



## Arctic Summer

*Damon Galgut*

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## Arctic Summer Damon Galgut

In 1912, the SS Birmingham approaches India. On board is Morgan Forster, novelist and man of letters, who is embarking on a journey of discovery. As Morgan stands on deck, the promise of a strange new future begins to take shape before his eyes. The seeds of a story start to gather at the corner of his mind: a sense of impending menace, lust in close confines, under a hot, empty sky. It will be another twelve years, and a second time spent in India, before *A Passage to India*, E. M. Forster's great work of literature, is published. During these years, Morgan will come to a profound understanding of himself as a man, and of the infinite subtleties and complexity of human nature, bringing these great insights to bear in his remarkable novel.

At once a fictional exploration of the life and times of one of Britain's finest novelists, his struggle to find a way of living and being, and a stunningly vivid evocation of the mysterious alchemy of the creative process, *Arctic Summer* is a literary masterpiece, by one of the finest writers of his generation.

## Arctic Summer Details

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Author : Damon Galgut

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## From Reader Review Arctic Summer for online ebook

### Amanda Patterson says

I loved the idea of this book. Damon Galgut fictionalises EM Forster's life between 1910 and 1924. It is the story behind the story of 'A Passage to India'.

I wasn't quite sure how to review this book, so I made a list of the things I loved first. I enjoyed reading about the literati of the time, and how EM Forster felt alienated. It was interesting to find out about a famous writer's life through an empathetic novelist's eyes. I was impressed by the research and time that went into creating the novel, and I liked the idea of finding out about the way people thought in India and Egypt and England in the early 1900s.

The book lacked something, though, and I think it had a lot to do with the sterile telling of the tale. We stayed in EM Forster's head, and I had no sense of setting because of the lack of sensory details. I also found the scenes in the book overly-long and repetitive, which may be true to real life, but boring when you read them. The magic was lost for me in that final third of the book.

I read 'A Passage to India' at university and this story took me back to a very different place and version of myself. It made me think of how we remember things, and how we change. More importantly, it reminded me of how we never forget how we feel about certain things, even after many years have passed. This made me wish Galgut had recreated something more tangible, instead of seemingly following the infatuation with the 'unknown' from Forster's famous novel.

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### Gerhard says

You can see when an author falls in love with his subject matter, as Damon Galgut does with E.M. Forster in this ravishing and devastatingly sad account of the author's sojourns in India.

Unable to express his true sexuality in his home country, where he was constantly under the watchful eye of his mother and the social barometer of English aristocracy, Forster's tentative explorations in this regard occurred abroad, in much different circumstances, and with much different results, at the end of the day.

What I loved about Galgut's book is how much insight it gives into both the writerly process and the lives of famous authors such as Forster, who we simply assume due to their fame that they were always confident in their sense of their own success and worth.

Not so Forster, who juggled the unpublishable Maurice with Arctic Summer (his only unfinished novel) and what was to be his eventual masterpiece, A Passage to India.

Impeccably researched and written with an extraordinary depth of empathy towards and understanding of Forster, Galgut maintains a difficult balance of showing us Forster in context and simultaneously conveying a sense of his literary legacy and achievements. Magnificent.

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## notgettingenough says

The long is: I suspect most people come to this as an EM Forster fan, whereas I'm the contrary case. This was the only Galgut I hadn't read when I picked it up in London a year or more ago. On the other hand, I've never read a thing by EM Forster other than his brilliant short story 'The Machine Stops'.

So enamoured am I of Galgut that when I bought this, I didn't even look at the back cover, only to discover when I sat down to begin it at home that it is a bio-novel. I was crestfallen. I have a historian's distaste for bio-pics, biography, autobiography. Why would a bio-novel be any different? What is it? Some excuse to write a biography without doing the hard work? Without having to bother with the facts? Back on the shelf it sat, and sat. And sat. Until the other day when I came upon it soon after an experience which had given me a different perspective on this sort of book. I read *Infinity: The Story of a Moment* by Gabriel Josipovici, read it, loved it, and only subsequently discovered it was a bio-novel.

Rest here:

<https://alittleteaallittlechat.wordpress.com/2018/07/10/arctic-summer-a-review/>

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## Marita says

### 4.5 stars

This biographical novel\* about author **E.M. Forster** commences with a passage to India, i.e. a literal one. It is 1912, and he is on board the *SS City of Birmingham* en route to India to visit his dear friend Syed Ross Masood whom he met when the latter was a student at Oxford University. Even on board ship Morgan (as the author refers to him) cannot escape the stifling attitude and behaviour of his English compatriots. "*The ship was like a tiny piece of England, Tunbridge Wells in particular, that had broken off and been set in motion.*" Stifling, as homosexuality was a crime in England; stifling as his mother with whom he lived was constantly concerned about appearances and what the neighbours would think if Morgan should write this or that. Morgan was a keen observer of his countrymen in a foreign location, and as the fictional Morgan states: "*“My Italian novels,” he said at last, “are really about the English. Italy was merely a backdrop.”*" Perhaps he would be able to write a good novel in India whilst visiting his beloved friend.

Initially thinking that his new novel would be a repetition: "*Insofar as he'd considered it at all, the book he'd imagined he might write would repeat his previous novels, where the chilly reserve of his English characters had broken down in the warmth and abandonment of Italy.*"", but with the backdrop of India. However, even after several visits he finds India incomprehensible and full of contradictions. Equally the English in India behave in an incomprehensible manner with their petty racism. There is mutual disdain between Englishman and Indian alike. "*This crack, this deep divide, would run through his book. Two nations, two distinct ways of doing things, were in endless friction with each other. And it was everywhere obvious. The conflict was in him and around him, and wanted to be worked out on the page.*" But how? Surrounded by chaos he tries to sort through the chaos in his mind.

Author Damon Galgut's well researched Arctic Summer is a sensitive and perceptive exploration of E.M. Forster's friendships, his longing to be loved and to gain acceptance, and his on-going struggle to write A

Passage to India, which took him years to complete. It focuses in particular on his friendship with Syed Ross Masood to whom A Passage to India is dedicated\*\*, as well as his friend Mohammed in Alexandria, Egypt, where Forster was stationed during WWI. During the course of this novel, Forster learns acceptance of himself, and writes Maurice in between trying to write his great novel about India.

*“From one level to the next, up and down the bewildering social staircase, Morgan passed. He was an outsider; he settled nowhere long enough to take a place. Yet he himself wasn’t free, either of his skin or the designation it bestowed on him. And he had a shadow in tow, to remind him of the depths underfoot.”*

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There is so much that I'd like to say about this novel, and I feel that I have but skimmed the surface. I struggled both to decide and to articulate what I thought and wanted to say, and yet I felt compelled to review it.

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Roughly forty years ago I read all of E.M Forster's novels (except the incomplete Arctic Summer), as well as his non-fiction work Aspects of the Novel. As I was reading Damon Galgut's novel about the author's struggles to write A Passage to India, I wished that I had read that opus recently as I have only the vaguest recollections of that work. However, I re-read William1's excellent review:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

For a superb review of Arctic Summer by Damon Galgud, read Roger's review:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

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\*This novel is named after an incomplete novel by E.M. Forster: Arctic Summer

\*\*Upon completion of his great novel "A Passage to India", Forster would dedicate the novel as follows:

TO  
Syed Ross Masood  
AND TO THE SEVENTEEN YEARS OF OUR FRIENDSHIP

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## Val says

The book is a fictionalised account of a few years in E M Forster's life and shows him unsure of himself as a writer, as a gay man and as a member of a class and society responsible for administering an Empire. It is not necessary to have read Forster to enjoy the book, this could be about any man trying to find a life he feels comfortable living, but it adds to the story if you have. During the book Forster travels to India, makes friends, falls in love, starts writing several books, lives in Egypt, tries to cross cultural divides of class and ethnicity and develops as a man and a writer. All his most important books are from this period in his life. Damon Galgut is a very good writer himself and I suspect that the only reason this is not on the main Booker list is that publishers were tending to push their US authors at the expense of their Commonwealth ones.

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## Will says

*Arctic Summer* is the fictional account of E.M. Forster's life from around the time he became known for his early novels until *A Passage to India* was published, in the mid-twenties. It also provides a compelling and informative background to *Maurice*, the novel that wasn't published until 1971 which I read a couple of years ago without the context of Forster's becoming aware of his sexuality, (he wasn't at all comfortable with his homosexuality - for which he used the term Minorite - although he did not really try to suppress it). His longing was for affection even more than physical love: "in any event, the hunger wasn't satisfied. Even in one's most physical moments, the real craving was for love".

Forster lived with his mother at this time, constrained by "empty conversations with elderly women". By the end of this period he was still essentially a virgin. One deep friendship with Syed Masood, to whom *A Passage to India* is dedicated – though the flamboyant Masood was not actually gay – another with Mohammed el-Adl, a tram conductor in Egypt, who also subsequently married and had a family. It is amazing really that he was able to write so persuasively about love in his early novels when his experience was so limited.

Initially I wondered how close Galgut's fictional account would be to an actual biography; were these even real characters populating the pages? But by the end it was evident that he had researched Forster's diaries minutely and faithfully; the events and characters were real, and the fictional aspect was really limited to Forster's thoughts and feelings that he didn't share anywhere.

One revealing episode that reinforces this occurs near the end of the book: Forster overhears two women in a tea-room talking about him and his supposed unhappy life. He responds, indignantly (and completely out of character in my view), telling them that he has loved, has lived. "So terrible was the memory of this incident that he mentioned it to nobody. Not even to the pages of his diary" - so clearly a Galgut invention.

I learned to treat such passages with caution – another that I thought did not really reflect Forster's personality was a tawdry obsession with teenage boys that took place in India when Forster was for a few months Secretary to the Maharajah of the state of Dewas. I had a feeling Galgut imagined an awful lot into that time.

But despite all of Forster's "There is nothing I know better than the English tea party," in *Arctic Summer* he comes across as passionate about life and writing, though he felt it was a matter of "grinding craft rather than lofty art". I did love the contrast with DH Lawrence's revolutionary fervour, though: Morgan interrupted one of DH's tirades about digging down to his "volcanic base material" instead of fossicking about with Italian love stories and knitting, to say primly, "I don't knit!"; to which Lawrence scowled and replied "In your soul, you do." I don't know if this actually happened, but if not, it should have.

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So *Arctic Summer* is a sort of imaginative dramatized biography, and a very absorbing read it was too, though it has taken me an uncommonly long time to get through it.

## Vit Babenco says

"Love had vexed his mind, making him irritable and irrational. There was something in human affection that was at odds with reason, he thought, like a kind of mild insanity."

Moral qualms and shortage of willpower – I believe **Damon Galgut** perfectly depicts his protagonist's drawbacks. And he magically recreates psychological climate and an atmosphere of that long gone era.

"That echo. It played in his head at unexpected moments, repeating certain sounds and making nonsense of them. But could you remember an echo? Memory itself was like another kind of echo, everything duplicating endlessly, in shadow versions of itself."

And this is an aura of the place:

"He didn't believe – not really – in the supernatural. But he didn't entirely disbelieve either. India scraped up to the surface a kind of buried animism in him, a propensity towards the mystical."

And an idea of happiness is always better than the happiness itself...

"But the shame, he slowly realised, was part of the point. Degradation had its own sensual power, and no sooner was he hurrying away from one encounter than his mind was leaping ahead to the next one. In the morning when he woke up he was already breathless with anticipation and the hours passed with grinding slowness till the appointed time. But the idea was far more thrilling than the act, which was over almost as soon as it started."

E.M. Forster was an unhappy man, tormented by his desires and doubts, and he lived a miserable life but his moral suffering did make a great writer out of him.

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## •Karen• says

"You see," he told Morgan. "It's as I said. Everything comes down to religion, and it's dull, dull, dull."

"Religion is perhaps not the only element at work here."

"What do you mean? Oh yes, I see.... but even that part of it is dull. A mixture of rapture and cowardice. No action, but all that *quivering*!"

Oh lawks a mercy. I seem to have turned into one of those people who need something to happen occasionally in the books they are reading.

Beautifully, sensitively written. But once laid down, it was hard to pick up again. At first I blamed the excruciating font, the rough paper, my reddened streaming eyes. I battled on, because I have loved Mr Galgut's work in the past. But it really was a mixture of rapture and (very understandable) cowardice. No action, but all that *quivering*.

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## Hugh says

A fascinating portrait of E.M. Forster and his long struggle to produce "A passage to India". Galgut's prose is always well-judged and readable, and it left me wanting to read Forster.

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## Roger Brunyate says

### Inside a Very Private Man

I knew E. M. Forster at Cambridge. That is to say, he allowed me to visit him in his rooms at King's College a couple of times in 1962, when I was a young undergraduate. We talked about those few subjects on which he would willingly open up—mainly music, art, and literature sufficiently removed from his own. I found him genial, witty, and welcoming, but also extraordinarily private on any matter having to do with his life or work. Many years later, after he was long dead, I got to know him in a different way, through adapting his novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread* as an opera libretto.\* The choices I had to make gave me a closer insight into Forster's mind as an artist, as I tried to work out not only what was most essential in what he wrote, but also (tentatively) what might lie behind the lines that he could not write. I believe I have read all his fiction other than the incomplete *Arctic Summer*, whose title the South African writer Damon Galgut borrowed for his biographical novel; I have now corrected that omission. But I have never read a traditional biography of Forster, so this was a revelation, like seeing an old acquaintance in a new light, fresh but familiar at the same time.

The novel opens just over a century ago (and fifty years before I met him), on the steamship carrying Edward Morgan Forster on his first visit to India, in 1912. Immediately, I felt that Galgut had captured his personality just right: his "crumpled, second-hand appearance, which made him seem like a tradesman of some kind"; his exquisite politeness; his extraordinary reticence about personal matters of any kind, especially sexual ones. On board ship, he meets a young army officer called Searight, who recognizes a kindred spirit in Morgan, and is not reticent at all. The author, already famous from the success of his fourth published novel, *Howards End*, is both horrified and intrigued. For although recognizing himself as a homosexual—Galgut's period-appropriate term is "minorite"—and yearning for love, he would remain a virgin until he was 37.

Galgut's approach is rather similar to what Colm Tóibín did for Henry James in *The Master*, though he is less episodic and I think more revealing. Both men, according to their authors, were attracted to young men of a lower class, though both struggled against expressing or even admitting it. But unlike James, who easily assumed his status as a public figure, Galgut's Forster is a mass of insecurities, and feels himself something of a fraud. He is also presented as a profoundly lonely man, seeking love and human companionship, but deterred from finding it because of the complications of his physical urges.

Three of the long chapters which make up the meat of this book are named after men, all of other races, each of whom was important to Morgan at different phases of his life. There is Masood, an Indian barrister of good family whom he tutored for admission to Oxford years before, and is now his chief reason for visiting India now; Masood will give much, but he cannot give him all. Then there is Mohammed, a tram conductor whom Morgan befriends during the years he spends in Alexandria during the War, working for the Red Cross. And finally Bapu Sahib, the Indian Mahahrajah who invites Morgan to his court as Private Secretary in the early 1920's; theirs is by no means a sexual relationship, but based on mutual respect and fondness; it also coincides with what was probably the least closeted period of Forster's life.

For the inability to let go emotionally is what Forster sees as the besetting handicap of the English upper-middle class, entrenched behind walls of xenophobia and convention. It is the subject of his early novels such as *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Even knowing that book as well as I do, Galgut gave me new insights. I understood the magnetic charm of the Italian ruffian, Gino Carella, and his effect on the hero, Philip Herriton. I also understood that Philip could no more admit these things than could Forster himself, also still trapped in the middle-class proprieties of his mother's world. But away from England, in each of his voyages

East, to India, Egypt, and India again, he found himself loosening up more and more. His masterpiece, *A Passage to India*, went far to expressing the contrasts, not just between two cultures but two sides of his personality. But it did not resolve them; one of Galgut's most impressive scenes is the one in which Forster realizes that the book must be built around an unsolved mystery. And Morgan Forster never could resolve them in print. He lived for 46 years longer, but never wrote another novel.

Galgut's book also made me sad. How little I knew back then! With more homework, for instance, I could have asked Forster about his literary friends, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and C. V. Cavafy, all of whom figure in Galgut's book. But he would have brushed me off with polite evasions. For though I shared his conversation and his whiskey, I could never really know him. Now, after reading this deeply perceptive novel, in some essential way I do.

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The three-act opera was composed by Mark Lanz Weiser. It received its student premiere at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore in 1999. Its professional premiere was given by Opera San Jose in February, 2015.

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### **Eric Anderson says**

Sometimes the feeling of a novel resonates so strongly with my current emotional state that it's eerie. It's that magical moment where consciousness becomes fused so tight with the narrative and the particular story becomes my own – particular and universal. True. I had this sensation as I got into the thick of this novel's story. It seems an unlikely place and person to feel so connected to: Galgut's fictional imagining of writer EM Forster. The novel mostly takes place between the publication of "Howard's End" in 1910 and the publication of "A Passage to India" in 1924. Forster (or Morgan as he is commonly called) travels to India primarily to visit a man he's fallen in love with named Syed Ross Masood. He experiences first hand the strained racial relations and the way imperialism was transforming at that time. Having met in England when Morgan was tutoring him the pair became close friends, but never lovers as Masood denied Morgan's advances. When Morgan returns to England he continues to live with his mother who is both his closest companion and worst enemy. During the war Morgan takes up a position in Egypt and there meets the second great love of his life Mohammed. Galgut carefully reconstructs the tentative relationships Morgan builds with other people, elucidating the suppressed sexuality of Morgan and the complexity of racial politics. The story is overall a speculation on the events and emotions which fed into the difficult creation of "A Passage to India" as well as the novel "Maurice" which wasn't published until after the author's death.

Read my full review of Arctic Summer by Damon Galgut on LonesomeReader

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### **Maria Espadinha says**

O Outsider

Esta é uma biografia romanceada de E.M. Forster, um conhecido romancista que se notabilizou pela obra "Uma Passagem para a Índia".

Forster sentia uma natural anti-empatia pelos seus supostamente iguais. A sociedade britânica não fazia mais que transmitir-lhe uma amarga sensação de Outsider, absorvendo-o como um "Loner Among the Crowd"!

Numa época em que os homossexuais eram apontados a dedo, Forster vivia num estado de Alma Reclusa, sedenta por se Libertar e Expandir.

Urgia Abrir Novas Portas!

Conhecer Outras Terras e Outras Gentes que lhe colassem Asas à Alma, permitindo-lhe Soltar-se e Descobrir-se...

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### **Helle says**

Having recently read Damon Galgut's *In A Strange Room*, which was brilliant, and having a life-long love of E.M. Forster, I was prepared to love this novel about the English writer. I liked it a lot but for some reason not quite as much as I loved *The Master*, a similar novel, in which Colm Toibín eloquently and plausibly muses on Henry James's life and books.

As in *The Master*, in which Toibín calls his protagonist Henry, Galgut calls *his* hero Morgan throughout, lovingly as I interpreted it, and it brings the reader closer to him (and his first name wasn't meant to be Edward anyway, Galgut tells us; his father accidentally said his own name at the christening. Had he been less absent-minded, Forster's first name would have been the same as James's).

The title – *Arctic Summer* – was the title of a novel Forster never finished and seems fitting for this portrait of him, his last and unrevealed story, as it were. It is part plausible story-telling based on research and part Galgut's rendition of Forster's thoughts about his homosexuality and the two main loves of his life (at least during the period that we follow him), Syed Ross Masood and Mohammed el-Adl, and less so his thoughts about his books. (In a conversation with Virginia and Leonard Woolf at the end of the novel, Forster says that he isn't really a novelist. Virginia agrees, Leonard does not). For my own part, I would have liked a bit more about his novels.

Galgut returns to India in this novel, and to travelling. He creates a story in which Forster puts together his major works, but the novel builds up to the creation of what many consider to be Forster's masterpiece, *A Passage to India*. Galgut's novel delineates the other novel's development and suggests where many of its ideas spring from. It took Forster some twelve years to write; he continually abandoned it, deeming his memories of India inauthentic, until he visited it again.

Lines from *Passage* are strewn throughout this novel as if Forster had picked up bits and pieces from conversations and events over the 12 years from its conception to its final composition, which he may well have done. I recognized lines spoken by Dr. Aziz and Dr. Godbole, descriptions of Forster's journey to the Barabar Caves (which became the Marabar Caves) and his thoughts on the British Raj, many of which made *Passage* such an important book at the time. Forster had the keenest eyes when it came to observing the English in India but also in-depth knowledge of some of the differences between Hindus and Muslims in India and, thus, of the complexities of Indian politics at the time.

A lot of guess work is necessarily involved as to Forster's feelings of loss and inadequacy, his way of being a

forlorn, gentle man unable to fathom, let alone experience, the depths of his own sexual desires. (We are reminded in the beginning of the novel that Wilde was imprisoned only 17 years previously). Much of this is both probable and reasonable, but I felt less willing to grant Galgut the liberty of imagining Forster's small sexual encounters so explicitly. It seemed intrusive somehow because Forster himself hid this part of himself from all but his closest friends, although I suspect that may have been one of Galgut's reasons for including them: to imagine them out into the open. (And my need to protect Forster post-humously is no doubt entirely misplaced – this is art, after all – but those were my feelings). I have to admit that it also grated on my ears that the word *nevertheless* is used perhaps 20 times in the novel (yet didn't work? Or *even so, however?*, leaving it out?).

In conclusion, though, I read this as an affective homage to Forster. Like Forster – and through painting this portrait of him – Galgut explores human connections and travelling, two of my favourite topics. At one point in the novel, Forster sees a sign in India which is characteristically misspelled and which comes to be a kind of theme in *A Passage to India*: the memorable *God si love*, an orthographically inaccurate but quite wonderful way, to my mind, of reiterating the epigraph to *Howards End*: *Only connect*.

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### **Jay says**

I became much too close to the main character in this novel to be able to discuss the book with much objectivity. In fact, at the end of the novel I knew that I would strangely miss accompanying the thoughts of Morgan Forster, or rather Damon Galgut's creation of E.M. Forster. Morgan's loneliness, his sense of being an outsider, his rather sad connections with those he comes to love are not unfamiliar to me in my own experiences and Galgut manages to bring out what elevates and enriches those experiences in a masterful way.

Damon Galgut got my attention with his more experimental "In a Strange Room", which I found fascinating and baffling. After reading that book I noticed myself thinking back on it often with ever greater appreciation, but here in "Arctic Summer" I'm shown a Damon Galgut who writes more traditionally, and still makes the book linger after he's done.

Perhaps Arctic Summer will not be a huge literary milestone for Damon Galgut, mainly due to it's dominant concern with Forster's personal and intimate life as opposed to his writing. But, for me this moving book about a rather gentle man has already been placed among my favorites.

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### **Rebecca says**

As a writer he'd felt he had to provide answers, but India had reminded him that no answer would suffice. 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.

**(3.5)** This fictionalized account of the life of E.M. Forster zeroes in on the drawn-out composition of *A Passage to India*, which he began in 1913 but wouldn't complete and publish until 1924. In between he broke off to write *Maurice* (only published posthumously), spent three years working in Egypt during the war, and served as a secretary to an Indian maharajah. For as bold as he was able to be in his writing of *Maurice*, Morgan (as he is known here) was still a virgin at the time and fought with the idea that his homosexual urges were unnatural and disgusting. India exerted a pull on him in part because his first great, unrequited love was for Syed Ross Masood, a young Indian man he tutored in Latin. Though that relationship was never consummated, later ones with an Egyptian tram conductor and an Indian barber were.

As fictionalized biographies of authors go, I'd rate this somewhere between David Lodge's *A Man of Parts* (H.G. Wells) and Colm Tóibín's superior *The Master* (Henry James); all three books share a heavy focus on the author's sexuality. "Buggery in the colonies. It wasn't noble" is one of my favorite random snippets from this novel, and sums up, for me, its slightly prurient aftertaste. Although Galgut gives an intimate and sympathetic picture of Forster's struggles to live and write as he wished to – informed by his journals and letters as well as biographies and other secondary source material – I found I had to force myself to keep going with a book that lacked a propulsive narrative. I did enjoy reading about the inspirations and key decisions behind *A Passage to India*, which I read in a college course on the Modernists, but for me the best scenes featured meetings with other contemporary writers: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Cavafy, and especially D.H. Lawrence.

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