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| Forster, E.M. (1879–1970) |
| Edward Morgan Forster |
| One of the leading British novelists of the early decades of the twentieth century, Edward Morgan Forster is best known for his novels *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924). Forster attended Cambridge University from 1897 to 1901 where he became a member of the Cambridge Apostles secret society, which included philosophers Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Membership in this society brought him into contact with several members of the Bloomsbury Group, including economist James Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf’s husband Leonard Woolf, and biographer Lytton Strachey. His work is best remembered for its use of realism to denounce the repressiveness of Edwardian British culture and it is often infused with liberal humanism. Additionally, his use of third person omniscient narrative and abundant dialogue gave Forster a unique narrative style that influenced a number of later authors. Throughout his career Forster associated with a host of writers and artists including Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, and Christopher Isherwood. Forster was highly influenced by his travels throughout the European continent and India. His works often illustrate this interest by focusing on settings outside of England. All of the novels published in Forster’s lifetime were published before 1925, after which Forster spent his life working on non-fiction including biographies, travel narratives, and essays. |
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Throughout his career Forster associated with a host of writers and artists including Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, and Christopher Isherwood. Forster was highly influenced by his travels throughout the European continent and India. His works often illustrate this interest by focusing on settings outside of England. All of the novels published in Forster’s lifetime were published before 1925, after which Forster spent his life working on non-fiction including biographies, travel narratives, and essays.  Forster was born 1 January 1879 into a respectable London family. His father died of consumption in 1880, leaving Forster’s childhood dominated by female figures. After an inheritance allowed Forster a successful childhood education, he graduated from Cambridge University with bachelor’s degrees in classics in 1900 and history in 1901. Following his graduation, Forster travelled with his mother to Greece and Italy from 1901–1907 before returning home to England to lecture at Working Men’s College, London. His travels influenced Forster’s writing, as did his service as a Red Cross Volunteer in Alexandria, Egypt and his trips to India in 1912 and 1921. During the First World War, Forster was a vocal conscientious objector and worked as a volunteer for the International Red Cross in Egypt. Forster permanently returned to England in 1921 and remained there until his death in 1970.  File: E.M. Forster.jpg  E.M. Forster 1  [[Source: Image can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/images/episode/b00n5vjs_640_360.jpg>]]  Forster’s first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), takes Lilia Herriton as its main character and shows the influence of Forster’s early travels. The novel draws its title from Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism*. This novel also sets the stage for Forster’s literary representations of the European continent and the influence of his travels on his writing. Lilia and her daughter Irma travel to Italy where she falls in love with an Italian peasant named Carella. After being disowned by the Herriton family and realizing her marriage with Carella isn’t what she thought it was, Lilia dies giving birth to Carella’s son. The Herriton family desires to bring the new child back to England and sends Philip Herriton, Lilia’s brother-in-law, to retrieve the child. In their efforts to ensure the child be raised as an Englishman, Forster represents the Herritons as caring less for the child’s well-being and more for maintaining appearances. The baby ends up dying in an accident before the Herritons reconcile with Carella and return to England. Like many of Forster’s later novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* concerns itself with the ability of forging connections across cultures. The novel’s characters experience both physical and spiritual journeys and emerge at the end of the novel with new knowledge of both their own and foreign cultures.  Forster’s next novel, *The Longest Journey* (1907), was his first major work. This novel, a sort of Bildungsroman, takes place in England and is set primarily in Cambridge and Wiltshire. The early part of the novel reflects Forster’s time at Cambridge as the novel’s protagonist Rickie Elliot is a student there near the beginning of the century. The novel begins with an examination of Rickie’s progress as a writer and the development of his relationship with Agnes and Herbert Pembroke. After Rickie and Agnes are married and take posts working with Herbert at Sawston School, Rickie’s career as a writer and relationship with his half-brother Stephen Wonham begins to deteriorate. The novel ends with Rickie dying while saving a drunken Stephen from being struck by a train. After Rickie’s death, his book of stories is published and he posthumously becomes a noted author. Drawing from Forster’s time at Cambridge and his philosophical influences, the text concerns itself with a number of philosophical questions while also demonstrating heavy symbolism to highlight the tragic aspects of human existence.  His third novel, *A Room with a View* (1908), also emphasizes Forster’s early travels to the continent. This novel focuses on the interactions between the bourgeois family of Lucy Honeychurch and the more progressive family of George Emerson during the height of Edwardian England. The novel begins with Lucy and her cousin Charlotte visiting Florence, Italy and their complaints about their rooms having a view of the courtyard rather than the River Arno. Mr. Emerson and his son George offer to switch rooms with Lucy and Charlotte and this begins the interactions between Lucy and George. The second part of the novel opens in Rome while Lucy and Cecil Vyse begin to spend time together before Lucy returns to her family home in Surrey, England. This novel anticipates the later class analysis in *Howards End*, and illustrates the class conflicts that were common in the early years of the twentieth-century. In the end of the novel, Lucy turns away from wealthier Cecil Vyse and marries the working-class George Emerson and returns to Florence. The novel stands out as one of the most striking portrayals of Edwardian culture: Lucy represents the young, empowered generation beginning to take shape just after the turn-of-the-century in England, and Forster emphasizes Italian culture as much less repressive.  Forster’s next two novels are undoubtedly the most celebrated works in his oeuvre. *Howards End* (1910) gives a more complete view of the social and economic relationships in turn-of-the-century England. The novel, which derives its title from the name of the Wilcox’s family home, focuses on the interconnected relationships between the wealthy Wilcox family, the culturally-ambitious half-German Schlegel sisters (Margaret and Helen), and the lower-middle-class Basts. After the death of Ruth Wilcox, who attempts to leave Howards End to her friend Margaret Schlegel, her husband Henry becomes romantically involved with Margaret. The Wilcox children resent Margaret for posing a threat to their inheritance of the family home, believing that she only values it as real estate. After Henry Wilcox costs Leonard Bast his modest position as a clerk, we learn that Henry and Bast’s wife Jacky had engaged in an affair years earlier, that ended with Henry severely mistreating Jacky. Margaret and Helen begin to drift apart as Margaret is to be wed to Henry, and Helen begins to gravitate towards Leonard, eventually becoming pregnant with his child. When Leonard confronts Henry and Margaret near the end of the novel, Henry’s son Charles attacks Leonard, who is killed when a bookcase falls on top of him. Margaret leaves Henry, and his emotional transformation results in his reconsidering his previous positions. He wills the home to Margaret (as Ruth had originally intended) and stipulates that the home ultimately be left to Helen’s son by Leonard. At the end of the novel the Schlegel sisters bring the Wilcoxes and the Basts together.  The last novel published during Forster’s life, *A Passage to India* (1924), is often considered to be his masterpiece. After traveling to India, Forster wrote the novel against the background of the Indian Independence movement; it is loosely based on his experiences. The novel centers on the young Englishwoman Adela Quested’s journey to India to meet Ronny Heaslop, a colonial officer she may marry. In an effort to experience the authentic India, Adela and Ronny’s mother Mrs. Moore visit the Marabar caves with Dr. Aziz, a local physician. Adela accuses Dr. Aziz of sexual assault and a trial ensues. During the trial Adela recants her accusation and Aziz is freed. Critics have celebrated the novel as a detailed examination of the British colonial system and an unveiling of the civilizing mission associated with the British Empire.  After the publication of *A Passage to India,* Forster began to focus his creative attentions on non-fiction including biographies and historical accounts. His last novel, *Maurice* (1971), would not be published until after Forster’s death. This novel, suppressed because of its homosexual content, follows the coming-of-age story of Maurice Hall and his conflicted feelings of homosexuality.  Despite the fact that Forster did not publish a novel in the last four decades of his life, his reputation as a novelist persists. *Howards End* remains celebrated for its depiction of the social and economic systems of early-twentieth century England, and *A Passage to India* stands as one of the most canonical English texts for the early-twentieth century. It remains an important indictment of the British colonial system. Forster remains one of the most important and influential writers in twentieth century British literature. Several of Forster’s novels have been made into motion pictures, and his influence has been felt by contemporary writers like Zadie Smith, whose novel *On Beauty* (2005) was loosely based on Forster’s *Howards End.* Selected Works *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905)  *The Longest Journey* (1907)  *A Room with a View* (1908)  *Howards End* (1910)  *A Passage to India* (1924) |
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