

Twentieth century british author



E. M. Forster (1879-1990) was the author of many well-known novels, and also several volumes of short-stories, essays and criticism. He is best-known for his 1924 novel *A Passage to India*, which has enjoyed a world-wide audience ever since its publication. Today he is considered as one of the prominent figures of British literature of the first half of the twentieth century. Forster once wrote, “ Life is easy to chronicle, but bewildering to practice. ” Edward Morgan Forster himself began his ‘ bewildering practice’ on 1 January 1879, in London. When he was eight-years old, he inherited an amount ?

8000 from his great-aunt, Marianne Thornton, of whom he would later write a biography. This inheritance was sufficient to let Forster pursue his education and literary career in relative freedom from financial constraints and worries. Upon his graduation from Tonbridge School, Forster secured admission into King's College, Cambridge where he studied classics and history, and was partly under the tutelage of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, of whom he would later write a biography. At Cambridge, he was exposed to the values of liberal humanism and cultivated a respect for the freedom of individuality of human beings.

Under the influence of the philosopher G. E. Moore, Forster developed an aesthetic belief that contemplating beauty of art constituted a nobler purpose in life. He also became a strong believer in the value of friendships, and struck lasting friendships which meant a great deal to him throughout his life. He would later travel to India with a group of university friends. “ If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country,” he would later say.

During these years of higher education, Forster was a member of an intellectual clique at Cambridge called the 'Apostles', and through them came into contact with the members of the Bloomsbury Group, with which he would associate more closely in the subsequent years (Childs 2002). Completing his education at Cambridge, he left England on a long trip to Italy and Austria, which would last for one year. Forster would spend a significant period of his life traveling. It was around this time, in 1901, that he began exercising his writing skills.

He then started working at Working Men's College and subsequently taught at the extra-mural department of the Cambridge Local Lectures Board. Forster's literary career began in 1903, when he began writing for *The Independent Review*, a liberal publication that he co-founded with Lowes Dickinson and used as a platform for advocating anti-imperialism. Soon, Forster became a published author with the appearance of his first novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). Forster used his knowledge of Italy to create a story that juxtaposed and contrasted the passionate world of Italy with the constricting values of suburban England.

The result is a social comedy, which rather interestingly ends up as a tragedy dealing with rather unsavory aspects of death and frustrated love. It is the story of a young English widow, Lilia, who falls in love with an Italian, but the members of her family cannot accept this and try to wrest her back. This work was not well received by the public. By 1910, Forster would have written three more novels. *The Longest Journey* (1907) and *A Room with a View* (1908) exhibit a growing maturity in literary skills and artistic scope, and *Howards End* (1910) saw his rise to fame.

Forster wrote most of his short stories and four novels before 1910. In the sixty years he lived after that, he would write only two novels, *Maurice*, in 1914, and *A Passage to India*, in 1924 (Tambling 1995). After publishing his first novel, Forster left for Germany and worked for several months as tutor to the Countess von Arnim, in a place called Nassenheide. This experience would serve him in the characterization of Schlegel sisters in *Howards End*. Back in England, in 1907, he took on the role of a private tutor for an Indian Muslim, with whom he developed a close relationship that could be seen as homosexual love.

Forster's famous work *A Passage to India* would be dedicated to this person. Forster was a covert homosexual all through his life. The posthumous publishing of his homosexual novel *Maurice* (1971) offers strong testimony to his sexual orientation, although it is difficult to ascertain how far his homosexual orientation may have influenced his work in general. However, he certainly felt frustrated for not being able to write about homosexual themes openly and it is possible that he stopped writing novels half-way through his life out of such frustration. In 1907, Forster wrote and published a novel about his Cambridge days, *The Longest Journey*.

It tells the story of an undergraduate and a struggling writer, Rickie Elliot, who abandons friendship for the sake marriage, but is enlightened by his pagan half-brother. *The Longest Journey* was also Forster's favorite novel, despite the poor response it got from the critics and the public. Around this time, Forster was closely associated with the Bloomsbury Group, and was interacting with people such as Lytton Strachey and Roderick Fry. In his third novel, *A Room with a View*, which is also his second Anglo-Italian novel partly

set in Florence and partly in English suburbia, Forster displays his contempt for English snobbery.

It is a light and optimistic tale, a story of misunderstandings which however ends on a happy note as Lucy Honeychurch, the protagonist, acknowledges her love for the impulsive George Emerson over her feelings for the intellectual Cecil Vyse. Forster's novels have already begun to display a common theme of sensitive characters struggling with the inflexibility of social codes that they are encumbered with as well the relative insensitivity of those around them.

It can be conjectured that Forster's frustration at the opposition of the conservative values of his time to his homosexuality may have taken a general form portraying the oppression of social rigidity in his novels. In 1910 came *Howards End* which is a social novel about sections of the middle classes, focusing on the question of who will inherit "Howards End," which is Forster's metonym for England. The story centers on the relationship between the intellectual German Schlegel sisters and the practical, male-dominated, business-oriented Wilcox family.

In the novel, Forster attempted to find a way for Wilcox money to become the support for Schlegel culture, and also for the future of rural England to be taken away from the influence of urban, commercial interests and placed once more in the hands of the farmers. The novel presents an ambitious social message, though not wholly practical or convincing. *Howards End* finally secured Forster's reputation and established him as a novelist. However, he would only publish one novel in the rest of his long life, besides sporadic publication of short stories, essays and so on.

In 1911, Forster brought out a collection of short stories entitled *The Celestial Omnibus*. In 1912-13 he made his first visit to India, with R. C. Trevelyan, Dickinson and G. H. Luce. Here, he had the chance to observe the British colonial administration first-hand. After this trip, he wrote most of the first section of *A Passage to India*, but it was not until after a second visit, in 1921, when he spent six months as private secretary to a Hindu Maharajah, that he completed it. His masterpiece was published in 1924 and was unanimously praised by literary critics.

Around this time he also worked on the homosexual novel *Maurice: A Romance*. Though it would not be published until after his death, it was circulated privately at the time, and is a story of cross-class homosexual love the kind of which Forster himself yearned for. During World War I, he worked with the International Red Cross and was stationed in Alexandria, Egypt. He also became a strong supporter of the Alexandrian poet C. P. Cavafy. During his stay in Alexandria, he struck an acquaintance with a teenaged tram conductor, Mohammed el-Adl, with whom he fell in deep love.

Mohammed would die of tuberculosis in Alexandria in spring of 1922, and this loss weighed heavily on Forster for the rest of his life. Forster returned to England in 1919, after the war, but set off traveling again in 1921. On this trip to India he worked as the private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas Senior, and his letters home from the two Indian trips were later published as *The Hill of Devi* (1953). In 1922 he published *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, but could get it into circulation only in 1938.

Pharos and Pharillon, which is a collection of Forster's essays on Alexandria together with some translations of Cavafy's poems, was published in 1923.

All through this time, Forster had been reworking on *A Passage to India*, which was published in 1924, almost a decade and a half after his previous novel *Howard's End*. It is a novel about the clash between Eastern and Western cultures during British rule in India, and is generally considered among major literary works of the twentieth century. It is the story of Adela Quested and Mrs. Moore's journey to India to visit Adela's fiance, and Mrs Moore's son, Ronny Heaslop.

There they meet a college teacher, Cyril Fielding, who is an avatar of Forster himself, the Hindu Brahmin Dr Godbole and the Muslim Dr Aziz. The novel revolves around Dr Aziz's alleged assault Adela. Ms. Quested reports of an attempted assault by the Dr. Aziz and subsequently retracts her complaint. Once again, misunderstanding features prominently in Forster's narrative. *A Passage to India* was widely acclaimed. For example, a critic at *New York Times* wrote: " The crystal-clear portraiture, the delicate conveying of nuances of thought and life, and the astonishing command of his medium show Mr.

Forster at the height of his powers" (Forster, 1989 : front flap). But mysteriously, at the height of his powers, Forster would choose to renounce novel writing. Some have speculated this could be because he felt he could not write openly and honestly about homosexual relations which he longed to write about. In 1927 he gave the Clark lectures at Cambridge University, which were published as *Aspects of the Novel* the same year. He was also offered a fellowship at King's College, Cambridge. In 1928, his second collection of short stories, *The Eternal Moment*, was published. It is a collection of six stories predominated by fantasy and romance.

In the immediately following years there was the publication of *The Hill of Devi* and two short-story volumes, under the generic name *Collected Short Stories*. The last published work of his life was *Marianne Thornton*, the biography of his great-aunt whose gift allowed him to go to Cambridge. In 1969 Forster was awarded the Order of Merit. He died shortly thereafter. " E. M. Forster has never lacked for readers, is widely studied, has had his novels turned into highly marketable films, and has encouraged criticism usually of a strongly liberal-humanist kind," notes Tambling (1995) in his introduction to a book of critical essays on E.

M. Forster. Forster explored the shortcomings of the English middle class and their emotional deficiencies, employing irony and wit. Today he is remembered for the impeccable style of writing that is evident in all of his novels and short stories. References: Childs, P. (2002). *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on E. M. Forster's A Passage to India*" (Routledge Literary Sourcebooks). London : Routledge. Forster, E. M. (1989). " A Passage to India. " Orlando, FL : Harcourt Brace Tambling, J. (1995). " E. M. Forster: Contemporary Critical Essays" (New Casebooks). . New York : St. Martin's Press.