
Morgan among the Minorities: Damon Galgut's Arctic Summer as Biofiction

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**MORGAN AMONG THE MINORITIES: DAMON GALGUT'S
ARCTIC SUMMER AS BIOFICTION**

Mémoire présenté par **Mignon Eloïse**
en vue de l'obtention du grade de
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INTRODUCTION

DAMON GALGUT'S HOMOSEXUALITY AND *ARCTIC SUMMER*

The social acceptance of gay love is still an ongoing battle in today's world. Homosexual individuals still remain subjected to prejudices worldwide and can even, in certain countries, be sentenced to death. The second half of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a slow, and geographically uneven, *process* of sexual liberation with the implementation of gay rights and with the emergence of "queer theories". Famous representative of that field such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to cite only a few, started deconstructing the notion of *gender* and, by the same token, the ruling heteronormative identity politics. Since then, whether it be in literature, cinema, or other fields, artists across the world have increasingly and more and more publicly celebrated their gay identity through their works, depending on whether they were more or less militant in their representation of same-sex love.

This issue of homosexuality pervades the career of the South African writer Damon Galgut, who has overtly claimed his homosexuality. Yet, Galgut was born in Pretoria in 1963 within the punitive system of apartheid. This political context was thus particularly hostile as this system tightly controlled sexual behaviours, banning interracial but also homosexual relationships. When he expressed himself publicly on these matters, Galgut confessed his belief that apartheid relied strongly on a "male mythology"¹, inevitably leading him to be marginalized. He is convinced that this sexual identity, this sense of being an "outsider", significantly affected his vision of the world:

I wouldn't change my sexuality for anything because to be gay immediately puts you in the position of the outsider, and I like that position [...] If I had been a straight man born into society, there would have been a lot of things that would ne-

¹ Gevisser, Mark and Edwin Cameron. *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. New-York and London: Routledge, 238.

ver have occurred to me, that I would never have questioned. It would never have occurred to me to resist.²

According to Galgut, sexuality thus seems to represent an essential aspect of identity, and may even give rise to what one could call an “ethos of resistance”. Although one should not make unjustified generalities about the impact of this sensibility on the writer’s career, one can still assume, if only on the strengths of declarations such as the one above, that his sense of being as an “outsider” has come into play in his literary exploration of psychological alienation³ and of political resistance.

All through his career, Damon Galgut has attested his relative autonomy from the social pressures exerted on South African authors. Indeed, different critics such as Sofia Kostelac have recognised his ambivalent position within South African literature, reminding us that his books are inscribed in the South African context and still refuse to answer simplistically the perceived dictates of the South African literary tradition. Starting from his first novel *A Sinless Season* (1982) until the publication of *The Impostor* (2008), the reader can trace the evolution of political sensitivities in his country. Galgut even insisted in an interview that “all literature is a record of its time”⁴. Still, to grasp Galgut’s view, it is important to mention that he refuses to think of literature as a mimetic mirror to reality. His books rather focus on the impact of politics and history on identity and on private relationships. If we look at his novels which cover both the apartheid and post-apartheid era, we notice Galgut’s recurring concern with the mechanisms of the human psyche. He does not hesitate to reveal the moral ambiguities of his characters and invite political as well as philosophical interpretations.

Having said that, one cannot consider Galgut’s works to be informed by any literary “gay activism”, at least not before the publication of *Arctic Summer*. Although his no-

² Galgut is cited by Sofia Lucy Kostelac. See Kostelac, Sofia Lucy. “Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature”, PhD. Diss., University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2014, 11.

³ Tim Trengove Jones argues that Galgut demonstrates a particular sensibility to “psychic dislocation” which, according to him, stems from his “distinctively gay presence in the world”. See Trengove Jones, Tim. “Gay Times: Reading Literature in English in South Africa Today”, *English Studies in Africa* 51, no. 1 (2008): 106.

⁴ Galgut is cited by Kostelac. See Kostelac, “Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature”, 19.

vels are marked by the recurring presence of precarious homoerotic friendships, the theme of homosexual desire had until then always remained quite implicit and elusive. For example, in the novels *The Good Doctor*, *The Impostor* or *In a Strange Room*, the characters' alienation is linked to sexuality but this link remains quite unresolved within the narrative. Kostelac even mentions the accusations made against Galgut's novel *In a Strange Room*, in regards to his allegedly "conservative" representation of homosexuality:

His tendency to leave his characters in states of suspended desire, unable to surmount their sexual reticence, is at odds with the progress (sic) narratives of national and sexual identity, which have [...] become co-mingled in the reception of post-apartheid writing and thus rendered Galgut's place within a genealogy of gay South African authorship an especially problematic and precarious one.⁵

Interestingly, just as the author's sexual identity contributed to his marginal stance under apartheid, thus authorizing a form of subversiveness on his part, by contrast that same strategic position afterwards came to be regarded as a source of political conservatism.

In fact, to understand better the context in which these critiques were inscribed, it seems important to mention the symbolic value that gay literature has been invested with in post-apartheid South Africa, commonly called the "Rainbow Nation". This issue is insightfully evoked by the scholar Tim Trengove Jones, who writes that:

The principle call to culture criticism within South Africa is how to effectively understand some of the key constituents within this after-life. The continuing drama of inclusion and exclusion – most notably manifested in the recent 'xenophobic' violence, a sorry representation of that 'apartheid' dehumanisation of both perpetrator and 'victim,' a brutalisation occurring yet again at the point of intersection between race and economics – provides the most striking persistence of that troubling battle between power and identity which we have carried over from apartheid. Nowhere is this battle more usefully and problematically dramatized than in controversies surrounding the rights of LGBTI citizens. Our own (post)-modernity (or our transitional angst) is most acutely embodied in – borrowing from Weeks once more – 'the way in which worries about

⁵ Kostelac, "Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature", 177.

changing sexual behaviour and gender and sexual identities have become the explicit focus for debates about the current shape and desirable future of society'.⁶

Similarly, Sofia Kostelac also interestingly refers to the “symbolic freight of the ‘coming out’ narrative in the post-apartheid national imaginary”.⁷ To illustrate this point, one can cite the famous South African writers Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee, who are certainly representative of that tendency to interweave sexuality and politics. In their respective novels published at the end of the nineties, *The House Gun* (1998) and *Disgrace* (1999), the issue of gay sexuality plays an important role in the representation of post-apartheid South Africa. Brenna M. Munro, in her work *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come* (2012), interestingly points out how the characters’ gay identity in these novels is given an allegorical meaning:

These books appropriate and transform the coming-out narrative into family drama in order to talk about the possibilities and failures of the national transition. The sexuality of these younger characters thus stands for national transformation— and the productive disorientation of whiteness.⁸

Obviously, Galgut’s narrative is different as the story does not take place in South Africa. Still, keeping this context in mind, one shall see how Galgut’s investigation of Forster’s homosexuality may change, or rather *complicate*, the position that the former occupies within South African gay literature.

To some extent, *Arctic Summer* stands out in the corpus it forms with the author’s previous novels as homosexual love here becomes the central focus. The biographical novel crafted by Galgut dignifies Forster’s homosexual love stories without any taboo, explicitly describing the secret intercourse of the protagonist in a way Forster could not have done at the time. Furthermore, it is particularly striking to note how this literary work — which is Galgut’s latest novel to date— echoes in a more direct way his homosexual “ethos of resistance”. Though resisting any utopian representation of the theme, the novel takes on an “oppositional” political dimension through the representation of Morgan’s

⁶ Trengove Jones, “Gay Times: Reading Literature in English in South Africa Today”, 45.

⁷ Kostelac, “Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature”, 183.

⁸ Munro, Brenna M. *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, 189.

empowering pursuit of sexual freedom, which develops against the heteronormative morals of his Edwardian society. In that connection, one can mention Kostelac's opinion, developed to salvage the presentation of homosexual love in *In a Strange Room*, that Galgut is able to create a personal and "quiet redemption"⁹ for his marginalized homosexual characters. The analysis below will show how Galgut elaborates on this quest for personal liberation in *Arctic Summer*, going much further in the exploration of homosexuality and expressing more clearly a potential epiphany for the character through different strategies.

THE PARADOX OF *ARCTIC SUMMER*'S RECEPTION

In addition to the goals evoked previously, undertaking the analysis of *Arctic Summer* may also enhance the relevance of a work which remains surprisingly unacknowledged by both the local and the international academic spheres. The reception of Galgut's novel is indeed puzzling and paradoxical. On the one hand, this publication increased significantly the author's international popularity, as it granted him the Barry Ronge Fiction Prize, the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, as well as the Folio Prize and the award for the "Book of the Year" at the Tata Literature Live Festival in India.¹⁰ It also significantly aroused the interest of the British and American press, which did not hesitate to celebrate the quality of Galgut's prose. *The Guardian*, for example, acknowledged the thorough research made by Galgut on Forster's inner life, defining the novel as being a "remarkable lyrical tribute"¹¹ to the author. One may also mention the BBC and *The Economist* magazine, which featured interviews with Galgut about his *Arctic Summer*, in hopes of understanding the sources of his fascinating empathy for Forster.

On the other hand, many book reviews expressed a relatively reductive view concerning the creative dimension of the work. *The New York Times*, among others, deplo-

⁹ Kostelac, "Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature", 189.

¹⁰ Warren, Crystal. "South Africa and Zimbabwe", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 50, no. 4 (2015): 567.

¹¹ Siddhartha, Deb. "Arctic Summer by Damon Galgut - review". *The Guardian* 28 February 2014. <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/28/arctic-summer-damon-galgut-review>> Accessed 15 September 2020.

red an exaggerated “adherence to fact and reality”¹². In addition, the novel has been subsequently rather ignored within the academic sphere as very few scholars have analyzed Galgut’s biographical novel, especially since these few analyses remain relatively brief in view of the numerous issues covered by this novel¹³. This point echoes one of Sofia Kostelac’s observations in her comprehensive study of Galgut’s reception, to the effect that the latter remains a “relatively marginal figure”¹⁴ within South African literary studies, let alone in international, literary studies. She interestingly underlined Galgut’s “tumultuous and uneven career history”¹⁵, explaining that:

the vagaries of Galgut’s critical reception — which have seen him, by turns, celebrated, ignored and even explicitly discounted as a noteworthy South African author — make his career an especially apposite case study through which to examine the shifting standards of cultural legitimacy which have been set for local writers over the past three decades.¹⁶

Although one can only speculate about the cultural expectations of the South African readership regarding *Arctic Summer*, one can safely argue that Galgut experiments a new terrain through his biofiction, definitely moving away from the South African context as he writes a fictional biography of the British author E.M. Forster. In fact, both the genre and the subject matter of this novel carry Galgut’s readership in a totally new direction. This element might thus partly account for the limited academic interest earned by the book so far.

Nevertheless, looking closely at the issues covered by *Arctic Summer*, we shall see that Galgut subtly revitalizes certain debates of his time and place, as he engages with the

¹² Mallon, Thomas. “A Closet with A View”. *The New York Times Book Review* 28 September 2014 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/28/books/review/damon-galguts-arctic-summer.html>> Accessed 15 September 2020.

¹³ The articles I could find access to are Celia Cruz-Rus’s essay entitled “Damon Galgut’s *Arctic Summer* (2014) in Context” (2017), Mathilda Slabbert’s article “Forming ‘Affective Communities’ and Narrative Forms of Affection: Damon Galgut’s *Arctic Summer*” (2019) and Howard J. Booth’s recent essay “Allegory and Interpretation: E. M. Forster’s *Maurice* and Damon Galgut’s *Arctic Summer* (2020)” (2020).

¹⁴ Kostelac, “Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature”, 2.

¹⁵ Kostelac, “Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature”, 1.

¹⁶ Kostelac, “Damon Galgut and the Critical Reception of South African Literature”, 3.

themes of sexuality, oppression, racism and class divisions. This study thus aims to enhance the status of Galgut's work, by critically engaging with the scarce academic debate and the few press reviews. I shall demonstrate that the biographical and the fictional dimensions folded in the hybrid term "biofiction" are not "mutually exclusive" as Martin Middeke puts it¹⁷, so that this portrait can have an aesthetic and political value beyond its biographical dimension.

GALGUT'S CHOICE OF SUBJECT MATTER: E. M. FORSTER

Many scholars interested in the career of the British novelist E.M. Forster have pondered the long intermission which followed the publication of his fourth novel *Howards End* in 1910. This relative absence on the literary scene lasted until 1924, the year *A Passage to India* was finally published. Surprisingly, this novel which would grant Forster a prestigious position in the history of English literature, was also to be the last one he would ever publish. In his fictional biography entitled *Arctic Summer* (2014), titled thus in reference to Forster's eponymous unfinished novel, it is precisely this period of withdrawal, which preceded Forster's greatest literary success, that the South African Damon Galgut attempts to elucidate. Entering the depths of Forster's consciousness, the author demonstrates that this moment in Forster's life was particularly transforming, culminating with the writing of his *Passage to India*.

The aim of this thesis will be to define the singularity of Galgut's biofiction, taking into account the rich panorama of literary critiques and biographies already existing on the historical figure of Forster —although no straight "comparison" will be established as this would be outside the scope of this work. I shall look at the themes and form chosen by Galgut in order to shed light on the symbolic and political power of his portrait. I will investigate how the genre commonly called "biofiction" allowed the novelist to dramatize through fiction the personal evolution of the historical figure E.M. Forster. The author could freely select and connect some problematic aspects of E.M. Forster's identity: his traditional bourgeois values, his repressed homosexuality and his ideal of *cross-class* and

¹⁷ Middeke, Martin. "Introduction" from *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (1999). In *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. Edited by Michael Lackey. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 315.

interracial homoerotic friendship. He crafted a biofiction that somehow takes the form of a bildungsroman, or to be more precise a “Künstlerroman”, recounting Morgan’s pursuit of physical and spiritual fulfillment —in both life and art— against the inhibiting milieu he came from. Still, one will see that Galgut is mainly concerned with staging the contradictions and irresoluteness of Forster’s persona, who is always torn between freedom and resignation, self-expression and self-censorship. Therefore, although *Arctic Summer* depicts Morgan’s empowering “passage” to experience in bodily and spiritual terms, as epitomized by the final completion of his *Passage to India*, the portrait nonetheless remains essentially unresolved and ambivalent.

STRUCTURE OF THE ANALYSIS

The first chapter of this analysis will provide a summary of the novel. Then, in the second chapter, I will contextualize Galgut’s representation of Forster within the larger biographical tradition which has re-read the latter’s work and life through different angles, including homosexuality. In this larger framework, I will attempt to define the notion of “biofiction” so that one may gain insight into the unicity of Galgut’s portrait. We shall see that the author felt *free* to negotiate between numerous eclectic sources, by Forster and on Forster, and to make them interact creatively. The third chapter will be complementary to the second as I will examine the implications of Galgut’s narrative techniques. Then, I will discuss the theme of cross-class and interracial homoerotic friendship, which enables the author to reclaim, from a postcolonial angle, Forster’s “quiet resistance” in his repressive context. In the last part of the analysis, I shall look at the novel’s intertextuality and self-reflexivity, which also contribute to the process of fictionalization characterizing the whole biography. This last chapter will focus on Galgut’s references to Forster’s *A Passage to India*, which make possible a re-interpretation of that novel.

CHAPTER 1

Synopsis of Arctic Summer

1. SYNOPSIS OF *ARCTIC SUMMER*

The novel starts with Morgan's first trip to India in 1912 while he was 33 and still a virgin. The reader is directly confronted with Morgan's sense of insecurity and immaturity as he laments his lack of experience in comparison to the fascinating Kenneth Searight, a rather dashing young officer of the British army whom he meets on his travels. The latter talks openly to Morgan about his bouts of homosexual intercourse with younger men so that the writer ponders his own repressed sexual fantasies. So far, Morgan has never dared to act upon his desires and he worries that he might never be able to do so. Searight, whose presence exudes a "tinge of promise" that somehow belies his "air of impeccable politeness" (3)¹⁸, exemplifies the possibility of sexual freedom, an attitude which seems morally questionable to Morgan's psyche but which is also, paradoxically, inspiring and exciting.

The story is chronologically fragmented. Different flashbacks tell us about Morgan's background and the reasons for his departure to India. Morgan comes from middle-class English society, which is highly coded. Politeness and propriety govern his world, a "deadly properness" (42) which seems to suffocate him. This hypocritical thriving on tea parties and "buttoned-down conversations" bores him and plunges him into a pit of silence and timidity. Since his father died when he was 2, he has been living as his mother's only son and almost never left her. Yet, the maternal relationship is problematic because Morgan feels paralyzed by his mother's gaze, as she keeps lamenting that he does not have a "strong character" (76). Morgan's resulting sense of inadequacy prevents him from confessing to her about his homosexual desires. The reader actually understands that Morgan even struggles to formulate this "secret" in his own mind to the extent that he prefers to label himself as a "minorite"¹⁹.

¹⁸ Galgut, Damon. *Arctic Summer*. New-York: Europa Editions, 2014. All references to the novel are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.

¹⁹ This specific appellation as it is written in the text seems to be coined by Galgut since it is not present in the other biographies. Still, it clearly derives from the expression of "minority" that Forster used in his private diary. See Moffat, Wendy. *E.M. Forster: A New Life*. London, New-York and Berlin: Bloomsbury, 2011, 70. In the second chapter, I will come back to the implications of that term as they are interpreted by Moffat. At the end of the analysis, I will also comment on the complex political and ideological overtones of that expression as they are subsequently emphasized by Galgut in his turn.

At the beginning of the novel, Galgut's Forster is not completely voiceless as he is publicly acknowledged as a novelist. Still, writing fiction is paradoxically both liberating and imprisoning for him. On the one hand, it has therapeutic benefits as it helps Morgan to figure out his "inner conflicts" and his position in the world. On the other hand, he seems aware that certain aspects of his nature cannot be revealed publicly so that he must control his creative impulses, remaining cautious and even cryptic in his representation of the personal aspirations of his characters. Furthermore, his imagination is limited since he is constrained to write about the forces ruling his milieu: the institution of heterosexual marriage, tradition, money and power.

It is in this context, in which Morgan feels like an outsider in both his life and art, that he encounters Masood. This Muslim Indian directly recognises in Morgan's personality a particular power, or what he calls an "Oriental sensibility" (46). Masood even suggests to Morgan that he should write an Indian book in order to explore this gift: a proposition which, at first, puzzles him but then slowly finds a response in his mind. From this moment, the reader can trace the long path which will lead to the writing of *A Passage to India*. This project will fluctuate according to the vagaries of Morgan's relationship with Masood and will also gradually transform under the influence of new encounters and experiences, which the novel will carefully chart.

The meeting with Masood coincides with a period of great sentimental turmoil. Morgan's platonic relationship with a Cambridge friend called Hom has already stirred his desires for love and intimacy. However, this homosexual love turns out to be impossible as Hom resigns himself to marrying a woman. At the same time, Morgan gradually falls in love with Masood and struggles with the urge to confess these "shocking" feelings to his friend. When Morgan finally dares to evoke the "unspeakable" after a year, Masood reacts in a dismissive way, only answering that "he knows" (68). This chapter also reveals that Morgan feels haunted by another "unspeakable" desire haunting him everywhere he goes, namely the temptation to contemplate working-class men and to apprehend the "dark" world these men belong to.

Thanks to these flashbacks about Morgan's frustrating experiences, the reader gradually understands that he is counting on India, for which he is heading in this year of 1912, to provide a fulfillment of his longstanding yearnings and of the repressed desires which have characterized his emotional and creative life. Morgan is looking forward to

being reunited with Masood, now that he has finally managed to be “free of [his mother]” and that he feels “determined to make use of the freedom” (24).

The third chapter entitled “India” strikingly starts with an ellipsis as it directly moves forward to Morgan’s visit of the Barabar Hills. The narrator goes back to this episode several times as it has left a lasting imprint in Morgan’s memory. Galgut investigates the philosophical dimension as well as the symbolic importance this expedition takes on within Morgan’s quest for meaning, as a man and as an artist. Indeed, Morgan has come to figure out that his “Indian novel” should explore the mysterious power of these dark caves. One is then retrospectively told about Morgan’s experience in India, where he had mostly stayed with Masood and his friends. Having access to the “Indian side”, Morgan feels particularly confused. As an English writer who came to India for personal reasons, he has had a marginal position within the imperialist system. Being close friends with both British and Indian men, he feels completely powerless in the face of interracial distrust, and he realizes that he fully belongs neither with the colonizer nor the with colonized.

His feelings are also confused by another personal disappointment as he is finally forced to accept that Masood will never be his lover. The reader learns that Morgan’s expedition to the Barabar hills has been deeply informed by this painful awareness of unrequited love. At the end of his journey, he seems utterly irresolute and disillusioned regarding love, sex and politics.

Back in England, he struggles to write his Indian novel, not succeeding yet to make sense of the caves. He pays a visit to Edward Carpenter, a seventy-years-old “minorite” who has abandoned his upper-middle-class life in order to live in the countryside with his young working-class lover. Carpenter has succeeded in living out his ideal and Morgan’s imagination is deeply receptive to this concrete demonstration of the power of love to transgress all barriers, including those between the social classes. This visit catalyses Morgan’s desire to confess to his own ideal of same-sex love, at least by consigning it to paper. His creativity is provisionally liberated as he finally allows himself to write his first homosexual love story, *Maurice*, as well as a few erotic short stories. At that stage, the protagonist envisions a new relation to his own fiction: *Maurice* is actually based on his own experience and his private longings, thus laying claim, in this respect, to a level of truth quite unprecedented in his work so far. Although it is a liberating moment of his career, he soon realizes that he might not be able to overcome the feeling of shame that

would overwhelm him if other people should read his story. He thus self-defeatingly calls into question the legitimacy of such a representation. Once again, he wavers, uneasy with his own impulses because he knows that revelations of this sort are very risky. In addition, the ideals and desires he evokes in *Maurice*, where they acquire a life of their own, remain in the realm of fiction and exacerbate his sense of lack in the field of real experience. Morgan starts to imagine that “he would perhaps be virginal all his life” (156).

While Morgan starts worrying that he might remain at a standstill in his emotional and sexual life, the international political situation deteriorates and the war approaches. Refusing categorically to take part in the bloodshed, he decides to travel to Egypt to work as a “searcher” for the Red Cross. This journey, again taking place on the “margins” of the British Empire and its war, stimulates Morgan’s fantasies. As was the case in India, he is dazzled by the beauty and sensuality of the “brown” natives he encounters. However, the difference is that, this time, Morgan finally finds the determination and the courage to *act* upon his desires. After being acquainted with C.P. Cavafy, who introduces him to his sensual poetry, Morgan feels that his sexual longing has been strongly awakened through the journey. Alexandria finally offers him the possibility to engage in sexual intercourse. This time, he does not hold back, indulging his wildest impulses with an anonymous soldier encountered on a beach at Montazah, then with a Muslim tram conductor called Mohammed.

Morgan’s relationship with Mohammed gradually turns into a tender “romance” — as he himself sees this— even though Mohammed insists that he is not a homosexual. The two men succeed in sharing moments of intimacy and complicity regardless of the financial and educational gap existing between them. Morgan thus finally lives out the type of “dangerous” love that had remained only a fictional indulgence in *Maurice*. Their forbidden romance yet faces many obstacles, as reflected in Morgan’s constant doubts about Mohammed’s feelings. Until the time when Mohammed dies, Morgan will go on questioning the sincerity of their love, and of his own part in it.

The sixth chapter speaks about Morgan’s return to India after he has accepted to work as a “Private Secretary” to the Maharajah of Dewas, Bapu Sahib. The heat and idleness of this new sojourn awaken Morgan’s more “humiliating” instincts, which become irrepressible. It drives him to look for a sexual partner among the servants of the palace. Morgan ends up arranging different secret meetings with the barber of the Maharajah, fi-

nally indulging in his most repressed desires. Lust even mutates into violence during his intercourse with the barber, threatening Morgan's sense of integrity.

During this second trip to India, Morgan develops an insider's view on the Hindu side of Indian society, gained thanks to his participation in the life of the court of Dewas. This insight into the Hindu culture turns out to be spiritually enlightening while also enriching and complicating his vision of India. He finds himself particularly attracted not only to the mysticism but also to the bodily dimension pervading Hindu rites, which challenge the rational and prudish mindset he had internalized in England. Although Morgan knows that his understanding of the place remains inherently limited, he achieves a sense of spiritual fulfillment that renews his inspiration for the "Indian novel".

The last chapter is the most intricate of the novel as it conveys the philosophical lessons that Morgan has learnt through his experiences and the hindsight he has gained now that he is back in England, and separated from both Masood and Mohammed. His uncertainties as a human being and as a novelist have reached their climax. Galgut shows that it is, contradictorily, in that divided mood that Morgan feels best able to finish the novel he had left on the side for years. Back on his manuscript, he realizes how his initial ideals regarding life and art have altered through his spiritual transformation. Because of the distance separating him from Mohammed and the shocking news of his impending death, he is struck by the transience of life and of human relationships. As a consequence, he finds himself questioning the possibility of knowing the "truth" and to capture this "reality" in fiction. The novel ends with Morgan still feeling uncertain about his own worth as a novelist though he does feel he has created something "new".

CHAPTER 2

Contextualizing Damon Galgut's *Arctic Summer*

2. 1. E. M. FORSTER'S LITERARY "COMING-OUT" IN BIOGRAPHIC STUDIES

The canonical British writer E.M. Forster was born in 1879 and raised in the bourgeois class of Victorian society. His youth was thus marked by the arrest of Oscar Wilde for "gross indecency" according to the Labouchère Amendment. This amendment, implemented in 1885, had strongly reinforced the criminalization of homosexuality²⁰. As the philosopher and psychologist Michel Foucault argues when analyzing the connection between sexuality and identity in his *History of Sexuality*, the Victorian age was also the key moment when sexual behaviour started to be studied in the medical field. The terms "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" were forged at that time, reinforcing binary views on gender and, by the same token, the stigmatization of sexual minorities:

The psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted the day it was characterised – the famous article by Westphal on the 'contrary sexual sensations' (1870) can be taken as a date of birth – not because of the type of sexual relations but because of a certain sexual sensitivity, a given way of inverting in oneself the masculine and feminine roles. Homosexuality became one of the figures of sexuality when it was downgraded from the practice of sodomy to a type of interior androgyny, of hermaphroditism of the soul. Whereas the sodomite was a deviant, the homosexual was now a species.²¹

It is in that repressive cultural context, in which sexual behavior was closely scrutinized and could lead to imprisonment, that the writer E.M. Forster grew up and then became a novelist, always keeping secret his homosexuality from his audience and also from his mother.²² More than forty years after Forster's death, Damon Galgut, a homosexual writer born in South Africa during the apartheid years, decided to write about this well-known Edwardian writer, in order to explore the impact of this repressed homosexuality on his identity and his art.

²⁰ Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 32.

²¹ Foucault is cited. See Bernal Crespo, Julia Sandra, Carlos Andrés Orozco Arcieri and Viridiana Molinares Hassan's. "Foucault and Homosexuality: From Power Relation to Practice of Freedom", *Revista de derecho*, no. 46, (2016): 118.

²² Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 32.

At first sight, this investigation of Forster's problematic sexual identity may not seem groundbreaking if one considers the significant number of scholars who endeavoured to shed light on this even before the publication of *Arctic Summer*. As the anthology on *E.M. Forster's Legacies in British Fiction* underlines:

Since E. M. Forster's death in 1970, Forsterian studies have hinged round three main axes [...]: his complex links to modernism, the no less intricate question of his sexuality as informing his writing (Bakshi, Martin), and the postcolonial dimension of *A Passage to India* and other critical writings.²³

This tendency on the part of certain scholars to re-read Forster through the lens of homosexuality was of course stimulated by the posthumous publication of his overtly homosexual novel *Maurice* (1971) and of his homoerotic short stories in *The Life to Come* (1972) —fictions which had been written decades earlier and had been kept secret by Forster. One can learn in Wendy Moffat's biography that this posthumous literary "coming-out" had been thoroughly planned by Forster, and it is not difficult to imagine the impact that such a symbolic gesture must have had on Forster's critics and readers, Galgut among them.

The scholar Alberto Fernandez Carbajal also refers to this issue, explaining that this "posthumously revealed homosexuality" generated an important debate, as it "divided the opinion of both 'straight' and 'queer' critics"²⁴. The controversy was enhanced by the fact that Forster never publicly stood up against the homophobic laws prevailing in Britain in his time, nor did he dare to come out publicly, always refusing to publish his gay writings —even after homosexuality was decriminalized in 1967. Therefore, in comparison to activist figures such as J.A. Symonds, Oscar Wilde or Edward Carpenter, who defended

²³ Cavalié, Elsa and Laurent Mellet. "Introduction: Forster and After". In *Only Connect: E.M. Forster's Legacies in British Fiction*. Edited by Elsa Cavalié and Laurent Mellet. Bern: Peter Lang, 2017, 9.

²⁴ Carbajal, Alberto Fernández. "Introduction: Liberal, Humanist, Modernist, Queer ?". In *Compromise and Resistance in Postcolonial Writing: E.M. Forster's Legacy*. Edited by Alberto Fernández Carbajal. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 2.

the nobility of homosexuality, this gay writer embodied a quite marginal position²⁵. Some writers would even accuse Forster of cowardice, arguing that he had “betrayed other gay people by posing as a heterosexual and thus identifying with [the] oppressors”²⁶. Within Forsterian studies, it seems that scholars still have not come to grips with this ambivalent position.

Moreover, Moffat mentions another striking fact when she remarks that the “final entries” of Forster’s private diary were only made publicly accessible in 2008.²⁷ This rich material that Forster kept concealed during his lifetime makes him an enigmatic figure, which has not ceased to intrigue critics, biographers and, apparently, also novelists, even decades after his death. One could cite P.N. Furbank, Nicola Beauman, Wendy Moffat, Christopher Lane, Jesse Matz, Antony Copley, or even the scholars who contributed to the collection *Queer Forster*, whose work has attempted to trace the homoerotic overtones of Forster’s work and the “coded language” underlying his fiction and diaries.

It is actually quite striking that, since Forster’s death, five different “lives” have been successively written on him, indeed without counting Galgut’s recent biofiction. After Forster’s death, it had become possible to re-assess the literary works published during his lifetime in light of the secret posthumous fiction, while also investigating the confessions contained in his personal writings not meant for publication. In other words, it became possible to reconcile the image of the artist with that of the man, or the fiction with the life. P.N. Furbank’s biography, dating back to 1977, was the first one to be published and became a benchmark for his successors. In 1978, Francis King published his own bio-

²⁵ As Moffat reminds us, Oscar Wilde used Hellenism as “both an ideal and a disguise” to legitimize homosexuality. During his trial, he quoted from a poem by his lover Alfred Lord Douglas, claiming that “the love that dare not speak its name in this century is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man [...] such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare [...] it is the noblest form of affection”. For his part, the socialist Edward Carpenter would also defend the legitimacy of these so-called “unspeakable” desires, even developing a new language to assert their *nobility* in his pioneering texts *Homogenic Love and Its Place in a Free Society* (1894) and *The Intermediate Sex* (1908). See Moffat, Wendy. *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, London, New-York and Berlin: Bloomsbury, 2011, 46.

²⁶ Martin, Robert K. and George Piggford. “Introduction: Queer Forster?”. In *Queer Forster*. Edited by Robert K. Martin and George Piggford. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997, 20.

²⁷ Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 20.

graphy entitled *E.M. Forster*, followed by Nicola Beauman's *Morgan; A Biography of E.M. Forster*, in 1993, and Mary Lago's *E.M. Forster: A Literary Life* in 1994. More recently, in 2010, Wendy Moffat published her own version of Forster's life, integrating for the first time the new revelations coming from his private diary. Her work is evocatively entitled *A Great Unrecorded History: A New Life of E.M. Forster*. Before the publication of Galgut's portrait, these works had thus already endeavoured to connect dialectically the private and public documents left by Forster.

However, it seems important to note that these biographies do not explore Forster's homosexuality in the same way. In his rather derogatory review of Furbank's biographical work, entitled "The Future of Forster Biography", Wilfred Stone interestingly points out the potential shortcomings of a "too factual" biography if the point is to make Forster "come out of the closet". He argued that Furbank's biography "[lets] the facts too helplessly speak for themselves" and thereby lacks "psychological interpretation":

At the root of Forster's search for an authentic identity was, of course, the issue of homosexuality. And clearly, one purpose of [Furbank's] biography is to bring Forster out of the closet, once and for all. It needed to be done, and Furbank did it with tact, discretion, and intelligence. But that accomplishment is not, or will not always be, in itself enough warrant for a sustained interest in Forster or in his work. Whatever scandalous interest sexuality may have evoked yesterday is, today, largely evaporated [...]. Homosexuality is, of course, of central importance in any life of Forster; it is important not only as an aspect of his personal experience, but as Robert Skidelsky points out, as an "idea" in the Cambridge of Forster's youth—an idea that underlay many of the Liberal arguments for a breakdown of prejudice between classes, races, and sexes, and has not yet adequately been studied. But to learn of Forster's sexual encounters without connecting them with the writer is to witness a Forster who can seem trivial, banal and weak.²⁸

One could say that the biographies written successively by Beauman and Moffat have moved into the direction promoted by Stone. They both take on a more "interpretive" approach to investigate the complexity of Forster's secret homosexual identity in relation to his fiction. In his review of Beauman's work, the critic Tony Brown highlights this point:

²⁸ Brown, Tony. "Forster Biography", *English Literature in Transition* 37, no. 3 (1994): 355.

The personal approach to reader and subject—Forster is referred to throughout as “Morgan”, “more intimate . . . than the more impersonal ‘Forster’” (3)—is one thing, but it is a subjectivity which is fundamental to Beuman's whole method. To refer to “the strict objectivity that is the biographical norm” is clearly in itself problematic, but there is a middle way—a skeptical, though necessarily subjective, weighing of available evidence—between “straight *reportage*” and the “intuitive approach” which Beuman prefers: “[I]f one wishes to go beyond the bare fact, to the insight that may change our understanding of the novels . . . then one has to embrace intuition”.²⁹

Moffat, in her *New Life*, also unashamedly puts forward the need for “interpretation”. Although her biography covers Forster’s whole life from his birth to his death, she explicitly places the issue of Forster’s homosexuality at the heart of her work. The title of her prologue, namely “Start with the Fact That He was Homosexual”, even clarifies this aim.³⁰ She mentions a passage drawn from the writer’s diary, dating back to 1904, in which Forster refers to himself as being part of “a minority”:

I’d better eat my soul for I certainly shan’t have it. I’m going to be a minority, if not a solitary, and I’d best make copy out of my position. There is nothing contemptible or cynical in this. I too have sweet waters though I shall never drink them. So I can understand the drought of others, though they will not understand my abstinence.³¹

This quote shows that Forster avoided straightforward designations and favoured circumlocutions, referring to himself through the historically loaded term of “minority”³². In her

²⁹ Stone, Wilfred. “The Future of Forster Biography”, *Biography* 3, no. 3 (1980): 254.

³⁰ Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 3.

³¹ Forster is quoted by Moffat. See Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 70.

³² Louis Writh — cited by Hans Van Amersfoort — provides a useful definition of the term “minority”, reminding us that this expression encompasses different social groups: a minority is “a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination”. See Van Amersfoort, Hans. “Minority as a sociological concept”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1, no. 2, (April 1978): 218-234. As Barton Meyers writes, this term was first used in the nineteenth century to refer to “national minorities” in the context of nationalist movements. Then, it started to be used as “a general term for all groups subjected to prejudice and discrimination”. See Meyers, Barton. “Minority Group: An Ideological Formulation”, *Social Problems* 32, no. 1, (October 1984): 1-15.

biography, Wendy Moffat interprets the cryptic implications of that term, explaining that this appellation was, on the one hand, a way for the writer to “repudiate mainstream culture, which abhorred homosexuals, criminalized homosexual acts, and made even the thought of such desire ‘unspeakable’”.³³ Most crucially, she insists on the way this term also concealed the writer’s attempt to forge a personal and democratic model of homosexual love:

He grafted the Apostles’ belief in personal relations onto an erotic ideal of a lover and a friend different from himself. His fantasies concerned the garden boy and the laborer, the clerk and (eventually) dark-skinned men. Since he had begun teaching at the Working Men’s College, the romantic idea that love could be both an expression of lust and tolerance was incarnated in a particular form. That this was both a conventional trope —Wilde himself had sex with working-class boys, after all—and an unconventional one was emblematic of Morgan’s character and his personal philosophy.³⁴

This passage, which reminds Stone’s argument in regards to the link between Forster’s homosexuality and his liberalism, is clearly representative of Moffat’s specific approach. In her work, she heavily focuses on Forster’s eventful “double life” with men different from him in terms of class or race. As one will see in the chapter dedicated to Galgut’s thematic choices, this particular aspect of Forster’s fantasies, which is underlined by Moffat, becomes central in *Arctic Summer*. The South African author essentially focuses on the ideological and political implications of Morgan’s cross-class and interracial homoerotic friendships. Besides, Galgut never uses the term “homosexual” in the novel, preferring the terms “minorite” and “minorism”, thus endorsing Forster’s refusal of other terms.

In the light of these facts, one may contextualize Galgut’s “biofiction” and place it within a larger tradition of biographical studies, especially since we know that Galgut himself acknowledged his own role as biographer. Indeed, he confessed in several interviews about the long and multi-dimensional research he undertook before writing *Arctic Summer*, specifying that he tried to integrate “the established autobiographical facts as ac-

³³ See Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 70.

³⁴ Moffat, Wendy. *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 71.

curately as possible”³⁵. Furthermore, the reader discovers in the author’s “acknowledgments” that he relied on numerous and eclectic sources, ranging from Forster’s fiction and non-fiction to his correspondence, and including different biographies and critical sources. In the same section, Galgut also wrote that he drew heavily from Forster’s diaries and private letters in his attempts to recreate “actual dialogues”, only “[altering] the words a little, on the assumption that nobody recalls conversations, even their own with complete certainty” (337). He thus integrated many historical references, refrained from inventing characters, only choosing to nickname his fictionalized Forster “Morgan”—a gesture actually reminiscent of Beauman’s and Moffat’s choices. Therefore, it is not surprising that one can note numerous similarities between Galgut’s work and the pre-existing traditional biographies. Above all, one may find many similarities and convergences between Galgut’s and Moffat’s approaches as they both foreground the secret life and thoughts of Forster’s in relation to his “minorism”. As a consequence, one could even have the impression that Galgut’s work revives in some aspects Moffat’s biography, although Galgut more specifically focuses on the period going from 1906 to 1924.

³⁵ Bakshi, Devica. “Forster in Love”. *Open* 28 March 2014. <<https://openthemagazine.com/lounge/books/forster-in-love/>> Accessed 15 July 2020.

2. 2. *ARCTIC SUMMER* AS A “BIOFICTION”: TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE GENRE

The question that may thus come to mind at this stage is whether the “hybrid” nature of Galgut’s biographical novel distinguishes the latter from the more “traditional” (i.e. non fictional) biographies. Can one argue that Galgut’s sensibilities as a South-African gay *novelist* suffice to justify a reconsideration of this historical figure? In that connection, one can first cite Galgut’s own enlightening explanation, given during an interview:

Between the facts, there are a lot of open spaces where I was free to invent— or, more accurately, interpret. Forster was very secretive about two aspects of his life: namely, his intimate emotions and his writing. I realised that there were profound connections between these areas, and exploring them was where the fiction occurred. All in all, I see the facts as the skeleton of my book, and the imagined parts as the tissue.³⁶

This comment shows that Galgut did not intend to mimic the biographers even though he proceeded to extensive research and largely relied on their work. On the contrary, he embraced the creative possibilities offered by the novelistic form in order to decipher, with empathy and subjectivity, the elusive and intimate emotions of Forster.

The neologism “biofiction”, first coined by Alain Buisine in 1991, is used by the American scholar Michael Lackey, along with the expression “biographical novel”, to refer to the widespread form of “literature that names its protagonist after an actual biographical figure”.³⁷ Quoting John Keener, Daria Tunca and Bénédicte Ledent provide another and more precise definition, arguing that biofiction corresponds to “all narrative that applies ‘novelistic’ discourse to the representation of an historical life”.³⁸ Lackey notes that

³⁶ Bakshi, Devica. “Forster in Love”. *Open* 28 March 2014. <<https://openthemagazine.com/lounge/books/forster-in-love/>> Accessed 15 July 2020.

³⁷ Lackey, Michael. “Locating and Defining the Bio in Biofiction”, *a/b: Auto/biography Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 3.

³⁸ Tunca, Daria and Bénédicte Ledent. “Towards a definition of postcolonial biographical fiction”, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 55, no. 3 (2019): 336.

this genre, which creates a liminal space between fiction and history, was already experimented in the 1930s but only became “a dominant literary form” in the nineties.³⁹

The notion of *hybridity*, which is often used by scholars of the field to define the form is particularly significant as it reflects the epistemological shifts which occurred through the twentieth century. Tracing the origins of the form, Lackey argues that the boundary between fiction and history—and thus also between fiction and biography—has been increasingly problematised in the twentieth century. He writes that “Lytton Strachey and the new biographers of the early twentieth century revolutionized the biography by making liberal use of the creative imagination and fictional techniques”.⁴⁰

Still, it is only in the 1960s, with the rise of the postmodernist movement, that most scholars, including Lackey, situate a real and decisive change of paradigm. As Martin Middeke writes, the “postmodernist zeitgeist” —reflected in the theories of the post-structuralist philosophers Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes—involved the deconstruction of the notions of “truth” and “objectivity”⁴¹. These epistemological questionings, Middeke further argues, automatically impacted writers’ mental conception of history and thereby of “life-writing”.

For his part, Lackey develops a similar argument as he writes that postmodernism definitely unsettled the positivist perspective on discursive modes of representation, which had hitherto been hegemonic: the dichotomy separating fact and fiction was definitely debunked.⁴² One can argue that this vision is still predominant in contemporary collective

³⁹ McCann, Colum and Michael Lackey. “Contested Realities in the Biographical Novel”. In *Conversations with Biographical Novelists: Truthful Fictions across the Globe*. Edited by Michael Lackey. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 134.

⁴⁰ Lackey, Michael. “Introduction: The Rise of the American Biographical Fiction”. In *Conversations with Biographical Novelists: Truthful Fictions across the Globe*. Edited by Michael Lackey. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 1.

⁴¹ Middeke, “Introduction’ from *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (1999)”, 313.

⁴² Lackey, Michael. “Introduction: The Rise of the American Biographical Novel”, 11. One could also mention in that connection Hayden White’s view —quoted by Ledent and Tunca— that “history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation”. They add that this view has become “commonplace [...] since the advent of both postmodernism and postcolonialism”. See Tunca and Ledent, ““Towards a definition of postcolonial biographical fiction”, 337.

consciousness, and Middeke seems quite right when he writes that “the biographer, like the historian, is likely to be mistrusted for his declaration of neutrality”⁴³.

The popularity of biofiction in recent decades tends thus to be associated with this new postmodernist paradigm, since it is a literary form which, by definition, affirms the porousness of the boundary between the discursive genres: it willingly explores their affiliation, automatically engaging in epistemological reflections of all kinds. The seminal works recently published by Lackey, such as his collection *Truthful Fictions: Conversations with American Biographical Novelists* (2014) and his anthology *Biographical Fiction: A Reader* (2017), are particularly enlightening in this respect. On the one hand, they attest to the significant plurality and heterogeneity characterizing the field, as Lackey gathered many different theories and typologies established since the 1990s. His work thus reveals how biographical novelists have experimented with many different levels of fictionalization and various deconstructing strategies. On the other hand, while recognizing the essentially heterogeneous nature of the genre, Lackey insists in delineating some general and “distinctive” features of that form of fiction. He argues that the particularity of biographical novels, compared to more traditional biographies, is that they all establish a specific “tacit contract” with their readers, because they “seek to represent a different type of truth from biographers”⁴⁴:

Because authors of biofiction are interested in a socioeconomic or psycho-political truth, they feel free to take liberties with the established facts in their effort to represent what they consider something more substantive. This more substantive truth is not temporally restricted to a specific figure or time from the past. Rather, it is consciously and strategically bi-temporal—the structures and conditions in the past obtain in and can therefore be used to explain the present. [...] Within this narrative framework, if altering minor details about the actual biographical subject’s life is necessary in order to project the creative writer’s more substantive truth, then that is what the author must and will do.⁴⁵

⁴³ Middeke, “Introduction’ from *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (1999)”, 314-315.

⁴⁴ Lackey, Michael. “Introduction: A Narrative Space of its Own”. In *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. Edited by Michael Lackey. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 9.

⁴⁵ Lackey, Michael. “Introduction: A Narrative Space of its Own”, 10.

His approach thus interestingly spotlights the inherent subjectivity underlying this form as well as its creative and political power. One could say that there are written traces of such a “contract” established with the reader in Galgut’s *Arctic Summer*, as the novel is introduced by the following statement: “This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real locales are used fictitiously” (6).

Still, it may be useful to nuance and complement the argument in this specific case study, taking into account the fact that Galgut’s work has been considered a particularly ambiguous case of biofiction. As already briefly evoked in the introduction, numerous critics lamented Galgut’s allegedly “too biographical” approach. Howard J. Booth argued that Galgut sometimes moved into “flat reportage” while Robert Kusek —quoted by Booth— said that the novel “lacks a transnational element, crossing between periods and cultures”⁴⁶.

In this context, Martin Middeke and Cora Kaplan’s approaches to biofiction seem to be particularly complementary. Middeke’s study concerns different biofictions which he calls “historiographic metafiction”, that is to say biographical novels “characterized by their overt historical referents”⁴⁷. In the introduction of his study, he presents his corpus by strongly insisting on the ambivalent nature of the texts chosen, arguing that they remain essentially poised between fiction and history. This scholar thus interestingly insists on the unique and productive role of the biographical novelist, who somehow inherits the post-modernist mindset while remaining attached to the notion of “historical truth”. The writer can create a balance to convey some “credible” truths about his historical subject, developing what Middeke calls a “revisionist historical consciousness”:

In fact, readers and critics of biofictions will find themselves reminded of the distinction between fact and fiction every time they consult the factual biographies in order to trace fictional deviations from the factual accounts of the lives at issue, deviations which may be considered relevant, that is, symbolic. No matter whether readers or cri-

⁴⁶ Booth, Howard J. “Allegory and Interpretation: E. M. Forster’s *Maurice* and Damon Galgut’s *Arctic Summer* (2020)”. In *Twenty-First Century Readings of E.M. Forster’s Maurice*. Edited by Emma Sutton and Tsung Han-Tsai. Liverpool: Liverpool University press, 2020, 209.

⁴⁷ Middeke uses Linda Hutcheon’s typology as developed in her *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988). See Middeke, “Introduction’ from *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (1999)”, 315.

tics are trapped into pursuing red herrings or whether biofictions entangle them in a game with the historical material, the factual world may be suspended, but hardly done away with. For the writer of biofictions this means that a fictional or empathic/sympathetic approach to the subject may make use of the historical material, may play with it, may even invert it, if necessary, and still arrive at a heuristically impressive and plausible interpretation of that life. As a consequence, the artist may incorporate and reflect upon epistemological uncertainties caused by the aporias of time and language, *without* obliterating historical consciousness.⁴⁸

In a similar vein, the scholar Cora Kaplan argues that

The ‘bio’ in ‘biofiction’ references a more essentialised and embodied element of identity, a subject less than transcendent but more than merely discourse. It implies that there is something stubbornly insoluble in what separates the two genres and prevents them from being invisibly sutured [...].⁴⁹

Middeke and Kaplan thus convey a similar message since they both imply that the historical and biographical aspect is fundamental, though not necessarily limiting. These approaches will thus inform my analysis of *Arctic Summer* as a “biofiction”. I will not attempt to dissociate the historical elements from the fictional material in any exhaustive way. Still, I will shed light on the innovative aspect of the novel by scrutinizing Galgut’s *choices* at different levels, starting with the narrative techniques and the thematic choices which he privileged. One will also look at the presence of intertextuality and self-reflexivity throughout the novel, two processes typically associated with the field of biofiction. All these elements will account for the fictional status of the work and will enhance the subjective approach taken by Galgut.

⁴⁸ Middeke, “Introduction’ from *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (1999)”, 315.

⁴⁹ Kaplan, Cora. *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 65.

CHAPTER 3

The implications of Galgut's narrative strategies

3. 1. HISTORICAL VERISIMILITUDE

From the beginning of the novel, the reader directly perceives the historical aspect of the narrative. A third-person narrator presents the main protagonist and sets the specific time-frame: “In October of 1912, the *SS City of Birmingham* was traveling through the Red Sea [...] Morgan Forster, was thirty-three years of age and had come to think of himself as a writer” (15). A little further down in the first chapter, the historical reference to the arrest of Oscar Wilde —which, as the narrator reveals, occurred “only seventeen years before” (22)— sets the tone for the story. This element of historical context allows the reader to immediately situate the homophobic context of the Edwardian society in which the character evolves —especially since this event became inseparable in the collective memory from the repressive sexual politics which long held sway in England. Relying on John Keener’s view, one could argue that the integration of this “cameo” —that is the “appearance of a historical figure [...] in a text without any overt narrative reference to his or her life-span” — has a symbolic impact as it produces a sense of “historical verisimilitude”⁵⁰ in the reader’s mind, no matter the extent of their knowledge of Forster’s life.

In fact, historical landmarks of this kind imbue the narrative. For example, the text refers to the violence escalating in Ireland and India—still under British colonial rule at the time—due to the independence movements. Indeed, when Morgan goes to Belfast to see his friend Hom, he notes how “Ulster [is] highly charged with rhetorical emotion, furious talk about secession, overhung by the visit of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, bringing new proposals for home rule” (77). Many historical references to the political situation in India also appear throughout the narrative as Morgan travels there and witnesses how the division between the natives and the British officials increases, as well as between Hindus and Muslims. There is, for example, an explicit reference to “the massacre in Amritsar” which occurred in 1919 and accelerated the fall of the British Raj. Finally, one could argue that the biographical dimension of the narrative is also disclosed by the fact that Galgut punctuates the story with many precise dates, to the extent that the narrator’s voice sometimes resembles that of the historian/biographer. Readers are thus

⁵⁰ Keener, John. “Chapters Four and Five from *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel* (2001)”. In *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. Edited by Michael Lackey. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 340.

constantly reminded of the historical basis characterizing the work, though this may happen in a largely unconscious way.

Having said that, through the reading, the readers soon realize that historical context and chronology are frequently downplayed in favor of Morgan's subjective internal world, which is constructed through different narrative strategies. As Monica Latham points out:

Fiction gives writers-biographers the freedom to play with chronology and be selective: time is elastic and fluctuant, allowing prolepses and analepses as well as close-ups and freeze-frames on details or epiphanic moments laden with utmost significance. Fiction allows them to flit with the truth, to fill in the gaps left by traditional biography, to prolong facts mentioned in historical documents, and to explore characters' thoughts in order to imagine what they might have felt.⁵¹

The subjective internal narration developed by Galgut in *Arctic Summer* indeed allows the reader to have access to the protagonist's interior monologues as well as to his reveries and recollections. These narrative techniques together participate in representing the character's mental alienation but also his "invisible" and momentary epiphanies. In fact, the encounters, thoughts and memories that Galgut records are based on the autobiographical and biographical material pertaining to the historical figure, so that the portrait inevitably reminds one of the biographical Forster. Still, there is a significant process of fictionalization evident in the way the author rearranges and elaborates on these (auto)biographical elements, retracing in the slightest details Morgan's intuitions and unconfessed thoughts. These strategies may even give the impression that Morgan is writing his own autobiography retrospectively.

⁵¹ Latham, Monica. "Serv[ing] under Two Masters': Virginia Woolf's Afterlives in Contemporary Biofictions" from *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* (2012). In *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. Edited by Michael Lackey. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 416.

3. 2. SUBJECTIVE INTERNAL NARRATION: INTERNAL MONOLOGUES

The narrative alternates between direct speech and third-person indirect speech, a narratological hybridity which makes it possible to record some of Morgan's conversations and, in parallel, the internal conflict these conversations generate in his spirit. The third-person narrator is thus given an internal subjective point of view, as it focalizes exclusively on Morgan. This focalization is made explicit when the narrator uses what Käte Hamburger — cited by John Keener — calls the “verbs of inner actions (such as ‘to believe’, ‘to think’, ‘to intend’ or even ‘to be’ when followed by an internal adjective)”⁵². Nevertheless, the narrative constantly switches to free indirect speech, to the extent that the reader does not know who assumes the responsibility for the speech and is forced to let go. Relying on Gérard Genette's theoretical view, John Keener interestingly defines this “confusion” as being a typical aspect of fictional discourse:

When focalized narrative goes unflagged by a ‘verb of inner action,’ the result is ‘free-indirect’ discourse or speech, containing a deliberate ‘confusion between the speech (uttered or inner) of the character and that of the narrator’. [...] Genette claims that such free indirect discourse is the most characteristic element of fictional narrative, ‘for at its maximum extent it can saturate the entire discourse, insidiously assimilating the whole of it to the character’s consciousness’.⁵³

For example, in the opening scene of the novel, which narrates Forster's encounter with the army officer Kenneth Searight, the plot is disrupted as the narrator seems to penetrate Morgan's consciousness:

In practice, he was not nearly so afraid of the State as he was of his mother. He could not refer to his condition, even in his own mind, with too direct a term; he spoke of it obliquely, as being *in a minority*. He himself was a *solitary*. At Cambridge, the question was discussed, though from an angle, and safely abstracted. One could be forgiven for believing it was a matter of talking, not doing. As long as it remained in the realm of words, no crime had been committed. But even words could be dangerous. (22)

⁵² Kate Hamburger is cited by Keener. See Keener, John. “Chapters Four and Five from *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel* (2001)”, 336.

⁵³ Keener, “Chapters Four and Five from *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel* (2001)”, 336.

The reader realizes that the narrator is focalized on Morgan throughout this passage, especially since the text is articulated through short sentences as if it replicated his train of thought. The character is well aware of his difference but must repress this awareness if he does not want to be seen as an outlaw and, above all, if he wants to preserve his relationship with his mother.

The first part of the narrative, which is dedicated to Morgan's lonely life with his mother in England, is punctuated by similar interior monologues, through which Morgan vainly tries to negotiate an adequate morality in his suburban heteronormative society. One could indeed cite another insightful passage, which recounts Morgan's thoughts after he learned about Ernest Merz's suicide —a man Forster suspected to be a "minorite" and who hung himself the night following their encounter. Morgan imagines that this man might have committed suicide after having intercourse with a younger man in exchange for money. This event was cryptically recorded by the "real" Forster in one of his diaries, and crops up in both Furbank's and Moffat's biographies. Yet, in *Arctic Summer*, the episode is clearly fictionalized as Galgut first *imagines* the dialogue which may have taken place between Merz and Forster, so that he can then highlight Morgan's own sense of being alienated from his society. Merz's fate resonates in Morgan's mind as being a "warning", since he feels that he might himself indulge one day in the "seductive power of gravity" (58):

Without warning, his body would throw up a pang of yearning so extreme that there seemed no reason to resist. [...] It was lust, nothing more, and there were times when lust felt like a kind of idealism. But it was also a part of his nature he reviled. His own desires repulsed him. Though if he could not aspire to purity, then he was sufficiently aware of what his mother and certain others might think, not to give in to baseness. And that was a sort of goodness, he thought, which might substitute for the real thing. (58)

As was the case in the previous passage, the syntax and writing style mirrors Morgan's subconscious voice while he is attempting to dissociate himself from Merz and to negotiate a sense of integrity: "It was lust, nothing more [...] And that was a sort of goodness, he thought, [...]". Morgan has internalized the prejudices of his society regarding same-sex love, so that he himself equates his desires with moral "baseness". Even in the safe

confines of his mind, he perceives his own sexuality to be “repulsive”, his view being thus paradoxically in line with the homophobic context provided by his English culture.

Still, the passage also reveals the clash between Morgan’s reason and his instincts. Morgan’s unassertiveness foreshadows a potential change of perspective and a sublimation of his desires. Later on, this idea is reiterated as Morgan admits the exciting and liberating power stemming from the “strong sense of the forbidden” (78). The narrator, who remains focalized on Morgan, cannot go further in the interpretation as the character seems himself unable to provide answers.

Furthermore, one should not forget to mention the ubiquitous presence of question marks and the repetitive use of “perhaps” throughout the text, elements which clearly indicate Galgut’s construction of “narrated monologues” —as Keener calls them⁵⁴. This technique is the ultimate example of the fusion between the narrator’s and the character’s voice:

Perhaps Meredith was right. Perhaps when all was said and done, one had to do the right thing. Marriage—a joining of lives—was the only possible way to be happy. But could it be this way? He had thought from time to time that, perhaps, if he only found the right person, it might be possible.

Following, moment after moment, successive examples of Morgan’s unstable mental state, as illustrated through his interior monologues, one is given a complex and ambivalent picture of the protagonist. Morgan’s sense of identity can never be taken for granted as he constantly wavers between different conflicting desires corresponding to different ideological positions.

3. 3. REVERIES AND FLASHBACKS

The narrative focalization on Morgan’s view involves a confusion between objective reality and the character’s irrational reveries. The night Morgan is excessively upset with his mother’s behavior and even imagines that he is injuring himself seems to be deliberately described in a particularly confusing way: “He bent and picked up one of the broken

⁵⁴ Keener, “Chapters Four and Five from *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel* (2001)”, 336.

shards from the floor and without hesitation drew it across his throat. The pain, the bright line of blood, were a relief and an escape [...]” (75). The author has deliberately blurred reality and fantasy: the reader only discovers afterwards that this event was merely taking place in Morgan’s imagination: “Did he do any of this? No, he did not” (75). In this way, the reader experiences at the same time as Morgan the confusion and frustration he needs to conceal to keep up appearances. The root causes of Morgan’s confusion are made unclear as the “focalized narrator”/character saturates, once again, the description with iterations of the word “perhaps”:

It was some time afterwards that he discovered that this night, with its reckless non-existent events, was the anniversary of his father’s death. Perhaps it explained his mother’s unhappiness, or his own. Or perhaps it explained nothing; his father was so long-gone that his absence was almost a presence. (75)⁵⁵

In his study of different 20th-century “artists’ novels”, Zivile Gimbutas interestingly examines how the use of certain narrative techniques may enhance the “aptitude of fiction to be more revealing of artists’ minds and psyche than documentary material”⁵⁶. Indeed, by re-enacting the artist’s “stream-of-consciousness” and ‘interior monologue’, he interestingly argues that novelists:

tend to present feelings, attitudes and reflections more accurately than objective, third-person narration [...] ‘Stream-of-consciousness’ writing, contrary to the literal meaning of the term, involves unconscious influences on the mind in the form of dreams, day-dreams, visions, déjà-vu impressions, as well as the flow of thought propelled by memories of previous events, and stages of life (flashbacks). Stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue thus bring forth subjective time in the midst of linear time, by which episodic plot

⁵⁵ Not only do these “perhaps” emphasize the focalization on Morgan’s immediate thoughts but they also anticipate the argument developed further concerning Galgut’s self-reflexivity in the novel. One will see that the absence of “truth” allows the author to subtly create double meanings. It characterizes Morgan’s personality but it also reminds us of the impossibility of knowing Morgan’s *true* identity for the biofiction writer/reader.

⁵⁶ Gimbutas, Zivile. *Artistic Individuality: A Study of Selected 20th Century Artist's Novels*. Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2012, xvii.

progresses. The subjective dimension complements objective narrative, making for representation that approaches the fullness of a life or personality”.⁵⁷

In light of this comment, which echoes some of the elements already evoked, one could add that the non-linear narrative structure of *Arctic Summer* reinforces this aforementioned “subjective sense of temporality”. As Mathilda Slabbert clearly explains, *Arctic Summer* is characterized by chronological fragmentation:

Despite the forward movement in time, however, the narrative design is often fractured: we have the interruptions and layerings of description of, for example, former trips (e.g. to Italy), visits to British friends with whom Morgan shared “anti-communitarian” sentiments (e.g. Edward Carpenter, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Lady Otterline Morrell, Lytton Strachey, C.P. Cavafy), recollections of his youth, time at Cambridge (his “chaste affair” with Hugh Meredith), and Morgan’s close even suffocating relationship with his mother Lily.⁵⁸

What is especially striking is Galgut’s integration of flashbacks, which are sometimes *internally* experienced by the protagonist himself through the form of memories. This technique allows the author to refer to other time-frames not included in the biographical portrait, while it also shapes a “mental” journey for both Morgan and the reader. It reinforces the reader’s illusion of being immersed in the character’s consciousness.

One may quote as an example the episode in which Morgan is writing his novel *Maurice* and remembers a number of childhood experiences. The flashback experienced by the character is explicitly indicated by the metaphorical language: “He travelled back in his mind to the unfolding of his spirit in Cambridge. [...] The years at Cambridge were one thing; they had been his awakening. But his minorism had begun much earlier, of course, when he was very young. [...]” (152-153). The long passage which follows recounts how Morgan gradually became aware of his sexual inclinations. He reminisces about the garden boys at Rooknest, the naked boys in the public baths of Eastbourne and

⁵⁷ Gimbutas, Zivile. *Artistic Individuality: A Study of Selected 20th Century Artist's Novels*, xvii.

⁵⁸ Slabbert, Mathilda. “Forming ‘Affective Communities’ and Narrative Forms of Affection: Damon Galgut’s *Arctic Summer*”, *Safundi* 20, no. 1 (2019): 88.

also remembers the strange man who forced him to touch his genitals in the street. The writing process for Morgan usually triggers this kind of introspective throwback.

Further in the story, another flashback triggers introspection while the character is having his first sexual intercourse on the beach in Montazah. In Furbank's biography, the event is mentioned in a vague way: "In October he had a casual escapade with a soldier on the beach. It was his first full physical encounter, and he did not enjoy it greatly — not so much because he found it squalid, as because it was so anonymous".⁵⁹ By contrast, in Galgut's version, the description of Forster's experience is fictionalized as the reader enters the character's psyche and immediate thoughts, witnessing the epiphanic aspect of that new experience:

There was no doubting the direction the man's hand were pushing him in, and he didn't resist, though for a second he wanted to, while his brain threw out schoolboy words that named, and could not name, the thing that was now in his mouth. Touching himself, as a child, he'd called his *dirty trick*, and he'd prayed every night to be rid of it. He thought about his mother and then his mind flew back to the baths in Eastbourne, jostling against the rubbery bodies of the other boys, the mockery they flung at him. *Have you seen Forster's cock, a beastly little brown thing*. The jeering had felt like a judgment, infusing every moment of desire since, so that he stood apart from himself and could not act. That wasn't the case now. (191)

The author represents, through the form of the novel, how the protagonist has actually become the prisoner of his own mind and memories, to the extent that his past "infused" and "haunted" his actions in the present. Yet, the flashback also emphasizes his attempt at mental liberation, as he realizes that these memories are no longer paralyzing. Morgan experiences a personal emancipation and self-consciously crosses "mental boundaries":

If they could have seen him doing... what he'd just done, his mother, oh how terrible, or Maimie or Aunt Laura, any of the old, powdery, frangible halo of women who encircled him, there would be no words. All of them would understand, as he did now, that he had crossed a line in himself, he had left their world behind, the decent world of tea parties and suburban witticisms. (191)

⁵⁹ Furbank, P.N. *E.M. Forster: A Life*. Vol. 2. London: Cardinal by Sphere Books Ltd, 1988, 35.

The third-person narrator reaches as far as Morgan's subconscious: "oh, how terrible". The language used by Galgut to describe the memory process shapes figurative movements ("he travelled back in his mind", "his mind flew back", "he had crossed a line in himself"), so that Morgan's physical journey takes on a spiritual dimension. These metaphorical movements and the motif of "boundary-crossing" are evidence enough that Morgan is no longer in the grip of his mother —physically and mentally speaking— so that he self-consciously and momentarily delineates a new sense of identity. To conclude, one can argue that the historical episodes related to Morgan's writing of *Maurice*, as well as his first sexual experience, are explored anew through the subjective internal narration and the inclusion of fictionalized flashbacks.

3. 4. FREE INDIRECT SPEECH

As already argued previously, the novel is characterized by the (con)fusion between, on the one hand, the voice of the author/narrator, and that of the character on the other hand. In fact, in different passages in which Morgan's ethical conduct is called into question, this technique turns out above all to empower the protagonist's voice. As the whole discourse seems attributed to Morgan, the latter is endowed with an elevated degree of hindsight and self-consciousness regarding his own position within his imperialist and heteronormative culture. When Morgan's sense of integrity is at risk, rhetorical questions anticipate the reader's moral judgment. The scene which voices Morgan's racist thoughts in Egypt is a telling example:

For the most part, he felt a physical distaste for the natives. But at the same time, these feelings were repellent to him. They reminded him of nothing so much as the English in India. Who could have known that it was in him, too, this racial arrogance, this contemptible contempt? It was worse than any mud, and it unsettled him badly. (174)

The reader does not know who is actually assuming responsibility for the question. Yet, as the rest of the speech closely follows Morgan's perspective, it seems that the latter perceives his own feelings as being "contemptible". This passage thus successfully captures Morgan's "ambiguous" epiphany, as he opens his eyes to his own complicity with the im-

perialist system of values. In his analysis of *Arctic Summer*, Howard J. Booth conveys a similar view as he argues that “*Arctic Summer* seeks to control how readers understand the behavior of the Forster character”⁶⁰. To illustrate his point, the latter interestingly evokes Galgut’s version of the episode with Kanaya:

In their sex now, he was rough with Kanaya. He could see that he was hurting him sometimes, and that knowledge excited him. The moment of retribution — when he’d beaten the pleading barber in his room — had awoken something. He’d felt strong, his authority beyond question. All the force of the Empire had filled him for a second. Gentleness and kindness weren’t possible in their relationship anymore, not even as a longing. The young man was in his power, and he treated him accordingly.

It wasn’t good for him. [...]

Although no serious damage was inflicted, the desire was a dark one and it made Morgan unhappy. It was as if a hand had roiled the bottom of his character, releasing clouds of mud into the water, so that he couldn’t see clearly (289).

In fact, if one compares this passage to Wendy Moffat’s description in her biography, we can see that Galgut has relied on documentary material to write this passage and he did not wholly invent these self-critical comments. Indeed, looking at the “authentic” passage from Forster’s own diary, which is quoted by Moffat, we can attest to Galgut’s “respect” of the historical material:

I resumed sexual intercourse with him, but it was now mixed with the desire to inflict pain. It didn’t hurt him to speak of, but it was bad for me, and new in me... I’ve never had that desire with anyone else, before or after, and I wasn’t trying to punish him—I knew his silly little soul was incurable. I just felt he was a slave, without rights, and I a despot whom no one could call to account.⁶¹

Moffat added her own interpretation in her literary biography, writing that the “the arrangement corrupted Morgan’s soul [...] With a clinical eye Morgan watched his own complicity in the privileges of race and caste”⁶². One thus clearly sees that Galgut did not ima-

⁶⁰ Booth, Howard J. “Allegory and Interpretation: E. M. Forster’s *Maurice* and Damon Galgut’s *Arctic Summer* (2020)”, 213.

⁶¹ Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 184.

⁶² Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life*, 184.

gine this self-critical aspect of Forster's personality, as it already figured in his diaries and was emphasized by his biographers. Still, it seems important to note how central that kind of moral questioning becomes in his poetic portrait. The perspectives of the author, narrator and character ambiguously merge everywhere throughout the text, so that Morgan's self-consciousness regarding the political and moral implications of his desires is subtly underlined.

CHAPTER 4

Galgut's thematic choices: Forster's cross-class and interracial homoerotic desires

4.1. CONNECTING FORSTER'S LIBERAL HUMANISM WITH HIS HOMOSEXUALITY

E.M. Forster's "liberal humanism" has somehow become a cliché in Forsterian studies. Indeed, most scholars who turned to this author have insisted on his belief in the primacy of "personal relations". In fact, Forster explicitly proclaimed this moral imperative in 1939, in an essay entitled "What I Believe":

Tolerance, good temper, and sympathy are no longer enough in a world which is rent by religious and racial persecution [...]. I certainly proclaim that I believe in personal relationships. Starting from them, I get a little order into the contemporary chaos. [...] If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country. [...] Love and loyalty to an individual can run counter to the claims of the State. [...] Naked I came into the world, naked shall I go out of it! And a very good thing too, for it reminds me that I am naked under my shirt, whatever its colour.⁶³

His novels have often been interpreted as being representative of this philosophy, as they include some characters who *attempt to* build friendships in spite of social conventions and cultural or racial differences. *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924) may be the best examples. The former, which is introduced by the famous epigraph "Only Connect...", records the complex relationships being established between three families coming from different social classes, whereas *A Passage to India* narrates the vicissitudes of different interracial friendships within the British Raj in India.

These political ideals defended by Forster regarding "love" and "friendship" — which, as he claimed, could represent forms of "counter-power"— are at the heart of Galgut's biographical portrait, which reconnects the writer's well-known "liberal humanism" —his "ethics of connection"⁶⁴ as some critics have called it— with his less known ideal of interclass and interracial homoerotic love. As announced in the second chapter, the particularity of Galgut's portrait is linked to that thematic choice.

⁶³ Forster, E.M. "What I Believe". In *Two Cheers For Democracy*. Edited by Edward Arnold. London: Edward Arnold, 1951, 78.

⁶⁴ Expression used by Elsa Cavalié and Laurent Mellet. See Cavalié, Elsa and Laurent Mellet. "Introduction: Forster and After". In *Only Connect: E.M. Forster's Legacies in British Fiction*. Edited by Elsa Cavalié and Laurent Mellet. Bern: Peter Lang, 2017, 12.

The South African novelist has indeed decided to pore over Forster's private life, choosing to focus on the period going from 1906 to 1924. During that period, Forster encountered Meredith Hom, Edward Carpenter, C.P. Cavafy and Kenneth Searight —homosexual individuals who conveyed diverging views on same-sex desire and respectively influenced Morgan's personal vision. These different encounters are historically documented but Galgut decided to go further by recreating in the slightest details the exchanges which may have taken place between Forster and these men. In an interview, he specified that the dialogue with Searight was imagined on the basis of a cryptic entry figuring in Forster's diaries: "an amazing conversation".⁶⁵ Crafting fictional voices such as this one, Galgut can fully individualize the historical figures surrounding Morgan, thereby giving them agency within the latter's pursuit of identity. The author can dramatize how these voices respectively resonate in Morgan's mind. Furthermore, Galgut's fictional biography foregrounds and fictionalizes Morgan's attempt to create affective relationships with two dark-skinned men: the Indian Syed Ross Masood and the Egyptian Mohammed el-Adl. In fact, Galgut shows that these two "complicated loves" —as they are called in the text— allow the protagonist to develop a critical consciousness regarding imperialist ideologies. This long chapter will thus trace the evolution of Morgan's homosexual ethos as it is constructed in a dialogic manner by Galgut.

4.2. MORGAN'S HETERONORMATIVE PURITAN BACKGROUND

In the novel, Galgut records the impact of Morgan's cultural background in his Puritan Victorian/Edwardian society. Morgan comes from the bourgeois Anglican middle-class, in which sexuality is strongly taboo, not to mention homoerotic love, which is considered as being a crime (as suggested by the brief reference to Oscar Wilde's trial). This Puritan environment does not make space for any sexual *pleasure* whatsoever. Indeed, as a child, Morgan had to assimilate the idea that masturbation was an indecent and immoral gesture: "Touching himself, as a child, he'd called his *dirty trick*, and he'd prayed every night to be

⁶⁵ See Galgut's interview for *The Economist* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-e8FHZw1-HU>> Accessed 20 July 2020.

rid of it” (191). In this Christian heteronormative framework, sexuality can only be associated with marriage and must only have a *reproductive* purpose.⁶⁶ The attitude of Morgan’s mother also epitomizes this prudish morality and instils a sense of shame and guilt in Morgan. Her response to the publication of Morgan’s novel *Howards End* shows how much seduction and sexuality, let alone cross-class intercourse, is considered as being a taboo topic. She believes that these desires should never “be written about” (62).

Morgan has known since childhood that he was attracted to other boys but had no other choice than to repress these fantasies and to censor his desires. There is a passage which reveals how this self-censorship resulted for a very long time in abstinence as well as naivety regarding sexual matters in general, whether they were heterosexual or homosexual. Before he was 30 years old, Morgan had actually never really understood the mechanisms of sexual intercourse:

Morgan himself had never had a lover, not one. The world of Eros remained a flickering internal pageant, always with him, yet always out of reach. It had been only three years before that Morgan had fully understood how copulation between men and women actually worked, and his mind had flinched in amazement. His mother and father engaging in such physicality to produce him: it was almost unthinkable. (24)

In fact, Morgan has always been torn between, on the one hand, his Edwardian values — which have always forbidden him to act upon his desire— and, on the other hand, his constant sense of difference and singularity within a heteronormative society. As a result,

⁶⁶ In his article entitled “Misère, Répression et Libération sexuelles”—which I paraphrase in English here— the psychosociologist Alain Giami underlines how this Puritan Christian mindset typical of the Victorian era actually dates back to Thomas Aquinas, who claimed that “non-reproductive intercourse was against nature”. Giami says that it is only with figures such as Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich —to cite only two— that this conception started to be called into question in favor of physical pleasure. It is then in the beginning of the twentieth century that the psychoanalyst situates the beginning of a process of sexual liberation. Freud, against the hegemonic ideology of his time, argued in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) that satisfaction was the true purpose of sexual impulses. His thesis, Giami highlights, thus reversed the perspective according to which sexual perversions were symptoms of mental disorders: sexual perversions were now related to the absence of sexual satisfaction. For his part, the psychoanalyst Reich denounced the shame and guilt provoked by the widespread ideological opposition to masturbation and to sex among adolescents. See Giami, Alain. “Misère, Répression et Libérations Sexuelles”, *Mouvements*, no. 20 (2002): 23-29.

he has been constantly overwhelmed by the sense of having a double and fragmented personality.

This invisible internal conflict is symbolically represented by Galgut through the motif of the mirror. By integrating different scenes featuring Morgan's contemplation of his own picture in a looking glass, the narrator reveals the character's ambivalent identity. This element reminds Middeke's argument, already quoted before, that readers and critics may wish "to trace fictional deviations from the factual accounts of the lives at issue, deviations which may be considered relevant, that is, symbolic".⁶⁷ When Morgan encounters a shepherd boy at the Figsbury Rings near Salisbury, he feels that he is discovering "his secret face in the mirror" (43). Another day, after his mother had once again made him feel powerless and weak, he is struck by violent and suicidal thoughts. That night, he wishes he could put an "end [to] his "invisibility, [to] his hidden and smothered life", by becoming violent (75). He even imagines that he injures himself with "a broken shard". In the end, nothing violent happened that night: Morgan merely "[watched] his red and trembling face in the mirror" (75). Later on in the course of his journey, soon after hitting Kanaya violently, Morgan looks at himself in the mirror and feels "fanatical" and indeed "somehow beautiful" (288). The mirror exacerbates Morgan's sense of having mysterious and primitive sides to his personality —related to his sexual desires— which follow him everywhere and do not fit with the Puritan milieu he comes from.

To represent the character's mental alienation from his milieu, Galgut also seems to have drawn his inspiration from the fictional universe of Forster's semi-autobiographical work *Maurice*. This intertextual process is not surprising since Galgut's biofictional representation explicitly presents the character Maurice as being Forster's alter-ego: "Morgan in another life!" (152). Howard J. Booth interestingly puts the two novels in parallel in his article, reminding how they both "explore coming through in the face of society's hostility to homosexuality".⁶⁸ Still, this scholar does not delve into the intertextual

⁶⁷ Middeke, "Introduction' from *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Fiction and Drama* (1999)", 315.

⁶⁸ Booth, "Allegory and Interpretation: E. M. Forster's *Maurice* and Damon Galgut's *Arctic Summer* (2020)", 203.

references to Forster's gay novel. To begin with, one shall consider this passage from *Maurice*:

When Maurice did go to bed, it was reluctantly. That room always frightened him. He had been such a man all the evening, but the old feeling came over him as soon as his mother had kissed him good night. The trouble was the looking-glass. He did not mind seeing his face in it, nor casting a shadow on the ceiling, but he did mind seeing his shadow on the ceiling reflected in the glass. He would arrange the candle so to avoid the combination, and then dare himself to put it back and be gripped with fear. He knew what it was, it reminded him of nothing horrible. But he was afraid.⁶⁹

Maurice is afraid to look at his own reflection in the looking-glass because it confronts him to his own deeper nature. He is both afraid of and attracted to it, which separates him from the bourgeois environment he inhabits. Furthermore, in both *Arctic Summer* and *Maurice*, the bourgeois milieu provided by Edwardian society is associated with death and morbidity by the repressed homosexual protagonists. Morgan's suburban lifestyle, which "seemed to consist of an endless round of tea parties and amiable, empty conversations" (34), is ruled by a "deadly properness" (42). Later, Morgan also associates England with a "familiar morbidity" (72) as "the suburbs [...] held him in their bloodless grip" (44). This grim view also reminds one of Maurice's perspective:

An immense silence, as of death, encircled the young man, and as he was going to town one morning it struck him that he really was dead. What was the use of money-grubbing, eating and playing games? That was all he did or had ever done. [...] Having spoken, he began to contemplate suicide.⁷⁰

In both novels, alienation leads to self-hate, violence and suicidal thoughts. This passage incidentally reminds one of Morgan's attitude when he imagines that he hurts himself in order to externalize his guilt and shame.

In *Arctic Summer*, the only medium through which Galgut's Forster can truly act upon this sense of inherent difference is fiction, which offers him "concealment" and ano-

⁶⁹ Forster, E.M. *Maurice*. London: Edward Arnold, 1971, 13.

⁷⁰ Forster, *Maurice*, 125.

nymity. In his novel *The Longest Journey*, he secretly and self-consciously projected his own subversive desires on fictional characters:

He had wrestled a great deal—invisibly, with the whole question of marriage. In the end, it was a problem he could only solve in words. [...] *The Longest Journey*, as it wound itself out of him, showed him strangeness in his own nature that partly alarmed him, but partly pleased him too—because they confirmed what he had hoped about himself: that he did not belong, not quite, in the deadly properness around him. No, there was a whole aspect of his character that was an unmentioned half-brother to his civilized side: drunk and disorderly and primitive, closer to the woods than the city. (42)

Therefore, Galgut shows through different episodes how Morgan's abstinence and self-repression does not mean that he remained isolated and naive. He has indeed tried to understand and articulate his homoerotic fantasies while remaining closeted.

4. 3. MEREDITH HOM AND PLATONIC LOVE

With his arrival at Cambridge university and his encounter with Hom, Morgan starts his spiritual journey towards sexual liberation and progressively takes some distance from his mother and the traditional Puritan world she belongs to. For the first time, he discovers some philosophical models of love which include the possibility of same-sex love. With Hom, Morgan discovers Plato's *Symposium* and the Greek perspective. It is at that time that he begins to call into question Christianity, whose "content started to feel very thin" (39). The Greek philosophies echo Morgan's desires:

His years at Cambridge felt like a high and radiant moment, where the world was on the point of opening for him. He had discovered the Greeks, and the Ancient Hellenic universe [...] And it was under the cover of Plato that he had allowed himself to love Hom's body, rather than his mind. [...] They spent a great deal of time together. One night, in the middle of a frantic discussion on the *Symposium*, they found themselves entangled on Hom's couch, fingers running through one another's hair: 'I love you,' Morgan told his friend. (39)

One can say that Galgut repositions Morgan/Forster within the larger movement of writers who, in the beginning of the twentieth century, turned to Greek culture in order to dignify their homoerotic desires.⁷¹ To understand better this passage, it seems important to go back to Plato's concept of love, which included a hierarchy between different forms of love. The Platonic ideal was related to the pederastic relationship between the master and his pupil: the passage from "eros", that is the love of the Body, to "philia", the love of Ideas, was the only way to achieve friendship and love.⁷² As Bin Bilal's article specifies: "Pederasty had limited male-male relationship to the Athenian landed, male citizens—the adult *erastes* would educate the *eromenos* into the ways of citizenship, while seeking idea, beauty and love" (166). In other words, according to this model, physical love is merely a preliminary step and must not represent the ultimate goal, which is the achievement of spiritual elevation.

In *Arctic Summer*, Hom seems, to some extent, to embody this Platonic ideal whereas Morgan is willing to go further in the exploration of his physical desires. Although Hom pretends to be ready to challenge the rules of society in order to "go where his feelings lead [him]" —and initially accepts to engage in a physical relationship with Morgan— he then refuses to completely indulge in carnal desire for its own sake. He says to Morgan: "Well, why not? If it was good enough for the Greeks..." (40).

4. 4. MORGAN'S INTERRACIAL AND INTERCLASS DESIRES: LOOKING BEYOND THE ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE

Morgan's homoerotic desires are not only subversive because they concern the same gender in ways found unacceptable in a homophobic society. His ideals of love are all the more problematic given that they concern working-class men as well as men of color.

⁷¹ John Richard James Herbert writes that the movement included, for example, John Addington Symonds, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (who is called Goldie in Galgut's novel) as well as Edward Carpenter. They all sought to assert the "historical respectability" of same-sex affection by resorting to Greek culture. See Herbert, John Richard James. "A Revaluation of E.M. Forster's Fiction", PhD Diss., The University of Birmingham, 2012, 230-234.

⁷² Sédat, Jacques. "Amitié Antique, Amitié Moderne : Un Changement de Paradigme ?", *Etudes*, no. 4155 (November 2011): 487.

Once acted upon, these erotic fantasies, which intertwine issues of gender, class and race, can have serious political implications. They can potentially challenge the hierarchical class system. On the other hand, they depend on, and somehow call into question, the imperialist mindset of Edwardian society.

In fact, from the moment he visited Henry James at Lamb House in Rye, Morgan internally acknowledged his mysterious sense of attraction exerted upon him by men radically *different* from himself, both in terms of their physical appearance and of their social status—which seem to work together and combine in the novel. Although the origins of his desires remain relatively elusive all through the story, different expressions give a hint as to the sources of these fantasies:

In the warm gloom, a laborer was leaning against the wall, smoking a cigarette, and the man's indistinct form, the red glow of the coal, had moved something in Morgan that all the high talk inside could not. He remembered the working-class men who had stirred him in his life and remembered too a glimpse he'd had from a train window of two naked brown bodies sunning themselves in warehouse. (48)

In the passage quoted and elsewhere in the narrative, the differences of class and skin color are ambiguously conflated. The language used conveys the impression that Morgan projects on the (white and non-white) working-class man a degree of sensuality, vitality, and authenticity, so many qualities patently unavailable in his “deadly” suburban milieu. Initially, this fascination thus appears to be essentially physical and impersonal, as it is related to a general ideal of male beauty. The man Morgan fantasizes about is “tall, dark, athletic and good-looking [...]. This man was nowhere visible in real life—or he was everywhere visible, and unattainable” (73). In India, he is sexually excited by the natives' attitude, who seemed to be present “inside their bodies [...] in a way that the British were not” (99). All these expressions reinforce the impression that Morgan is fascinated by the spectacle of lower-class freedom and self-confidence. In fact, this attitude contrasts with the protagonist's self-conscious and hypocritical behavior. In England, living at his mother's side, Morgan feels that he has a “second-hand appearance” (31). One is almost given the impression that he lives in the body of someone else when he is with his mother, so that he remains hidden behind his “armour of social politeness” (76). Morgan's erotic

desires for the working-class thus seem to stem from his yearning to escape his own social class and its rules of conduct. In light of this argument, one may grasp better Morgan's mysterious "identification" with the shepherd boy at the Figsbury Ring. Morgan was fascinated in this case by the fact that this boy did not call him "sir", in apparent defiance of the conventions of politeness and propriety.

Before his journey to India, because he was confronted to the double impossibility of his sexual fantasies, Morgan first decided to be resigned in matters of sex and love: "Love was what could never work; love was the longing across an insuperable barrier" (49). Still, repeatedly through the narrative, Morgan is given new hopes and he gradually reconsiders his initial fatalistic view.

4. 4. 1. SEARIGHT'S ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE

One may start with the figure of Kenneth Searight, whose historical influence on Forster is not as abundantly documented in comparison to other figures such as Edward Carpenter, but who particularly drew Galgut's attention. Galgut's Forster is particularly receptive to the freedom of spirit Searight exemplifies with regard to interracial sexuality. Just before disclosing his autobiographical poems about interracial pederasty to Morgan, Searight alludes to the sensual power of India, which offers no end of subversive sexual opportunities:

"One thing leads to another. It undoes people. I've seen it over and over. People go out there, to India, I mean, and they start behaving as they never would in England. I blame it on the heat."

"I shall wear my sola topi."

"It will not protect you."

"I assure you, it's of the finest quality—"

"No doubt. But it will not save you from yourself"

[...]

"I'm not quite sure I follow you."

"Oh, I think you do." (20)

Searight's answer, "It will not protect you", turns Morgan's dismissive answer about his sunhat into a metaphor for the embattled quality of the protagonist's sexual repression. Morgan is surprised by Searight's sexual freedom, which will become emblematic in his spirit: "Searight appeared to be almost proud of who and what he was" (21). By dignifying homoerotic lust through his speech and attitude, Searight forces Morgan to confront his own repressed desires, especially his obsession with the black male body. His conversation with that man is then momentarily liberating but it also irremediably destabilizes Morgan's system of values in the long run. Later on, when he is in Egypt, he ponders his own intact virginity, suddenly struck by the vividness of his memory of Searight's words:

His voice trailed off, into a memory of that conversation: the sea shining in the background, the smell of Arabia in the air. And the words; the unlikely words. *I blame it on the heat*. And Morgan had gone to India, and the heat had not undone him. He had remained respectable. He thought now of having to admit this to Searight, if they were ever to meet again. Other people might have to confess their sins, but he, Morgan, could only confess their absence. (189-189)

What this passage reveals, beyond the persistence of the memory of Searight in Morgan's mind, is the uncanny quality of his social and sexual conformism, gesturing as it does towards half-formed imaginations of an alternative behavior.

Moreover, Searight's speech introduces from the opening of the novel what Mathilda Slabbert rightly identifies as a "problematic trope" in *Arctic Summer*; namely a complaisant representation of "the black male body as object of white homosexual desire".⁷³ From a postcolonial perspective, it is of course clear that this speech—and Morgan's sympathetic response to it—is far from being innocuous as it explicitly associates the colonies with sexual freedom. This eroticization of the colonial space, Amardeep Singh suggests, has become an "Orientalist trope" within colonialist discourse.⁷⁴ In the wake of Edward Said's seminal essay on *Orientalism* (1978), this representation of the

⁷³ Slabbert, Mathilda. "Forming 'Affective Communities' and Narrative Forms of Affection: Damon Galgut's *Arctic Summer*", *Safundi* 20, no. 1 (2019): 93.

⁷⁴ Singh, Amardeep. "Reorienting Forster: Intimacy and Islamic Space", *Criticism* 49, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 40.

East as providing a “libertine escape”⁷⁵ for Western “explorers” has been recognized as the ideologically problematic construction that it is, one that reinforces an imperialist system based on domination and exploitation, as well as the dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized. As Joseph Boone writes, “the essence of any Orientalizing erotics lies in the projection of desires deemed unacceptable or forbidden at home”.⁷⁶

In view of this caveat, it seems necessary to note how, by choosing this thematic focus, Galgut with his *Arctic Summer* consciously or unconsciously takes part in the historical and postcolonial debate which has long sought to document and examine Forster’s interracial and interclass homoerotic desires —a debate launched after the posthumous confessions of his diaries and his gay-themed literary works. Ed Dodson usefully synthesizes the two positions in this debate:

There is a critical debate, often referencing Forster, as to whether interracial homosexuality in the colonies reinforced or challenged imperial power. Whilst Robert J.C. Young claims that “same-sex sex [...] posed no threat [to imperial rule]” (1995, 25–26), Christopher Lane “propos[es] that sexual desire between men frequently ruptured Britain’s imperial allegory by shattering national unity” (1995, 4) and Leela Gandhi argues that there is a “strange and emphatic conjunction of homosexuality and anti-imperial thought” (2006, 11).⁷⁷

In view of the sort of polarity that is outlined here, it will of course be interesting to ponder the nature of Galgut’s political intentions in *Arctic Summer*, as well as whether he is aware of the polemical nature of the rhetorical ground he is treading in the novel.

Concerning the specificities of Galgut’s “biofictional” representation of Forster’s homosexuality in *Arctic Summer*, Mathilda Slabbert interestingly relies on two studies: Leelah Gandhi’s study entitled *Affective Communities, Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* and Joseph A. Boone’s *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*. Her approach is particularly interesting because it suggests a postcolonial

⁷⁵ Singh, “Reorienting Forster: Intimacy and Islamic Space”, 40.

⁷⁶ Boone, Joseph. *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 5.

⁷⁷ Dodson, Ed. “Sexuality, Race and Empire in Alan Hollinghurst’s ‘A Thieving Boy’ (1983)”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52, no. 6, (2016): 711.

reading of Galgut's portrait which resists any essentialist perspective on Forster's sexuality and his potentially "orientalist" attitude.

Looking closer at Gandhi and Boone's works, one may directly perceive a common willingness to complicate certain ideological clichés sometimes associated with the postcolonial field of study, displacing these in favor of a more nuanced and historicist understanding of the colonizer's attitude. Indeed, these two scholars similarly advocate a critical perspective that would look beyond the politically correct conclusions often inferred from Said's *Orientalism*. As Boone seems to imply, this essay led, among other consequences, to a renewed application of "the hermeneutics of suspicion". In this context, he claims that:

It is time to find more flexible ways of analyzing the traces of desires past and present, echoing across spaces and traversing populations, cultures, subcultures, disciplinary fields, and individuals. One step is to trust our intuitions and honor the human desire to understand other cultures and alternative ways of being in the world, even at the risk of revealing the limits of our knowledge and the blind spots that our subject positions invariably create.⁷⁸

Rather focusing on the "unacknowledged friendships [...] between anti-colonial South Asians and marginalized anti-imperial westerners"⁷⁹, Gandhi develops a similar perspective. She wants to "[depart] from postcolonial theory in an emphasis on internal rather than external critiques of empire"⁸⁰:

Over the last few decades postcolonial scholarship has tended to designate anti-imperialism "proper" as an action performed solely by the putative non-West upon the putative West, through gestures of oppositionality (culturalism, nativism, fundamentalism) or infiltration (hybridity, mimicry, reactive interpellation, "the journey in"). Supplying us with complex theoretical means through which to diagnose the oppositional energies of non-western anti-imperialism, especially when expressed in the form of anti colonial nationa-

⁷⁸ Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, 32.

⁷⁹ Gandhi, Leelah. *Affective Communities, Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006, 12.

⁸⁰ Gandhi, *Affective Communities, Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, 4.

lism, postcolonialism has however remained tentative in its appreciation of individuals and groups that have renounced the privileges of imperialism and elected affinity with victims of their own expansionist cultures. It is to such western “nonplayers” in the drama of imperialism that this book devotes its attention, thus seeking to shed greater light on some “minor” forms of anti-imperialism that emerged in Europe, specifically in Britain, at the end of the nineteenth century.⁸¹

There are many elements evoked in these two passages which may serve to analyze the discursive choices underlying Galgut’s representation of Forster’s sexuality. In *Arctic Summer*, Morgan’s sexual attraction towards the dark-skinned “Other” is never monolithic as he attributes different meanings to his sexual and emotional experiences with brown men in India and Egypt. Besides, evincing a historicist approach, Galgut’s internal narrator shows that Morgan’s interracial relationships gradually lead him to engage in self-criticism, so that he genuinely attempts to forge his own view although he has heard about “the noble justifications for Empire” (295).

4. 4. 2. MORGAN’S EXPLOITATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH KANAYA

On the one hand, as mentioned previously, the origins of Morgan’s desire for the brown working-class man are already ambiguous. Searight’s allusions to his experience at the opening of the novel, and this character’s influence on Morgan—as demonstrated through the form of memories and internal thoughts—may give one the impression that Morgan has opportunistic intentions: he sometimes seems to envision sex in the colonies as a way to prove to himself and to Searight that he is not “weak” (248). One could also add that Morgan’s unconfessed motivations for going to Egypt are strongly related to a stereotypical image of the Middle-East as a place that may be conducive to “various debaucheries” (180). Indeed, once arrived in Alexandria, Morgan’s sexual excitation reaches a climax: “What he really wanted was to be introduced to the more squalid precincts of the bazaar” (180). As the internal narrator reveals, Morgan expects to discover “the dirty side of things”, which he equates in his mind with the “real Egypt” (181). Fur-

⁸¹ Gandhi, *Affective Communities, Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, 3.

thermore, Morgan sometimes seems to reproduce racist attitudes towards the colonized, though the narrator insists on the fact that this occurs against his will. Indeed, one may spot a significant contradiction between, on the one hand, Morgan's *fascination* with Masood's "strangeness" and "exotic pedigree" (49) and, on the other hand, his *disgust* for the Egyptian natives:

Everything about them—their movements, their dress, their customs—kept him at a remove rather than pulling him closer. There had been only one or two occasions (a young man on a tram, touching the buttons on the tunic of a soldier as he said goodbye) when his sexual interest had been stirred. For the most part, he felt a physical distaste for the natives. (174)

This passage illustrates how Morgan struggles to understand the mechanisms of his own sexual desire.

Galgut's ambivalent representation of Forster becomes even clearer in the way he re-tells Morgan's relationship with Kanaya—a historical episode which has unsurprisingly become central in the debate concerning Forster's interracial sexuality. This relationship, which develops during Morgan's sojourn at the court of Bapu Sahib in India, is overtly represented as being an exploitative one by the author/focalized narrator. Kanaya is a servant who obeys and who does not show that he derives any personal satisfaction from his undercover dealings with his master. As a consequence, Morgan is well aware that this sexual relationship is only based on class and imperial domination. Still, he carries on with the relationship and decides to take advantage of the situation, as it makes him feel powerful and sexually satisfied: "Degradation had its own sensual power" (280). During their encounters, Morgan increasingly uses his position of superiority: first, by beating the barber, and later by becoming "rough" in their sex, thus symbolically reinforcing the "imbalance of power" (289) already characterizing their respective social positions in colonial society. Morgan is aware that his actions make him truly representative of the "colonizer": "All the force of Empire had filled him for a second" (289).

Nevertheless, the text never allows the reader to consider this behavior towards Kanaya as being truly representative of Morgan's personality. The reader is led to believe that Morgan is somehow doing it against his will. The episode is thus depicted as a cathar-

tic experience, necessary for Morgan to know himself better. The protagonist consciously refuses to consider this kind of sexual relationship as being a “success”. His sense of self-dividedness therefore increases at this stage of the narrative, so that, when Morgan indulges in “exploitative sex”, the author can clearly dissociate his assumed position from Searight’s “orientalist” discourse: “On more than one occasion at these moments, the image of Searight passed across his inward eye. Scenes like these were what the other man aspired to, but they provided no upliftment to Morgan. Buggery in the colonies: it wasn’t noble” (280). Clearly, however, nobility is not a value that Morgan is prepared to surrender whether now or later.

Through this episode, Galgut can articulate what he considers to be Morgan’s personal ideal of same-sex love, which is inseparable as we shall see from his deep hankering for a form of viable, if not honorable, “solidarity across race and class” (280). Indeed, Morgan feels strongly depressed by the fact that Kanaya takes on the position of the “slave” and does not show any affection: “Any solidarity across race and class, like that which he’d achieved with Mohammed, simply had no purchase here [...] Affection wasn’t part of the arrangement” (280). One should note that this idea is also present earlier in the narrative, when Morgan ponders the “failure” of his first sexual experience with the anonymous soldier on the beach in Egypt: “In any event, the hunger wasn’t satisfied. Even in one’s most physical moments, the real craving was for love” (92). These two sexual experiences are then unsuccessful, but they help the protagonist grasp the true purpose of his cross-cultural and same-sex desires, which is to achieve an egalitarian affective relationship that must include mutual love and shared benefit.

It can be argued that it is only with Masood and Mohammed that Morgan really succeeds in creating this sort of affective bond, at least partially and provisionally, thus overcoming his received cultural stereotypes and his position of dominance as a colonizer. Only in these cases do Morgan’s physical desires take on a truly progressive and anti-imperialist dimension, apparent for those, such as Galgut’s readers, who can read his mind in his most honest moments of introspection. In the light of Gandhi’s and Boone’s arguments, it is possible to claim that Galgut’s biofiction turns Forster into an ambivalent “postcolonial” figure of resistance, who discovers that his interracial erotic desires may

also provide him with something essential: as Boone writes, they make it possible for him “to understand other cultures and alternative ways of being the world, even at the risk of revealing the limits of [his] knowledge”.⁸² Boone’s perspective, in that he refers to the concepts of identity and knowledge, is especially relevant to our analysis since Galgut focuses on the ontological and epistemological implications of cross-cultural affection and empathy in the context of imperialism. As one will show through different passages, Morgan gradually becomes able to look at India and Egypt from a new perspective thanks to his empathy for Masood and Mohammed.

4 .4. 3. MASOOD: MORGAN’S CRITICAL VIEW ON COLONIALIST DISCOURSE

The figure of Masood is given a central role in Galgut’s narrative. All through their first meetings, Morgan is fascinated by this young man’s beauty, for in his perception he “looked, and sounded, and smelled like a prince” (31). It is Masood’s Oriental aspect which attracts Morgan in the first place: “What Morgan found most interesting in his new friend was the strangeness of him, the exoticism imported into his drawing room” (34). Furthermore, at first, the exact nature of their relationship remains ambiguous as they become demonstrative and tactile in the private sphere but do not have sexual intercourse: “Then he sprang up and seized hold of Morgan, pushing him backward on the couch and tickling him furiously” (33). The reader only discovers later, at the same time as the protagonist, that there has been a cultural misunderstanding, so that Morgan has misinterpreted Masood’s attitude: the latter is actually heterosexual, so that he loves Morgan as a friend but refuses to go further.

However, despite Morgan’s failed attempt at sexual fulfillment with Masood, this cross-cultural encounter is ultimately far from being fruitless as it involves mutual affection and signs of tenderness. As Leelah Gandhi underlines, these gestures may convey a form of minor “resistance”: “the trope of friendship [is] the most comprehensive philosophical signifier for all those invisible gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes

⁸² Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, 32.

of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging".⁸³

The text explicitly emphasizes how, from their first encounters, Morgan's private exchanges with Masood, which imply a certain degree of physical intimacy, have significant ideological and political implications. Masood with his domineering personality is a relatively authoritative figure within their friendship, which incites Morgan to reconsider many core aspects of his British cultural identity, starting with his white skin color:

"You so-called white people," he was told, "are too afraid of your emotions. Everything is arranged coldly on shelves. In India we show how we feel, without being ashamed."

"Why so-called?"

"Because your colour is far from white. More a pinko-grey, I'd say. Look."

When he and Masood put their arms together, to compare, he saw that it was true. He had never thought of his skin in this way before. His friend's coloring was infinitely more attractive.

Such ideas edged dangerously close to politics, which also came up as a topic among Masood's friends. (36)

One could say that Morgan is portrayed as being relatively naive in the first part of the novel. Still, he is clearly influenced by Masood's comments, so that their private conversations can be said to disrupt his racial consciousness. Moreover, the reader who has read Forster's *A Passage to India* might notice that Galgut massively drew on that novel to imagine the dialogues between Masood and Morgan. In this case, he integrates an intertextual reference to Cyril Fielding's view that British people have "pinko-gray" skin. Quoting Fielding's integral speech on that matter may be useful:

The remark that did him most harm at the Club was a silly aside to the effect that the so-called white races are really pinko-gray. He only said this to be cheery, he did not realize that "white" has no more to do with a color than "God save the King" with a god, and that it is the height of impropriety to consider what it does connote. The pinko-gray male

⁸³ Gandhi, *Affective Communities, Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, 10.

whom he addressed was subtly scandalized; his sense of insecurity was awoken, and he communicated it to the rest of the herd.⁸⁴

This passage clarifies the extent of the subversiveness of that conversation in the context of colonialism, which remains quite elusive in Galgut's text which briefly comments that "such ideas edged dangerously close to politics". In Forster's novel, by contrast, the omniscient narrator unravels, albeit ironically, the dissenting nature of Fielding's naive view: the observation creates unease as it clearly challenges the essentialist colonial discourse, which relies on the superiority of the purportedly "pure" white race.⁸⁵ Further in *Arctic Summer*, Morgan comes to secretly defy this alleged racial hierarchy by making fun of it with Masood: "In a letter a few days later, he addressed Masood as his *Dearest boy*. And signed it, after a slight hesitation, *from Forster, member of the Ruling Race, to Masood, a nigger*. It was a measure of how far they'd come that he knew his friend would laugh" (53).

In another passage, Masood makes another subversive comment as he insists on the fact that Morgan is "Oriental under the *skin*" (my emphasis):

There was a quality in the Eastern character, he said, called Taras, which made a man ever-alert, ever-sensitive, to what was happening around him. True sentiment implied the

⁸⁴Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978, 56.

⁸⁵ Relying on Ambreen Hai's view, one can say that this passage exemplifies Forster's ironic deconstruction of colonial discourse. She argues that Forster "deconstructs imperialist epistemology and representation—ways of knowing, seeing, describing—to examine the ways in which language can oppress". See Ambreen Hai, *Making Words Matter: The Agency of Colonial and Post-colonial Literature*, Ohio University Press, 2009, 155. In another article—which is not especially focused on *A Passage to India*—she comes back to the implications of the author's use of irony: "Forster's main technique of critical self-implication is irony. [...] In *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, Linda Hutcheon importantly re-defines irony as not a 'static rhetorical tool' (13), but a 'discursive practice or strategy' (3) with an affective and critical 'edge' that always takes place in specific social and political contexts (37–43). According to her, irony 'happens' in the slippage between the said and the unsaid (12), so that its meanings inhere not simply in the 'unsaid,' (usually opposed to the 'said') but include and occur in the relation between the 'said' and the 'unsaid.' This allows us to read Forster's irony as very much a political strategy located in a charged context of imperial, gender, and race relations". See Hai, Ambreen. "Out in the Woods: E.M. Forster's Spatial Allegories of Property, Sexuality, and Colonialism", *Literature Interpretation Theory* 14, (2003): 325-326.

power of physically feeling the difficulties of another person. [...]. He knew that Morgan shared this quality, which was why he had always thought of him as Oriental under the skin (*AS*, 51).

Once again, the difference of color is diminished in Masood's discourse while the latter sheds light on Morgan's cultural *resemblance* with himself: he clearly dissociates Morgan from his fellow representatives of British culture, who, by contrast, "are too afraid of [their] emotions" (36). As is the case for the duos Aziz-Mrs. Moore and Aziz-Fielding in *A Passage to India*⁸⁶, the binary opposition between the colonizer and the colonized—which initially seemed to prevail in the text, with Morgan's descriptions of Masood's "exotic strangeness"—is increasingly deconstructed as the friendship evolves and *confirms* their cross-cultural affinity.

Furthermore, Morgan's relationship with Masood gradually leads him to develop a more critical perspective on the imperialist system. As is the case with the figure of Sea-right, Galgut creates a contrast between Morgan and Goldie. Whereas the latter goes to India as a missionary, as "a believer in the imperial project, which is to say, in the civilising power of social progress" (*AS*, 106), Morgan's apolitical and emotional motives for going to India place him in a very different stance toward the British Raj. Once arrived in India and reunited with Masood, he discovers that he is indeed endowed with the quality called "Taras"⁸⁷, so that he can perceive reality through Masood's gaze:

He couldn't see India except through Masood's eyes, which made him understand things differently. It wasn't the Indians that had upset him so much as his own countrymen; he didn't like what the British had done, nor what they had become while doing it. Nevertheless, he had also had some conversations and encounters with Englishmen that he found surprisingly enlightened. (107)

⁸⁶ In Forster's *A Passage to India*, Aziz tells both Mrs. Moore and Fielding that they are "Oriental".

⁸⁷ Relying on Rustam Bharucha's article "Forster's Friends", Bin Bilal defines this term: "Tarass' is an Urdu word that has multiple meanings and translations such as 'sympathy/ empathy/ compassion/pity/mercy". See Maaz Bin Bilal, Maaz. "E.M. Forster's Place in the Long Discourse of Friendship", In *Only Connect: E.M. Forster's Legacies in British Fiction*. Edited by Elsa Cavalié and Laurent Mellet, Bern: Peter Lang, 2017, 169.

Whereas Goldie's faith in British superiority strengthens as he laments the pervasive "irrationality" which characterizes India, Morgan's love for Masood makes him ponder the irreducible complexity of that issue. After witnessing the strong division between the British and the Indians, Morgan never ceases to lament the impossibility to belong in India and to take sides, as he feels personally torn between "the double frontiers of loyalty" (113).

Thus, although Morgan is originally uninterested in political matters, he is progressively forced to accept that politics automatically enter the private sphere, as it undermines his relationship with Masood:

"Oh yes, yes, it is bad. It is all up with you English and your Empire. A matter of time now, you will see. You will be pushed back onto your little island."

"Where you have always been a most welcome guest, I might add." He upset himself and almost cried. "It is not *my* Empire, Masood, why will you never admit it?"

"Friendship is your Empire, Morgan, I know that very well. I am only teasing you. Please remember that you are a welcome guest in India too. Though you are too afraid to come back". (239)

This passage exemplifies how, in the narrative, the interracial friendship between Morgan and his Indian friend proves unstable, although Masood eventually concedes on an optimistic tone that "friendship is [Morgan]'s Empire"—a line which, as one could argue, echoes in an anachronistic way the humanist view defended by the real-life Forster: "Love and loyalty to an individual can run counter to the claims of the State"⁸⁸.

On the other hand, one can compare the passage quoted above with the final scene of *A Passage to India*, which records Aziz's infuriated and disillusioned speech:

"We may hate one another, but we hate you the most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty or five hundred years, we shall get rid of you, yes we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then"—he rode against him furiously—"and then," he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Forster, E.M. "What I Believe". In *Two Cheers For Democracy*. Edited by Edward Arnold. London: Edward Arnold, 1951.

⁸⁹ Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978, 312.

In this passage, the Muslim character Aziz considers that the end of the Raj is an essential condition for his friendship with the British Fielding to be possible. In the last chapter of *Arctic Summer*, Morgan's connection to Masood is similarly represented as an illusory promise, reminding the reader of the ending of *Passage*:

Between him and Masood, between England and India, there had seemed to be an understanding, a joining which was always, in the future somewhere—until you realized it was impossible and that the story had really been one of a slow drifting apart, a widening gap. (322)

Still, paradoxically, Galgut's essential goal in *Arctic Summer* is ostensibly to prove the contrary, as the last chapter of the novel reasserts the "invisible" and nonetheless "powerful" feeling of affection between Morgan and Masood, which successfully defies the imperial system. Indeed, in the same chapter, Morgan evokes his "solid" friendship with Masood (317). Besides, the notion of "affection", which becomes a trope in the novel, is used and sublimated to show that their connection will even survive displacements in space and time, as it will continue to be perceptible after his friend's death: "True affection left something behind it, something that lingered, with its own mysterious life" (335). In fact, the last chapter entitled *A Passage to India*, from which these excerpts are drawn, contains many self-reflexive statements on the part of Galgut. He seems to be hinting at his own mission as a biographical novelist, which consists in revealing to the audience what the real-life Forster could not convey in *A Passage to India*:

But more than that, the very presence of India in Morgan's life had only happened through Masood. Everything in it, and everything behind it, had flowed from him, and led back to him again. [...] But insufficient as it was, his writing was really all he had to offer. [...] He didn't want to put their intimacy on display, of course, but people might not understand how solid their friendship was, and he wanted it conveyed. (317)

Within the text, Galgut thus alludes to his own writing process in *Arctic Summer*, in which he attempts to reconstruct the unspeakable "intimacy" which secretly underlies Forster's *A Passage to India*, focusing specifically on the writer's powerful love for Masood. I will return in the next chapter to the further implications of Galgut's re-reading of Forster's novel.

4. 4. 4. MOHAMMED AND MORGAN'S POSTCOLONIAL ANTI-IMPERIALIST DISCOURSE

The description of the development of Morgan's relationship with Mohammed follows a relatively similar pattern. As is the case with Masood, Morgan's interest in this young man is first and foremost physical. Indeed, the narrator describes how Morgan first distinguishes Mohammed from the rest of the natives because of his youthful sensuality and his "handsome dark head [...] under a red tarboosh" (194). As opposed to Masood, Mohammed finally accepts to have intercourse with Morgan. Nevertheless, over time, sex becomes less and less paramount within their friendship as Morgan gradually realizes that he does not only like this working-class native for his youthful and exotic physical appearance, but also for his intellect: "On the last few occasions they'd seen each other, on the tram, Morgan had been overcome with sensual feeling, but it wasn't like that today. He was fascinated instead by his friend's character and talk. Desire was shading off into interest" (204). From that moment onwards, Morgan's attitude towards Mohammed can thus no longer be interpreted as revealing above all a self-interested type of relationship.

Quite the contrary, Morgan is more and more obsessed with the idea of achieving a form of equality with his working-class friend despite the differences of race and class between them: "They were not so unlike, after all! Butcher's son and gentleman—they were both human and afraid, and enjoying the warm evening together" (203). Later on, Morgan is again struck by a similar thought: "They were just two people in a room" (207). In fact, the notion of "equality" pervades the whole chapter dedicated to Mohammed, so that the internal narrator univocally clarifies Morgan's inclusive ideal of friendship: "That they cared for one another, that they enjoyed each other's company and spoke openly to one another, without awkwardness or barrier: that was the great sin. Affection could erase all hierarchy; in this was the danger, and the delight" (212).

At some point, Morgan feels the urge to go further and to *act* upon this dissenting ideal of (homoerotic) friendship:

It was a quirk of destiny, nothing more, that had decreed Mohammed to be poor and unskilled, a tram conductor, while Morgan was a well-fed fellow with uncallous

hands. He would have changed places if he could, but the most he could do was try to utilise his power. (215)

For the sake of his friendship for Mohammed, Morgan will not hesitate to compromise his reputation and his position in Egyptian society. Although he knows that his British acquaintance Robert Furness is prejudiced against the natives —and, as a result, does not encourage his friendship with Mohammed— he asks this man to help his Egyptian friend get a better job.

Interestingly for our purposes, Maaz Bin Bilal evokes how “to understand Forster’s place in this discourse not only helps for a better appreciation of Forster’s work and ideas, but also adds to understanding how the discourse of friendship has been affected by Forster”⁹⁰. The approach taken by Bin Bilal actually consists in creating a dialogue between, on the one hand, Forster’s view on friendship —as reflected in his fictional and non-fictional writings— and, on the other hand, the models of love and friendships developed through the course of history, by philosophers such as Aristotle and Montaigne. He points out how E.M. Forster himself recognized that Montaigne was his “law-giver”, as he puts this in his essay “Two Cheers for Democracy” (Bin Bilal, 162). Bin Bilal further develops:

Montaigne, in his essay ‘Of Friendship’, quotes at great length from Cicero, about how a friend would even set fire to the temples of a city, if asked to do so by his friend. [...] It is only in inadequately just, if not outrightly unjust societies that the true good for friends comes into conflict with the good of the state. [...] Aristotle had connected such ideals of friendship and justice very closely in his books on friendship in the instructional *Nicomachean* and *Eudamian Ethics* as early as fourth century BC. Friendship was akin to justice here, and Forster built up from this Aristotelian long tradition where interpersonal justice leads towards social justice. If and where the law of the state ran contrary to laws of friendship, it was the latter that had to be prioritized, as the state was for the people and their relationships.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Bin Bilal, “E.M. Forster’s Place in the Long Discourse of Friendship”, 161.

⁹¹ Bin Bilal, “E.M. Forster’s Place in the Long Discourse of Friendship”, 162-163.

To some extent, in *Arctic Summer*, Galgut seems similarly concerned with Forster's place among those discourses. Quite strikingly, this passage imagined by Galgut may even remind one of Montaigne:

“I don't care that you are a tram conductor.”

“Do you like me because I am a boy?”

“I like you because you are Mohammed.” (213)

Morgan's elusive reply “because you are Mohammed” seems to echo the French philosopher's famous definition of friendship in his essay “Of Friendship”: “Because it was him, because it was me”⁹². Montaigne, who wrote this line for his deceased friend Etienne de La Boétie, considers that true friendship is not easily accessible, as it implies a communion between two souls, an “intellectual unity”, which resists any easy definition.⁹³ In Galgut's novel, this “unity” is particularly subversive as it occurs between two people with different class and ethnic origins. On the basis of Bin Bilal's article, one can thus safely argue that Galgut's Forster explicitly articulates a new and more *inclusive* model of friendship than Montaigne's and Aristotle's, as it “[privileges] friendship of the other over conventional and acceptable (asexual) relations of the same class and colour”.⁹⁴

To finish, as is the case with Masood, Morgan's affection for Mohammed entails a form of empathy which completely destabilizes the prevailing dynamics of power in Egypt. In Galgut's text, cross-cultural empathy seems all the more subversive as it is described as an ontological and bodily transformation, through which Morgan is able to transcend his *white* body, and thus his privileged position as a colonizer:

⁹² Montaigne is cited by Jacques Sédat. See Sédat, Jacques. “Amitié Antique, Amitié Moderne : Un Changement de Paradigme ?”, *Etudes* (November 2011): 490.

⁹³ Sédat, “Amitié Antique, Amitié Moderne : Un Changement de Paradigme ?”, 491. Montaigne's view would deserve more attention than I can give here.

⁹⁴ Bin Bilal, “E.M. Forster's Place in the Long Discourse of Friendship”, 165. This argument originally concerns Forster's characters in his “late” novels *Maurice* and *A Passage to India*. Still, Bin Bilal also insists on Forster's life, specifying that he was “inspired” by his own personal friendships.

But now he had begun to experience the Egyptian world through the skin of his friend, and it didn't resemble the one he lived in. Distantly, imperfectly, he thought he grasped a little of how it might feel to be an Egyptian working under English control, and the flashes of humiliation and anger it might involve. When Mohammed was hit in the jaw by a drunken sergeant-major, or whacked on the leg with a cane by an irate officer, it was as if the blows had landed on Morgan's own flesh. (214)

As Mathilda Slabbert underlines, “in the context of the narrative, skin then features not as a motif that separates or divides, but rather as medium, as mediator that offers endless opportunities to connect”.⁹⁵ Later on, in the same chapter, Morgan's internal thoughts on the notion of “purity” definitely challenge colonialist discourse: “He had learned to mistrust purity—or the idea of purity, rather, because the real thing didn't exist. Everybody by now was a blend; history was a confusion; people were hybrids” (223). Galgut even re-employs the term of “hybrid” to describe Morgan's new perspective: “His own hybrid self missed Mohammed terribly” (223). The choice of that term to describe a figure like Forster is not innocuous as it reminds the contemporary reader of the postcolonial anti-imperialist trope of “hybridity” dear to Said and Homi Bhabha—whose views are synthesized by Gandhi:

In the course of its discursive and disciplinary transmission the theme of Saidian “contrapuntality” has reached its apogee and possibly received its most inspired elaboration through the tropes of “hybridity,” “interstitiality,” “mimicry” and the “in-between,” each closely associated with Homi Bhabha's oeuvre and each announcing the epistemic and existential impossibility of colonial division. Imperialism, Bhabha reiterates in his influential essays, never fulfills its fantasy of discrete binarization. Its yearning for secure psychic quarantine is always complicated by a perennial osmosis through which colonizer and colonized mutate unawares but inexorably into each other in the countless hybrid and interstitial sites of imperial antagonism.⁹⁶

As a result, the encounter with the colonized drives Morgan to call into question all aspects of his identity: his cultural background, his ethnic origins and also his religious beliefs. As the next chapter will demonstrate, Galgut is also particularly concerned with the

⁹⁵ Slabbert, “Forming ‘Affective Communities’ and Narrative Forms of Affection: Damon Galgut's *Arctic Summer*”, 96.

⁹⁶ Gandhi, *Affective Communities, Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, 3.

development of Morgan's "hybrid" spirituality, starting from his rejection of Christianity and his attraction to the pagan figure of Pan, until his fascinating discovery of Islam and Hinduism in India, which occurs under the guidance of his friends Mohammed, Masood and Bapu Sahib.

This key notion of "hybridity" reinforces the idea that Galgut strives to reclaim Forster's anti-imperialist discourse, although the latter's resistance may have seemed "invisible" and limited, as it is necessarily conditioned by affection. It is only through an intellectual and affective connection with certain individuals that Morgan questions the system and develops a sense of empathy with the colonized. Indeed, without Mohammed or Cavafy, Egypt would remain an inscrutable and boring place, made of "nameless crowds" (196). Furthermore, Galgut distinguishes different forms of cross-cultural friendships in the narrative that do not have the same status. For example, although Mirza is presented as being Morgan's "friend", the narrator nonetheless emphasizes the difficulty to *connect* to that native: "It came to him that certain human relationships were like two rivers meeting, causing a third river to spring up. He had glimpsed himself at excellent moments. But although he understood his new friend, no third river sprang up between them. For that, understanding isn't necessary; only deep affection is required" (120). For Morgan, cross-cultural affection and empathy are not easily attainable and remain fleeting.

CHAPTER 5

Galgut's re-reading of Forster's
A Passage to India (1924)

5. 1. GALGUT'S MIMICRY AND TRANSPOSITION OF FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

This chapter is complementary to the previous one as it will be dedicated to *Arctic Summer*'s "transtextual" relations⁹⁷ with Forster's *A Passage to India*. In the previous chapter, we have already observed the existence of thematic links between the two novels. We noticed that Galgut used Forster's novel to reformulate, in a fictional way, Morgan's interracial friendship with Masood, together with his resulting "anti-imperialist" discourse. As soon as one opens the book, this "transtextuality" becomes apparent as Galgut's dedication foreshadows a dialectical relationship between the two texts. The South African novelist indeed addresses his novel to his friend Riyaz Ahmad Miranda and "to the fourteen years of [their] friendship]", a gesture which overtly mimics that of Forster in *A Passage to India*: "To Syed Ross Masood and to the seventeen years of our friendship".

Using *A Passage to India* as an autobiographical source, Galgut does not hesitate to rewrite emblematic scenes of that novel, including the mysterious episode of the "Marabar caves"—which are renamed the caves of the "Barabar Hills" (80) in reference to the historical place that E.M. Forster actually visited in India. He also borrows different Forsterian expressions and motifs related to India such as the "mystery", "the muddle" (44) and the "echo", which have appositely divided Forster's critics. Transposing to Forster the expression used by Monica Latham in a critical article, one could argue that Morgan is thus turned into a "Forsterian character" by Galgut.⁹⁸ This process is made possible thanks

⁹⁷ I use this term coined by Gérard Genette in his *Palimpsests* to encompass both the "intertextual" and "paratextual" references to *A Passage to India*. Genette defines "transtextuality" as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts". See Gérard Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982, 1.

⁹⁸ Latham, Monica. "Serv[ing] under Two Masters': Virginia Woolf's Afterlives in Contemporary Biofictions". In *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 405. In this article, she scrutinizes how four contemporary biographical novelists respectively re-wrote Woolf's life by subtly using her own oeuvre and style in their fictional portrait. Latham further calls these fictional biographies "literary pastiches", since the biographical novelists rely on Woolf's own "fictional universe" to enhance their understanding of the biographized. Latham adds that Virginia Woolf is therefore turned into "a Woolfian character" in these novels. As we shall see, *Arctic Summer* similarly takes the form a literary "pastiche" of Forster's fiction.

to the latter's polyvalent position as a biographical novelist: he can freely blend and juxtapose fictional and non-fictional sources in order to enhance his understanding of the biographee. Interestingly, Monica Latham points out how this method, which reflects a contemporary postmodernist consciousness, can produce a sense of "hyper-reality" for the audience:

Biofiction reflects deeper writing practices and current cultural phenomena. The novels I address here use postmodernist techniques similar to sampling in music, or recycling and collage in the visual arts; these intertextual practices consist of selecting fragments from previous works and integrating them in contemporary productions. Besides, the fundamental process at the heart of biofiction is manipulating the truth and recreating a reality that can appear "hyper-real"—more real than reality itself—an understanding that corresponds to the contemporary view that absolutely objective historical truth does not exist.⁹⁹

Galgut's portrait in *Arctic Summer* seems indeed unprecedented in the way he "fills in the blanks" of Forster's emotional, sexual and creative life, while unashamedly creating a sense of continuity between Forster's fictional/public personae and his private personality. As we have seen, Galgut does this with *A Passage to India* as well as with other fictions such as *Maurice*. However, relying again on Latham's view, one can add that this type of intertextual biofiction is, so to speak, "discriminating", since only readers who know about Forster's "fictional universe" can identify this fictionalizing process: "Only readers whose prior cultural, literary, and aesthetic knowledge of the subject's life and work allows them fully to understand the writer-biographer's skillful endeavor successfully receive and acclaim [it]".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Latham, "Serv[ing] under Two Masters': Virginia Woolf's Afterlives in Contemporary Biofictions", 418.

¹⁰⁰ Latham, "Serv[ing] under Two Masters': Virginia Woolf's Afterlives in Contemporary Biofictions", 406.

5.2. GALGUT'S RESPONSE TO THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE WORK

Investigating Galgut's use of *A Passage to India* as an autobiographical source seems particularly important in view of the numerous conflicting interpretations generated by the work. In his edition of the novel—which dates back to 1974—Oliver Stallybrass notes how, as soon as it was published, the novel tended to be viewed as an essentially political work, “with endless argument on whether it was ‘fair’, and much resentment on the part of those who felt their community had been maligned”.¹⁰¹ In the postcolonial field of studies, this type of interpretation was perpetuated, to the extent that many critics lamented Forster's lack of “political seriousness” in his portrayal of the relationship between the British and the Indians. The critics actually read the absence of “political references” as a sign of naivety, or even of complicity with the imperialist discourse.¹⁰² Paul B. Armstrong evokes the different aspects of this postcolonial debate on Forster's work:

When E.M. Forster is invoked by politically minded contemporary critics, it is usually to attack or dismiss him. His name has become a token for error or lamentable naiveté, whether he is presented as an illustration of the fallacies of liberal humanism, or as a last remnant of British imperialism, or as a practitioner of traditional narrative methods who lacks self-consciousness about the epistemological ambiguities of language.¹⁰³

Generally speaking, one can say that Galgut's novel indirectly responds to those critiques as it systematically vindicates the autobiographical and homoerotic subtext of the work. It salvages the liberal humanism conveyed by its author, highlighting how this discourse actually coincided with real-life and honest attempts on the part of Forster to “connect” to the dark-skinned “Other”.

As Armstrong's comment suggests, the epistemological issues raised by *A Passage to India* also divided the critics: they could not, and still cannot, agree as to whether Fors-

¹⁰¹ Stallybrass, Oliver. “Editor's Introduction”. In Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978, xxii.

¹⁰² Carbajal, Alberto Fernández. “Introduction: Liberal, Humanist, Modernist, Queer ?”. In *Compromise and Resistance in Postcolonial Writing: E.M. Forster's Legacy*. Edited by Alberto Fernández Carbajal. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 15.

¹⁰³ Paul B. Armstrong is cited in Carbajal. See Carbajal, “Introduction: Liberal, Humanist, Modernist, Queer ?”, 1.

ter deconstructed or, on the contrary, reinforced the discourse of imperialism through his novel. Therefore, as Carbajal interestingly argues, the position of Forster in the postcolonial field should be seen as essentially ambivalent: “[He is] at the cross-roads of two distinct branches of postcolonial studies, one that seeks in literature the means to critique the material conditions of colonialism and another which sees discursive representation as political appropriation, and which prizes representational self-effacement” (16). As Ambreen Hai specifies, one element of *A Passage to India* which has been viewed as being problematic is the difficulty on the part of the white characters to understand and articulate their experience in India, so that they can only describe it with ambiguous and orientalizing terms such as “mystery” and “muddle”. One can illustrate this point through the reference to a conversation drawn from *A Passage to India*. Mrs. Moore does not understand why the carriage she has been promised by an Indian couple never arrived:

“An Indian lady and gentleman were to send their carriage for us at nine. It has never come. We waited and waited and waited; we can’t think what happened.”

“Some misunderstanding,” said Fielding [...], seeing at once that it was the type of incident that had better not be cleared up.

“Oh no, it wasn’t that,” Miss Quested persisted. “I do so hate mysteries,” Adela announced.

“We English do.”

“I dislike them not because I’m English, but from my own personal point of view,” she corrected.

“I like mysteries but I rather dislike muddles,” said Mrs. Moore.

“A mystery is a muddle.”

“Oh, do you think so, Mr. Fielding?”

“A mystery is only a high-sounding term for a muddle. No advantage in stirring it up, either case. Aziz and I know well that India’s a muddle.”¹⁰⁴

This cultural misunderstanding—which is called either a “mystery” or a “muddle” depending on the characters—reaches a climax after the expedition to the Marabar Caves, which definitely unsettles Mrs. Moore’s and Adela Quested’s rational minds. There, the

¹⁰⁴ Forster, *A Passage to India*, 62.

two women are confronted with a “terrifying echo”¹⁰⁵. More importantly, this visit has dramatic consequences since it leads to Aziz’s arrest: the latter is accused of having sexually assaulted the British tourist Adela. Still, Adela remains irresolute throughout the narrative and feels unable to describe what actually happened to her in that numinous place. In fact, the reader is never given any clear-cut answer. As Oliver Stallybrass notes, this episode can even be said to have become the “notorious unresolved riddle” of the novel among critics¹⁰⁶. Furthermore, the polyphony of the novel prevents the reader from making any conclusion with regard to the representation of India and from identifying the author’s ideological position, as the omniscient narrator alternately focalizes on both the British and Indian characters and their conflicting views. This focalization constantly and unpredictably shifts all through the story. Ambreen Hai synthesizes the criticism leveled at Forster in view of the epistemological issues of *Passage*:

In assuming that Forster presents the impossibility of communication as due to the otherness of Indian language, critics end up subscribing to colonial stereotypes of Indian incomprehensibility. If Western language cannot capture India, they suggest, then either that language is inadequate for the great mysteries of the orient, or that orient itself is a muddle.¹⁰⁷

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said also mentions the inherent complicity of Forster with the imperialist discourse, arguing that “Forster identifies the course of the narrative with a Britisher, Fielding, who can understand only that India is too vast and baffling”¹⁰⁸.

In fact, Galgut’s “rereading” of *A Passage to India* does not allow one to solve once and for all the meaning of the caves and their mysterious “echo”. Nonetheless, *Arctic Summer* provides different keys of understanding and hypotheses, so that one can reassess

¹⁰⁵ Forster, *A Passage to India*, 138.

¹⁰⁶ Stallybrass, “Editor’s Introduction”, xxvi.

¹⁰⁷ See Hai, Ambreen. “Chapter 4: At the Mouth of the Caves: *A Passage to India* and the Language of Re-vision”. In *Making Words Matter: The Agency of Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009, 157.

¹⁰⁸ Edward Said is cited by Alberto Fernández Carbajal. See Carbajal, Alberto Fernandez. “The Postcolonial Queer and the Legacies of Colonial Homoeroticism: Of Queer Lenses and Phenomenology in E. M. Forster, David Lean and Hanif Kureishi”. In *Only Connect*, 261. See also Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993, 246.

the author's complex epistemological and ideological views regarding the "mystery" of India as it is reflected in his work. To some extent, Galgut thus also indirectly plays the role of a literary critic as he engages, though in an indirect manner, in reinterpretation.

First of all, *Arctic Summer* clearly prevents the reader who has read *A Passage to India* from associating Morgan with any single character from that novel: Adela Quested, Cyril Fielding and Mrs. Moore are all considered as Forster's alter egos by Galgut as the latter reattributes these characters' respective experiences and speeches to his fictional and multi-faceted Morgan/Forster. Besides, the text makes explicit Morgan's openness and receptiveness to the so-called "mystery" supposedly embodied by India, which becomes a trope in the novel and *positively* challenges his rationalist mind. This confusion turns out to be empowering for Morgan—as it is not for Adela or Mrs. Moore—as it seems to echo his own sexual, ideological and religious uncertainties. Galgut even uses the Forsterian term "muddle" at the beginning of the book while Morgan is writing his novel *The Longest Journey*. With this term, he emphasizes how, even before discovering India, Morgan was already experiencing a sort of epistemological crisis, and felt drawn to a non-rationalist way of thinking: "It was all mixed up, all coded, all undisclosed, too many opposites swirling in a muddle that he couldn't solve. But he liked it afterwards, this lack of solution, because it was the truth" (44).

As he visits India for the first time, Morgan can then recognize the sense of confusion and incomprehensibility: he notes "the strangeness, the distant otherness of India" (99), expressions which, if we rely on Said's *Orientalism*, may seem to reinforce again the colonial stereotypes and, by the same token, the asymmetrical power dynamics between the West and the East. However, the novel clearly presents the protagonist's interest in the "mysterious Orient"¹⁰⁹, to use Said's expression, as being primarily emotional

¹⁰⁹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, 26.

and benevolent¹¹⁰. If he decides to go to India, it is because he is driven by his love for Masood. At the same time, since he feels like an impostor in suburban England — in terms of religion, sexuality, and writing— he hopes that India will offer him a new identity as a man and as an artist: “He had developed a daydream, which he told to nobody else, which featured him traveling to India and vanishing. He would not die, exactly, but he would drift away, into a new life, a new identity, and he would never revisit his old one in England again” (74). Furthermore, Masood has incited him to come to India to write a novel “from *inside*” (46).

From the outset, his position is thus completely different from Goldie’s, as the latter clearly considers rationalist Western epistemology to be superior to any other: he belittles Indian cultures and dismisses their complexity, lamenting the mix of religions, the irrationality, the superstitions, and the “disorder” which characterizes India (107). Morgan, unlike him, is much more curious and sympathetic towards this so-called “irrationality” as he does not try to understand and explain it. He feels “unexpectedly stirred by temples, mosques and roadside shrines” (107). To illustrate this sense of fascination, Galgut even transposed to his fictional biography the episode quoted above from Forster’s *A Passage to India* —which records a cultural misunderstanding:

They simply waited, and no servant came.

[...]

“But you told us you would send your servants for us.”

“Yes, yes, so I did, but as everybody knows where my house is, I decided that the servant wasn’t necessary.”

¹¹⁰ Interestingly, Galgut’s re-reading of Forster’s novel seems to coincide with that of Amardeep Singh. This critic clearly insists on the need to consider with more attention Forster’s emotional and “unique engagement with the Orient” in order to understand *A Passage to India*: “Forster’s interest in Islamic space constitutes a discourse that is at once more personal and less authoritative than the Orientalist discourse described by Edward Said in his groundbreaking 1979 book, *Orientalism*. Forster is attracted to Islamic space not merely as a form of knowledge, but as an intense structure of feeling that is always partly an expression of his personal attraction to men like Masood”. See Singh, Amardeep. “Reorienting Forster: Intimacy and Islamic Space”, *Criticism* 49, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 36.

Morgan was so charmed by the illogicality that he forgot to stay cross. Where else could this have happened but in India? It struck him as revealing, though of what exactly he couldn't explain. (106)

It is precisely this sense of incomprehensibility, here no longer presented as a source of irritation, which makes India so fascinating for Morgan.

When Morgan goes back to India in order to work for his Hindu friend, the Maharajah Bapu Sahib, the place has not lost its mystical and mysterious aura. He describes the court of Dewas as being at once “incomprehensible”, “baffling” and “frightening”: “Everything was confusion and mess” (251). The narrator even uses the term “chaos” (252) in order to describe Morgan's perceptions. Yet, once again, confusion and fascination seem inextricably intertwined. For example, Morgan is enthralled by the ghost story he is told of a dead man who may be haunting the place of his accident in the form of an animal. People believe that this man might be trying to take his revenge: “It was a kind of thinking that had been worn away in England, lingering mostly in its literature [...] India scraped up to the surface a kind of buried animism in him, a propensity towards the mystical” (271). The notion of “mystery” is thus unequivocally given positive overtones as it allows spiritual growth in one. It even becomes a synonym for “infinite expansion”:

There had been so much he'd seen and heard in that country which had baffled him and which rational thinking couldn't penetrate. Mystery was at the heart of things there and it would be at the heart of his novel too. It was right that there should be an obscurity at the core of events, echoing the physical shape of the cave around which the characters and events would dance. One could move outwards from that absence, suggesting infinite expansion. (312)

Interestingly, we can also observe in this passage Morgan's obsession with one of the caves visited in the Barabar Hills.

If we go back to Galgut's description of Morgan's visit to that cave as it first appears in the narrative, we notice that the author mimicked the account provided by Forster's anonymous narrative voice in *A Passage to India*. Indeed, Morgan is similarly intrigued by the hollow shape of the caves, their darkness, the “smoothness” of their polished walls and, above all, their powerful echo (85). Through the narrative, Morgan's spiritual

experience in the caves is given different meanings as the protagonist constantly reconsiders and reinterprets the feelings invoked by this place. The reader discovers that the day preceding the visit, Morgan had tried to kiss Masood and had been rejected by his friend: “Morgan had taken those feelings of sadness and longing and shame—to the caves with him the next morning” (126). Further in the text, Morgan internally reasserts that “something had happened between Masood and himself, he felt, in the caves. Which was nonsense, because Masood hadn’t even been present” (127).

At the end of the narrative, Galgut’s “reinterpretation” becomes more explicit as he delivers a detailed fictionalized account of Morgan’s thoughts as he is finally crafting the scene of the Marabar Caves in his novel:

The echo [...] took a physical form: somebody else was there. [...] But who was it? No way to know. The other remained a mystery. [...] Why not let everything turn on a mystery? [...] Dry, earnest, ignorant Adela. All this time, she’d been in love, longing to be touched, and her longing had transmuted into violence. Imaginary or real or ghostly: let it remain mysterious. He wouldn’t explain what had happened because he didn’t *know* what had happened. [...] Wearing Adela’s skin now, which fitted him better than he liked, he burst out of the tunnel, into the blinding light. (311-312)

Although the “mystery” remains, the reader is incited to connect that scene with the writer’s personal experience with Masood. Furthermore, this provisional identification taking place between the writer and Adela is reinforced by the fact that, all through the narrative, the protagonist tends to perceive his homosexual desire as an “enemy” (190), since he never succeeds in understanding and controlling it. At some point, he even comes to acknowledge that “his lust [...] was like a question without an answer” (214).

To conclude, the reinterpretation of *A Passage to India* that Galgut strives for in *Arctic Summer* is, by definition, contradictory. On the one hand, the homoerotic subtext of the novel is put forward since Galgut creates overt textual correspondences between Morgan’s emotional life and his artistic work—first, through an indirect strategy of mimicry and transposition, and then in an explicit way in the last chapter, aptly entitled “A Passage to India”. On the other hand, Galgut deliberately prevents the reader from making any conclusion concerning the position of Morgan/Forster in his Indian novel, since he traces

the development of the novelist's aesthetic concerns and insists on the "uncertainty principle" —as Stallybrass calls it¹¹¹— that the latter finally embraces when writing the novel: "As a writer, he'd felt he had to provide answers, but India had reminded him that no answer would suffice" (311). Therefore, one could argue that Galgut also asserts in this way Morgan's modernist conception of writing. He demonstrates how, for the protagonist, only fiction has the power to reflect reality and capture some "truth", precisely because it does not have to offer any definite answer. *A Passage to India to India* thus seems to reflect and conflate Morgan's uncertainties about love, sex, politics, art and religion:

Part of the reason that he'd faltered was because he couldn't see further than politics; to write merely of Indians and Englishmen wasn't enough. But the story had broadened, suddenly, into a much larger channel, in which politics was only one stream. Religion, the lifeblood of India, flowed more strongly, and he saw now that the temple would offset the mosque and the caves; it would replace the one god and the no-god with a multiplicity of gods. If it wasn't order exactly, it was something better, because it more closely resembled the world. Things were not rounded off and resolved; rather, they expanded outwards, perhaps for ever, and his book could suggest that possibility. (273-274)

In this excerpt, Galgut actually seems to elaborate, albeit anachronistically, on the argument developed by the real-life Forster after the publication of *Passage*:

The book is not really about politics though it is the political aspect of it that caught the general public and made it sell. It's about something wider than politics, about the search of the human race for a more lasting home, about the universe as embodied in the Indian earth and the Indian sky, about the horror lurking in the Marabar Caves and the release symbolized by the birth of Krishna. It is—or rather desires to be—philosophic and poetic.¹¹²

Galgut thus also remained faithful to Forster's own vision since all these elements are clearly given a decisive role in his biofiction. One can thus attest again to the liminal status of *Arctic Summer*, which is always poised between fiction and history.

¹¹¹ Stallybrass, Oliver. "Editor's Introduction". In Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978, xxvi.

¹¹² Forster is quoted by Oliver Stallybrass. See Stallybrass, "Editor's Introduction", xxii.

At the end of the narrative, Galgut even makes the protagonist self-consciously comment on the reception of his work: “*A Passage to India* appeared in June. It was always a peculiar moment when he held a published product in his hand. [...] Now it had actually entered the world, multiplied and disseminated far beyond its source, and had taken on a separate life of its own” (324). This passage illustrates again the self-reflexivity which underlies the whole text —which has already been evoked in other sections. As Ansgar Nünning points out, this process has become a recurring feature in the contemporary field of biofiction and has been experimented with in various ways by writers¹¹³. In fact, as the author placed the theme of writing at the heart of his work, more specifically focusing on the genesis of *A Passage to India*, there are several passages in which his voice seems to merge with Forster’s. This conscious or unconscious fictionalizing process thus adds to the other “postmodernist” strategies which have been mentioned, and also allows one to reaffirm the empathetic and poetic approach chosen by Galgut.

¹¹³ See Nünning, Ansgar. “Fictional Metabiographies and Metaautobiographies: Towards a Definition, Typology and Analysis of Self-Reflexive Hybrid Metegenres’ from Self-Reflexivity in Literature (2005)”. In *Biographical Fiction: A Reader*. Edited by Michael Lackey. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 359-375.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Galgut's *Arctic Summer* exploits the creative and political possibilities offered by the hybrid genre of biofiction. Although the author clearly drew his inspiration from the numerous biographies and critiques which have been written on that subject, it is precisely thanks to that generic hybridity that his work stands out from the Forsterian studies: he can simultaneously act as a biographer, novelist and critic. As we have seen, Forster's life and work have been studied in conflicting ways in the postcolonial field, as the author's sexuality, liberal humanism, anti-imperialism, as well as his modernism have divided the critics. Galgut's fictional biography thus clearly integrates that multidimensional postcolonial debate, as it sheds light on the link between all those controversial issues, by means of a reflection on the implications of Forster's interclass and interracial same-sex desires. To be more specific, one can say that the biographical novelist reconnects the subject's homosexuality with his critical political consciousness towards the class divisions and the imperialist structure.

At this final stage of the analysis, and in view of these thematic choices, it would be tempting to eventually venture into the "autobiographical" dimension of the text, especially since biographic studies have studied at length what Ledent and Tunca call "the ill-defined boundary between biography and autobiography"¹¹⁴. Furthermore, as these two critics also demonstrate through different examples, this autobiographical dimension has become an important feature of "postcolonial biographical fiction"¹¹⁵. Thus, one may feel strongly tempted to intersect Morgan's ambivalent position in Edwardian society—as it is represented in *Arctic Summer*—with Galgut's posture as a white novelist within a divided postcolonial/post-apartheid society¹¹⁶. Even though this issue could not easily be explored within the framework of this analysis, also due to the undeniable historical aspect of the

¹¹⁴ Tunca and Ledent, "Towards a definition of postcolonial biographical fiction", 342.

¹¹⁵ Tunca and Ledent, "Towards a definition of postcolonial biographical fiction", 342.

¹¹⁶ Howard J. Booth cites Christopher Taylor's view that there are "parallels between [Galgut's] negotiation as a South African writer of the new, post-Apartheid nation, and Forster as a British writer in late colonial moment". See Booth, Howard J. "Allegory and Interpretation: E. M. Forster's *Maurice* and Damon Galgut's *Arctic Summer* (2020)", 203.

work, it is still interesting to highlight the postcolonial approach undertaken by Galgut. As we have seen, Galgut's narrative may be called "postcolonial" only if we use the term "postcolonial" in the way Gandhi, Boone and Carbajal have done it with reference to the historical figure of Forster —and whose respective works have been particularly useful in this analysis. This postcolonial lens is necessarily nuanced and must, therefore, be distinguished from the oppositional and anti-colonialist discourse which is typically associated with postcolonial theoretical studies. As Carbajal underlines, Forster's significant legacy in many postcolonial novels across the globe derives from his *ambivalent* position regarding the prevailing discourses of his time:

It is precisely this conciliatory middle way which has secured Forster a place in later debates on intercultural race and class relations and on the project of the postcolonial nation undertaken by authors whose inquisitive narratives seek to avoid the sway of political extremisms. In other words, Forster's resistance to normative discourses and ideologies, together with his drive for compromise, make his original debates attractive for later writers who attempt to gauge similarly open and dialogic positions.¹¹⁷

Since Galgut is also a homosexual writer, one can safely assume that this curiosity about Forster is, in his case, also particularly related to the issue of homosexuality. In *Arctic Summer*, the author investigates the subversive and political overtones that may be folded in the term "minorism" —used by Forster/Morgan— beyond its self-evident meaning, namely the belonging to a sexual minority. In Morgan's case, sexual alienation also entails a subversive, albeit limited, form of empathy with other racial and social "minorities". Galgut thus seems to support Robert K. Martin and George Piggford's view in this respect, that "Forster's sense of his own stigmatization provides metonymically for an identification with other oppressions"¹¹⁸. In a sense, Forster's struggle is thus universally relevant as today's world is still marked by racial, social and sexual prejudices.

¹¹⁷ Carbajal, "Introduction: Liberal, Humanist, Modernist, Queer ?", 2.

¹¹⁸ Martin, Robert K. and George Piggford. "Introduction: Queer Forster?". In *Queer Forster*. Edited by Robert K. Martin and George Piggford. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997, 18.

In the narrative, Morgan never really comes out publicly, as Galgut does not alter the established historical facts of Forster's life. Still, by integrating different symbolic fictional scenes, the novelist succeeds in representing the character's invisible and nonetheless unique accomplishment within his hostile context. In one of the last scenes of the narrative, the reader is finally given the chance to make sense of Galgut's symbolic title, *Arctic Summer*: Morgan contemplates his own reflection in a mirror, and imagines himself "standing alone in the middle of an immense whiteness. A snowy, frozen landscape, on which the sun was nevertheless pouring down. Arctic Summer: nothing moving, nothing alive, and yet the sky was open" (329). One can say that this metaphorical image, which conveys Morgan's incompatible feelings of liberation and repression, features both the character's and Galgut's epiphany as a biographical novelist: they respectively come to concede that "the reflection would never show the truth" (329). Still, Morgan manages to voice the most essential truth about himself: "I have loved," he told them. "That is, I mean to say, *lived*. In my own way" (329). This is clearly the general message that Galgut strives to convey in *Arctic Summer*, by investigating the unknown emotional experiences and conversations of the canonical British author.

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