

authentic—these are Forster and Isherwood, after all, who narrate the story, i.e. the tale of life-long friendship and unceasing hope for times when Maurice does not have to hide.

Richard Canning, 2009
Brief Lives: E. M. Forster
(London: Hesperus Press)

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Richard Canning's biography *Brief Lives: E. M. Forster*, published by Hesperus Press Limited, Et Remotissima Prope, in 2009, is the second of this type that came after *Brief Lives: Oscar Wilde* published in 2008. The biographer, a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Sheffield, is the editor of both gay male fiction and an AIDS fiction anthology, and is preparing a critical biography of Ronald Firbank.

The biography is different from other biographies due to its sources. It is a well-documented piece of writing, based on both less known materials from the King's College Library, and the Society of Authors, and well-known biographies, such as those by P. N. Furbank, Mary Lago and Oliver Stallybrass. It is divided into seven chapters, followed by an informative chronology, acknowledgements, and a useful bibliography. The biographer's goal is to make the reader understand the great writer's personality and reactions, emphasising the crucial issues of his lifetime that influenced him and his career. In spite of its limited number of pages (no more than 120), the book is quite difficult to follow, as the biographer guides the reader along many paths, which sometimes bounce back in time, offering further unexpected details.

The first chapter offers a detailed account of Forster's childhood dominated by female models around him, such as: his mother, Lily, born Whichelo (perhaps short from the French "Richelieu"), her sisters (Georgiana, Mary,

Eleanor, Rosalie), Louisa Whichelo, his maternal grandmother, as well as Marianne Thornton, or Monie, his paternal aunt, her niece and his godmother, Henrietta Synnot (whose name will appear in his first “Italian” novel). Then, a few words are given about his father, Edward Morgan Llewellyn Forster, a gifted draughtsman who died prematurely, and seemed somehow remote to Morgan (being the first one who “muddled” his name), whereas his aunt Monie was so close to Morgan’s heart that he wrote her biography.

On the other hand, the biographer emphasises that Forster’s life was influenced by males during his studies at Cambridge. In addition, during the Cambridge years he freed his mind, inasmuch as he read a great deal, including the witty George Bernard Shaw’s *Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant*, Robert Browning’s poetry, John Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice*, and George Meredith’s five novels. The biographer throws some light on Forster’s broadened education at Cambridge, mentioning the atheist Nathaniel Wedd, his tutor in Classical texts, Oscar Browning, his tutor in History, and Goldsworthy Lowest Dickinson, another History tutor, the Irish Hugh Owen Meredith (‘Hom’), with whom Forster fell romantically in love, but never fulfilled. At the end of his studies at Cambridge, Forster became one of the Apostles, a dynamic intellectual group whose aim was to sharpen both the mind and the judgement, so that the heart could become less selfish. The chapter draws the reader’s attention to Forster’s cultural propensity and his inconspicuous way of living.

The second chapter covers ten years (from 1901 to 1911) and gives a detailed account of the intricate relationship between Forster’s travelling and his writings. The biographer highlights the influential places, such as: Rome, Venice, Lake Como, Cadenabbia, Milan, where Forster was impressed by Leonardo’s *The Last Supper* (Santa Maria della Grazie), Monza, Pavia, Florence (pensione Simi, on the Lungarno) widely depicted in *A Room with a View*. The reader can understand how and why Italy “worked magic” for Forster, and the way he turned an incident into a story (for example, *The Story of a Panic*, *The Road from Colonus*). Moreover, the tour inspired him to write sketches and his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and to structure the characters he satirized in *A Room with a View*.

Further, the reader meets Forster as a teacher (teaching Latin at Working Men’s College, in Bloomsbury, London) and as a tutor for Elizabeth, Countess von Armin’s daughters (in Nassenheide, Pomerania, in Poland nowadays), then as a tutor of Latin for the Indian Syed Ross Masood. The latter became

more than Forster's source of inspiration for *A Passage to India*. Besides, the reader can understand Forster's ambivalence in his 1907 novel, *The Longest Journey*, in which Ricky, the main character, embodies Forster's characteristics. In addition, the biographer mentions Forster's activity as a critic praising Hugh Walpole's novel *The Wooden Horse* and tackling Henry James's novel *The Ambassadors*.

Death seems to have shocked Forster upon hearing that his acquaintance (Ernest Merz) had committed suicide. The event must have shaken him to such an extent that it made him go cycling to Stonehenge and eat dinner on the Altar Stone at midnight while thinking of Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Moreover, the event may have influenced the writer to imagine the sudden death of Leonard Bast from *Howards End* (the novel which Forster considered to be good, but could not love). On the other hand, the reader is aware of E. M. Forster's feelings towards music due to his collaboration with Benjamin Britten to write the libretto for *Billy Bud*. Moreover, Britten noticed that the structure of Forster's novels resembled the operas of either Mozart or Verdi. In short, the chapter shows Forster's sensitive and enthusiastic traits.

The third chapter is devoted to Forster's stay in India (1912–13), presenting his travel from Bombay to Aligarh (with Masood, but always accompanied), then to Delhi, where he was surprised at seeing the surroundings, the Mohamadan relics, the Indian life, the menagerie and the "guests", such as lizards and bedbugs. He travelled from Bombay to Aligarh, Delhi, Bankipore (Chandrapore in the novel *A Passage to India*) and Simla, where he witnessed a Muslim wedding, and was stunned by the scenery of the Himalayas range. In Agra he visited the Taj Mahal, one of the world's finest buildings, and headed for Gwalior and Chhatapur. On the other hand, he noticed that he had an affinity for India and for its "muddle" or "bizarre" world, beyond *Alice in Wonderland*, in spite of its corruption and inefficiency of the Natives States (governed by Indians). In short, Forster reflected that the Western world had a sense of surface values and fell completely in love with the "muddled" India.

The fourth chapter gives an account of what happened in Forster's life in both England and Alexandria between 1913–1924, focusing on the relationships, friendships and sexual awakening. During WWI, he joined the Red Cross as a "hospital-searcher" from Alexandria (1915–1919) and experienced his first complete sexual fulfilment. In addition, Forster was impressed by Edward Carpenter and his ideas ("uranism", or the "third sex"), while looking for appreciation regarding his own gay novel *Maurice*. Moreover, he confessed

to his female friend, Florence Barger, that he had both sexual relationships and affection for Mohammed el-Adl. In a nutshell, Forster came to understand himself.

The fifth chapter recounts Forster's impressions on India. He discovered not only the arrogance of the Anglo-Indian government, but also his fear of not capturing India accurately, in spite of Malcolm Darling's accounts of the massacre at Amritsar. In England, the Woolfs supported Forster, as Leonard Woolf highly appreciated him (describing Forster as "a perfect old woman") and Virginia Woolf (for whom Forster wrote a positive review for *The Voyage Out*) noticed his precision of period context, his satire and sympathy, as well as his fantasy, poetry and moral sense. Moreover, Forster felt that *A Passage to India* had political influence (he had not aimed at) and made people think.

As regards the sixth chapter, it covers forty-six years (from 1924 to 1970) and centres on Forster's activity as a critic, who discovered his literary style after reading mainly Jane Austen, Samuel Butler, Marcel Proust, Dante Alighieri, Edward Gibbon, and Lev Tolstoy. He was named "a sage" (Jack Sprott), and "the great simplifier" (P. N. Furbank), and stated that neither *Aspects of the Novel*, nor any other work of literary criticism should be paid much attention to. Interestingly, William Plomer realized that Forster's writings turned him into a harbinger of change, because during WWII Forster felt comfortable with the idea that literature and democracy are natural allies. In addition, Forster was a recognised voice and a cultural authority at BBC, encouraging young writers, such as T. E. Lawrence, William Plomer, and D. H. Lawrence. What is more, he was involved in the international writers' organization and twice (in 1934 and 1942) acted as president of the National Council for Civil Liberties. Visiting the United States, which he found "full of charm and friendliness", he lectured at a Symposium on Music (Harvard University) and at the Academy of Art and Letters. However, he was reluctant to film adaptations, thinking that only his name would survive as "nothing would have survived of the original". He died as a humanist believing, not only in curiosity, in a free mind and in good taste, but also in the human race.

The seventh chapter is centred on both the works published posthumously, including a novel (by David Leavitt) inspired by Forster's world with regard to terms of plots and characters, which Forster himself could have written,

and the 1980s, when Forster's novels were adapted and faced new readers and acclaims.

To conclude, Richard Canning's biography juxtaposes, from a well-documented standpoint, the writer's public persona as a member of the English literary establishment with his tormenting anxieties and joyous moments. In addition, Canning's biography not only is detailed, but also covers the main issues, such as: family, education, friendship and influences, personal remarks, cultural activity and prophecy. The biography is worth reading as it complements known biographies (Furbank, Stallybrass), interweaving details from the writer's correspondence edited by Jeffrey Heath (*The Creator as Critic*) and his activity at BBC, edited by Mary Lago, Linda K. Hughes and Elizabeth Maclead Walls (*The BBC Talks of E. M. Forster, 1929–1960*), both published in 2008. In a nutshell, it is a perfect choice for any student, researcher or individual interested in Forster's complex life and writings.

Frank Kermode, 2009.
Concerning E. M. Forster
(London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

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Introduction

Literary modernism was one of Frank Kermode's many fields of expertise. After making his name as a scholar of Shakespeare's era and Romanticism, Kermode wrote on Yeats and T. S. Eliot in his most influential book, *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), and produced the "Fontana Modern Masters" volume on D. H. Lawrence in 1973. In the words of Stefan Collini (2014), Kermode was "pre-eminent among the English-language literary critics who came to maturity in the second half of the twentieth century". *Concerning E. M. Forster* was his last book, appearing a year before his death. In it, twenty-first