

# **The World of E. M. Forster – E. M. Forster and the World Conference Report**

The conference *The World of E. M. Forster – E. M. Forster and the World* took place on 29<sup>th</sup>–30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 in Olsztyn, Poland. Its aim was to establish the place of Forster and his oeuvre in the contemporary (cultural/political/literary) world. The event was a great success and it was quite exceptional for a couple of reasons. It was the first conference organized by the International E. M. Forster Society. It was carried out in co-operation with three universities, namely the University of Warsaw, the University of Trier, and the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, the host of the conference. This was the second conference held in Poland which was devoted entirely to E. M. Forster. Hopefully, this initiative will boost Forster meetings in Poland, which, in turn, may become an important part of Forsterian intellectual tradition. And finally, but perhaps most importantly, the conference gathered scholars from all over the world, thus confirming the still vibrant presence and legacy of Forster and his works.

The papers delivered during the Olsztyn meeting as well as the compelling and engaging discussions that followed very well reflected both the double nature of the oeuvre of Forster (literature versus social history) and the variety of perspectives offered by Forsterian researchers (literary analysis, social studies, cultural as well as historical viewpoints, etc.).

After a short official opening, the conference was inaugurated by Professor Claire Monk from De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, who delivered a very illuminating plenary lecture on *Maurice* entitled "Re-valuing *Maurice*: Novel, Film and Beyond as Transtemporal Transtext". In her presentation, she emphasized the importance of the titular novel across time, pointing to its "still-unfolding power" as far as cultural as well as social history is concerned. Particularly, Monk talked about the reverberation of Forster's vision of a better, more liberated world of the future which would accommodate for all gay/queer/LGBT people. She claimed that his ideas, his affirmative foresight is nowadays very much in circulation in popular media. Besides, she argued that Forster's *Maurice* (1971) and James Ivory's film adaptation of it (1987) stirred quite similar emotions among their readers/viewers, respectively. Both

*Maurices* were regarded by many with hostility and lack of understanding. However, Monk avoided comparing the original with different forms of adaptations. Instead, she decided to treat *Maurice*, the novel and the film, as a unity, a single transtext, in order to re-evaluate the work by Forster and to highlight the essential similarity—the engagement into and the assertion of the gay and the homonormative.

Mihaela Cel-Mare Avram from the University of Bucharest, Romania, was another participant who dealt with the question of adaptation. In her paper entitled “(Re)Visiting E. M. Forster’s Film and Stage Adaptations”, she examined, on the one hand the modifications and on the other the intertextuality present in the film and stage adaptations of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room With A View*.

During the conference, Forster’s connections with other writers were considered. Anna Kwiatkowska from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland, pondered over the importance of umbrella in *Howards End* and in the works of Katherine Mansfield (“What’s behind Their Umbrellas? Symbolic Consideration of Umbrella in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* and Katherine Mansfield’s Short Stories”). She examined the extent to which the symbolism related to the umbrellas from the texts of the two authors differs and looked at the ways the respective symbolism was constructed.

Grzegorz Moroz from the University of Białystok, Poland, looked at “*Howards End* and *Point Counter Point* as the Condition of England Novels”. He compared and analysed the two works in order to show a frequently neglected fact, namely that Aldous Huxley’s novel touches upon similar issues as the ones to be found in Forster’s text.

Clara Pallejá-López from the Catholic University of Saint Anthony, Spain, and Lourdes Ilián from Madrid Complutense University, Spain, in their paper “Twin Tales: E. M. Forster’s ‘Another Kingdom’ and Max Aub’s ‘Box’, or When the Nymphs Speak Politics” also considered the question of Forster and other writers. They explored the similarities between both stories, “contextualising the two narratives as the products of particular cultural and political moments” lived by the respective authors. What follows, Pallejá-López and Ilián argued that the dryad from Forster’s story and the mermaid from Aub’s story embody the personal views of the writers in relation to the questions about which it was best to remain silent.

In the section devoted to Forsterian echoes in contemporary fiction, Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz from Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany, addressed

the following question: “Forster’s *The Longest Journey* and *Maurice* – Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Stranger’s Child*: Sequel or Confrontation?”. She looked for affinities between the two books on the level of themes, motifs and (social/cultural) concerns. In her paper, Puschmann-Nalenz also discussed the way the postmodern element interacts with the modernist one.

Likewise, Robert Kusek from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland, delved into the discussion of Forsterian features in contemporary literature. In “‘The enervated nancy boy of English writing’: E. M. Forster in *My Policeman* by Bethan Roberts and *Arctic Summer* by Damon Galgut”, he considered two biographical novels about Forster. Kusek investigated the differences and/or modifications found in the two texts in relation to Forster’s life on the one hand, and in connection with the strategies employed by the two authors, on the other. On the basis of the findings, Kusek decided to label the bionovel by Roberts “the bio-novel in disguise/in the closet” and to term the bionovel by Galgut a “fictionalised biography”.

The connection with the contemporary fiction was discussed by one more participant of the panel, Eliza Gładkowska from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland. She scrutinized the liminal in relation to identity in Forster’s *Howards End* and Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty* (“Endlessly in between: Liminal states in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* and Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty*”). Discussing the two novels, Gładkowska centered on the lack of stability in everyday, modern life, on the struggle to be attuned with the changing society.

The next section of the conference was named “The Passage to Italy” and was further subdivided into two parts. The first part was represented by Elena Raicu from the University of Bucharest, Romania, and Tania Zulli from Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, Italy. Racu presented a paper entitled “*A Room with a View*: Two Journeys and Two Visions”, in which she discussed Lucy Honeychurch’s double initiation, that is in terms of geography (the journey to Italy) and in relation to her emotional as well as social awaking (the journey into her heart and mind). Also Zulli in her considerations turned to *A Room with a View* and travelling (“‘Worshipping Giotto by the standards of the spirit’: Art and Travel in E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*”). However, she showed the travel-related descriptions as moments of pondering upon artistic structures, which, in turn, are capable of introducing order into the chaos of life. Additionally, Zulli explored the notions of ‘tourist’ and ‘traveller’

in *A Room with a View* so as to display their likeness to future twentieth-century 'city strollers'.

Two more papers were presented during the second part of the Italian section. Francesca Pierini Major deliberated on "Manufacturing Temporal Otherness: The Denial of Coevalness in E. M. Forster's Italian Short Stories and in Contemporary Relocation Narratives". She considered in particular Johannes Fabian's notion of 'denial of coevalness' as observed in *The Eternal Moment* and *The Story of Panic*. Major brings to attention the fact that Italy is still employed as a tool to re-examine emotional dimensions or, as she said, as "the stage for a literary rhetoric of self-discovery, sensual awakening, and loss of innocence". The other paper, "'Not typically Italian': Italy Revisited in E. M. Forster's *Arctic Summer*", was delivered by Raffaella Antinucci from the University of Naples "Parthenope", Italy. She analysed the image of Italy in *Arctic Summer*, Forster's unfinished early novel. She argued that this is a different picture of Italy ("a newer Italy") for, unlike other Italian novels by Forster, it bears vivid traces of aesthetic theories of Clive Bell and Roger Fry, which in consequence make the Italy "the shrine of Form".

In the panel dedicated to Forster's India, Sudhir Kumar of Govt. P.G. Nehru College, Jhajjar, India, talked about "Racial Antagonism in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*". He underlined the fact that certain aspects of cultural heritage and history of nations directly motivate racial antagonisms. In the same vein, Tarik Ziyad Gulcu from Kirikkale University, Turkey, deliberated on the national differences in the perception of society and life as such. However, he approached the issue from Darwin's perspective ("Opposed but Inevitable: Forster's Reaction Against and Acceptance of 'Cultural Selection' in *A Passage to India*"). In turn, Maaz Bin Bilal of O. P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana, India, considered "The Relevance of E. M. Forster in Contemporary India", indicating that Forster's writings which deal with liberalism have become increasingly relevant, especially when it comes to universities. To illustrate his point, Maaz Bin Bilal resorted to *The Longest Journey* to show how the text enters into a dialogue with the contemporary Indian higher education system, which is very much shaped by the state conservative attitude as well as by radical students.

The next group of papers dealt with Forster and the future in various configurations. N. Cyril Fischer of the University of Sydney, Australia, offered a re-reading of *Howards End* in relation to modernist aesthetics and popular/commercial culture ("E. M. Forster and Advertising"). He asserted that

Forster's novel should be looked at as "a carefully crafted commodity designed to promote itself". Moreover, Fischer argued that the author of *Howards End* on the one hand employed the techniques of the writers of the early Modernism and on the other resorted to the rhetorical method of self-advertising reminiscent of Mathew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and *Friendship's Garland*.

Next, Sławomir Koziół from the University of Rzeszów, Poland, referred to the only science fiction story by Forster, "The Machine Stops" ("You mustn't say anything against the Machine': Power and Resistance in E. M. Forster's 'The Machine Stops'"). He argued that the concept of the powerful Machine described in the short story was later on developed in the works by Giorgio Agamben, where it translated into a sovereign power and the politics of the reduction.

Finally, Heiko Zimmermann from the University of Trier, Germany, pondered over the connections between the quotes from Forster's works found on the Internet and the people who use them there (e.g. as mottos for their web pages). Moreover, he considered the role of such quotes and the potential fields of discourse enriched by such (de)contextualized quotations.

The last section of the conference was dedicated to Forster in Translation. Two papers were presented during the session. First, Marina Alonso Gómez from the University of Malaga, Spain, focused on "E. M. Forster in Spanish on both sides of the Atlantic: The Spanish Translations of *A Passage to India*". She considered three Spanish versions of Forster's novel, each done by a different translator, and discussed their distinctive features with reference to language varieties (Spanish used in Argentina, Spain, and Colombia) and publishing houses (Argentinian Sur, Spanish Alianza and Folio). Then, Maciej Adamski, an independent researcher from Bydgoszcz, Poland, in his paper entitled "The Car Lost or Saved? Polish Translation of E. M. Forster's *Howards End*" analysed the differences in references to a car in two different editions (from 1977 and 2009, respectively) of the Polish translation of the novel and their potential influence on the reception of the text.

The conference and its progress were discussed and concluded during the meeting of the IEMFS members, which took place during the second and last day of the event. As stated at the introduction, the conference aimed at answering the question about the position of Forster, his values and his works at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thanks to the fact that the response from the participants was exceedingly multi-layered and rich, the answer that emerges is diversified. There is no doubt that the life of Forster,

his writings, his friends as well as his opponents are a part of the nowadays world of culture (popular culture included) and literature. However, in many ways Forster is still relatively little known beyond English speaking countries. Moreover, knowledge about him is frequently reduced to several novels and a limited selection of short stories. Nevertheless, purely scholarly discussions do show that the issues the writer tackled in his novels, short stories, and non-fiction writings are unceasingly stirring emotions among researchers, hence triggering off the zeal to delve deeper into Forsterian narrative structures, to look at his essays, lectures, letters, etc. still more closely, from different, often new, perspectives, to seek connections with the past (Forster influenced by those before him) as well as with the future (Forster influencing those who came—and will come—after him). Subsequently, the conference proved that the circle of proponents of E. M. Forster and his world slowly yet gradually expands. Interestingly, the legacy of Forster consistently goes beyond literary studies, inspiring film and theatre directors, composers, and playwrights and affecting cultural/social/political thinking. Forster's works are tackled from different perspectives, and various approaches, theories, schools and methodologies are applied while reading and re-reading, evaluating and re-evaluating his life and work.

Anna Kwiatkowska