

THE MAJOR NOVELS OF E. M. FORSTER: ENGLISH TRADITION AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNISM

CO-MODERATORS: BOBBIE REITT AND JOAN MCKELVEY

[time and place to be determined & inserted later]



IN THIS SEMINAR we will explore the work and thought of E.M. Forster, focusing on the four most read of his six novels and considering their relationships to the principles and ideas that dominated his long career. His first novel appeared in 1905 and he wrote his last major review in 1960. Abandoning the novel after 1924, he turned to writing criticism, history, and biography. He became a prominent spokesman for liberal thought, literary culture, and—after his death—ultimately for sexual liberation. The arc of his ideas constitutes a barometer of the changing cultural weather as England moved from the Edwardian age through two world wars and the emergence of a modern and postcolonial world that would have been unrecognizable to the world of his youth.

Our focus will be on Forster's convictions concerning the profound importance of personal relationships, of freedom of artistic, religious, and political expression, and of the common threads that unite humans and overcome divisions of class, gender and sexual orientation, and nation.

In each session we will examine closely a selection from the required reading and hear a report on a topic relating to issues, events, and people relevant to Forster's life or his work. Participants may choose either (1) to lead one of our reading discussions or (2) to prepare a report on a background topic of their own choosing. The moderators have prepared a list of suggested topics (*see over*) and are happy to consider other relevant topics suggested by participants.

Required Reading (dates are for original copyrights; multiple editions are available)

Room With a View (1908)

Howards End (1910)

A Passage to India (1924)

Maurice (1971; written 1913 and withheld until after Forster's death)

Highly Recommended: an E.M. Forster biography (*see over*); David Bradshaw, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to E.M. Forster*; DVDs of the films made from these novels

To Inspire You: Possible Report Topics

Forster's travels in and responses to the Middle and Far East, esp. India (see his travel writings, e.g. *Hill of Devi*)

Forster's travels in and responses to Italy

Forster's uses of music in his fiction; his work as librettist for Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*

Forster's sexual evolution, partners, and attitudes

Edward Carpenter and his "New Thought": impact on Forster

Forster in the Apostles and in the Bloomsbury group

Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* or some other of his literary criticism

Forster's politics and liberalism (see, e.g., his *Two Cheers for Democracy*)

Forster's religious attitudes (see, e.g., his "How I Lost My Faith")

Forster roles as spokesman for and teacher of literature, including his radio career during WWII

Forster's attitudes toward writer's rights and efforts to fight censorship (e.g., *Lady Chatterley's Lover*)

Forster's attitudes toward women (including mother & relatives), women's rights, and suffrage

Treatments of Forster's fiction in film (all but one his novels have been made into movies)

Forster and other writer(s): take your pick! Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, J R Ackerley, W H Auden, D H Lawrence, T E Lawrence, Christopher Isherwood, others

The mystery of Forster's long fictional "silence"; his fears of literary paralysis & fame

Forster's attitudes toward the English class system

Forster's short stories (your pick: there are four collections)

Forster's attitudes toward modernism vs. English rural and folk traditions

Important critical responses to Forster: e.g., Lionel Trilling, Frank Kermode

Forster's responses to the crises of World War I and World War II

Biographies of E.M. Forster

Nicola Beauman. *E.M. Forster: A Biography*. 1994. (focuses on contrasts of his life and his works)

P.N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life*. 1977-1978 (2 vols). ("official" biography using EMF's papers)

Francis King. *E. M. Forster*. 1978. (short and brief overview, highly illustrated)

Wendy Moffat. *A Great Unrecorded History: A New Life of E.M. Forster*. 2010. (puts his hidden homosexuality at the center of the story of his life)

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