fellow Englishman who is on the periphery of society. Morgan is taken aback by what he sees as Carpenter's revolutionary lifestyle. In Carpenter's world, the beauty of the naked human body is celebrated, and people of different classes may fraternize without fear of prejudice or judgment. But Morgan also comes to the realization that while such a lifestyle seems absurd and frightening, it also springs from human kindness: "kindness of a human and immediate sort. It was surprising how very radical this simple emotion could be" (154). There is a sympathetic moment in the story for Morgan, who always struggles to comprehend, let alone actually enjoy, his own sexuality. Carpenter's lover, George, touches him on the small of his back. Morgan finds this to be both suggestive and subversive and is enthralled and out of his depth as a result.

Searight and Carpenter are both excellent foils which throw into relief the character of Morgan. Both seem to have made their mark on the world. And while Forster is undoubtedly a great English novelist and writer of the 20th century, a man who has left his mark on English letters, Galgut's Morgan seems only to struggle through the pages of *Arctic Summer* in a catalogue of embarrassing situations, some of which border on black humour. He is condemned to live with his mother in an environment of English prissiness. He is short-changed by Masood's distance and lack of warmth when he goes to visit him in India. He loses Mohammed to death—the only man with whom he seems to have any kind of meaningful relationship. (Like

Merrill, Mohammed is a working-class man.) And the reader of *Arctic Summer* is condemned to see Morgan as he sees himself: either as an outsider in Egypt or India—a white Englishman in love with a man of another race in an age when homosexual acts were punishable by law; or as a rather poor example of a worldly Edwardian gentleman when compared against Searight and Carpenter. From Morgan's point of view, these two men both flourished in their respective careers—Searight in the military, and Carpenter as the champion of a revolutionary way of life and unafraid of what others think.

In his role as the biographical novelist Galgut had a difficult task. In an interview he says that many incidents from Forster's life are known only in a sparse way. He had to read several sources and interpret them to fill in the gaps. Morgan's encounter with Searight is based on a brief record in Forster's diary. The record, in fact, is nothing more than a reference to an amazing conversation. This is where Galgut had to interpret what could lie behind such short, cryptic descriptions by using his imagination, and basing his decisions on the likelihood of the events so "revealed" as actually having taken place. Galgut faced a similar challenge in recreating the meetings between Forster and the Greek poet Cavafy in Alexandria, as well as in revealing what happened at the Barabar caves. Morgan visits the caves on his own after what may have been a failed attempt at intimacy with Masood while in India. In the interview, Galgut refers to the task of having to work as a novelist to create the whole emotional journey undergone by Morgan while blending it with established facts.

Galgut's novel gives a sense of the claustrophobia that Forster may have experienced during this stage of his life. His challenges seem to be overwhelming and there is much that counts against him, including the memory of his mother's antagonism when referring to his late father and intimating that he was "fey and weak and unmasculine" (144). We are reminded that we live in a modern, enlightened society. Perhaps an overall challenge is that the novel only examines a period of eleven years. Perhaps a future biographical novel about the whole of Forster's life would be more heroic and life affirming. But the facts of Forster's life will always play an important role in the construction of a new narrative. Whether the next *Arctic Summer* will be much different will depend on what the novelist can unearth and interpret.

Arctic Summer will interest readers who enjoy the works of Forster. It will appeal to people of a literary bent or those who enjoy biographies of writers. No doubt they will be sympathetic to Morgan's plight. The hypocritical

homophobic milieu presented here will highlight the progress made by modern society in the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity, and evoke sympathy for the isolation and mockery that gay men have had to endure in times gone by.

Ruby Roy, 2015.
A Comparative Study of E. M. Forster's Maurice
(New Delhi: Gennext Publications)

Nikolai Endres

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According to the cover, "This book attempts to comprehensively and objectively study, survey, evaluate thematic patterns in *Maurice* in comparison with other novels of E. M. Forster. Thus a deliberate design emerges which proves some of Forster's viewpoints regarding Love, Life, and role of artists." Ruby Roy holds a Bachelor's and Master's in English from the University of Delhi and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. on "Ironic Vision of Christopher Marlowe" from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University in Agra.

Roy begins by asking why, if Forster was dissatisfied with the manuscript of *Maurice*, did he not destroy it? Her answer: Forster's desire for posthumous fame. Roy next considers two reasons for Forster's failure to write more novels after *A Passage to India*: his nostalgia for a lost Edwardian world before the Great War and the psychological pressures of homosexuality. Pursuing sexual repression, Roy compares *Maurice* to "Goldie," Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, Forster's friend from college, and points to the contradictory exhortation by all of *Maurice*'s family members and mentors to imitate his father, whom he never knew (and, as I will note below, whose sexuality remains ambivalent). She then surveys Forster's works for similarities, but there is little originality or depth there. In fact, it is unclear what this little volume attempts to accomplish.