Call for Papers

RE-ORIENTATING E. M. FORSTER
Texts, Contexts, Receptions

An international anniversary conference
Cambridge, Thursday 2 to Saturday 4 April 2020

Confirmed speakers: Paul Armstrong (Brown), Stefan Collini (Cambridge), Santanu Das (Oxford), Leela Gandhi (Brown), Jane Goldman (Glasgow), Stefania Michelucci (Genoa), Rachel Potter (East Anglia), and David Trotter (Cambridge).

E. M. Forster, one of the major British writers of the twentieth century, died on 7 June 1970. The fiftieth anniversary of his death affords a special opportunity for a comprehensive re-evaluation of his place and significance in the literary and wider culture of Britain and beyond. This conference, to be held at the Cambridge University Faculty of English and King's College – where Forster was an undergraduate and where he later resided for many years as an Honorary Fellow – invites a wide-ranging exploration of his life and work, while focusing attention on two broad areas: (a) Forster in his historical and cultural context; (b) receptions of Forster since 1970. A central aim is to facilitate a productive dialogue between these two perspectives, with a view to defamiliarizing dominant perceptions of Forster and his work, exposing what has been occluded, and identifying new directions of travel in Forster studies.

Forster's novels are widely read and have frequently been adapted for radio, television, and the cinema; he continues to be a major influence on other writers. A Passage to India remains a foundational text for postcolonial studies and Anglophone writing about India, while Maurice, first published in 1971, is a cornerstone of queer fiction. But how does the Forster that emerges in the artistic and scholarly production of the years since his death relate to the Forster of the years of literary creation? How far have contemporary receptions of Forster been shaped by our own cultural perspectives, agendas, and anxieties? To what extent and in what regards has E. M. Forster the man become E. M. Forster the myth? How might he be seen as a different writer from the one we think we know – perhaps one even more radical and unsettling?

In evaluating proposals, the organizers will pay careful regard to fulfilling the general aims and conception of the conference. Submissions are welcome on any topic. The following broad themes are intended as suggestions:

- Family, friendships, social networks
- Education
- England and Englishness
- The Mediterranean, Egypt, and India
- Literary influences and affiliations
- Modernisms
- Politics: imperialism and colonialism, liberalism and totalitarianism, war
- Class
- Gender and sexuality
- Music, art, and mass culture
- Fantasy
- Adaptations in other media
- Receptions in contemporary fiction
- International receptions, including translations
- Writing Forster: biographies
- History of Forster criticism

The conference also invites reflection on the relevance of Forster's Weltanschauung (itself inviting exploration and definition) to our own historical moment, with consideration of this question: What, fifty years after his death, has Forster's concern for 'connection' and for civil liberties to say to us at a time when narrow nationalisms and authoritarian ideologies have once again become prominent across the world?

A volume of essays arising from the conference is planned with a leading publisher.

Proposals of 250-300 words for 20-minute papers, together with a brief CV of no more than 100 words, should be submitted by email attachment to E.M.Forster2020@gmail.com by no later than Friday 10 May 2019. We also invite proposals of 100-150 words for 'lightning talks' of 5-7 minutes, to be submitted by the same date; this may be of particular interest to graduate students. Anyone who wishes to have a longer proposal considered either for a 20-minute paper or for a lightning talk should please indicate this in the submission. Notification of acceptance or otherwise may be expected before the end of June.

The ethos of the conference is to be inclusive and collaborative, and the organizers will seek to ensure a positive atmosphere throughout.

We are glad to acknowledge the warm support of the International E. M. Forster Society (http://society.emforster.de) and the Association for Forsterian Research (http://forster-afar.com).

Steering Committee: Edward Allen (Cambridge); Howard Booth (Manchester); Santanu Das (Oxford); Laura Davies (Cambridge); Gemma Moss (Birmingham City); Amber Regis (Sheffield); David Scourfield (Maynooth); David Trotter (Cambridge).

Further information is available at: https://emforster2020.home.blog/.

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