

“E.M. Forster’s Legacies Half a Century After His Death: Nostalgia, Heritage and Queer”. Conference Report

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A symposium entitled “E.M. Forster’s Legacies Half a Century After His Death: Nostalgia, Heritage and Queer” was held online on November 7, 2020, as a part of the 40th annual conference of the Virginia Woolf Society of Japan. Chaired by Dr Kaoru Urano (Kyoritsu Women’s University), the symposium began with her brief introduction which examined the reception of Forster’s works after his demise in 1970, and drew attention to the resurgence of interest in his works from the 2010s onward. This was followed by a keynote speech by Professor Krzysztof Fordoński (University of Warsaw), the chairman of the International E.M. Forster Society. Professor Fordoński demonstrated how widely Forster’s influence has permeated our culture and called Forster one of the “most contemporary” writers. Then, three panellists gave presentations on the topics described below.

The first speaker, Professor Takahiro Mimura (Chiba Institute of Technology) presented paper entitled “A Study on the Function of Places in E.M. Forster’s Work.” Forster famously explains in the introduction to *Collected Short Stories* (1947) that he got his inspiration from places such as Italy, Greece, and Cornwall, but his use of the term *genius loci* (the spirit of the place) seems to have baffled readers concerning the narrative function of places in his work. Although this term generally implies the innate function of a place, which effectively explains *Howards End* (1910) or the hollow tree in

“The Road from Colonus,” some places often have unexpected and overwhelming power over his characters, such as the violet terrace in *A Room with a View* (1908) or the vast field in Vallone Fontana Caroso near Ravello in “The Story of a Panic.” Professor Mimura classified and interrelated these functions by referring to ideas of human geography. In particular, he focused on Doreen Massey’s concept of “throwntogetherness,” which introduces contingency and crosses over into geographical studies.

Professor Saeko Nagashima (Chuo University) presented the second paper entitled “*Maurice* and the Closet.” In Professor Nagashima’s opinion, among Forster’s writings, *Maurice* holds a unique position in that it was kept “in the closet” for more than half a century before its posthumous publication in 1971. In her paper Professor Nagashima investigated the concept of the closet by examining the interactions this novel has created between Forster and other creators and their works. From Christopher Isherwood’s close friendship with Forster to the works by filmmakers and other artists today who are inspired by the story of *Maurice* and its closet, the text’s wide range of influence helps us imagine *Maurice*’s closet not as a dark, isolating cell, but as a relatively safe space where marginalized voices can be, and have been, raised and heard.

The third speaker, Dr Masayuki Iwasaki (Fukuoka University) presented the paper entitled “E.M. Forster’s Legacy: *On Beauty* as Hyperreal *Howards End*.” This paper explored the transhistorical attributes of Forster’s narrative inherited by Zadie Smith. Smith adapts Forster’s narrative of *Howards End* (1910) in *On Beauty* (2005), and her revitalisation of Forster’s text reflects contemporary ambitions to overcome the burdens of postmodernism envisaged as a “break” from modernism. The cultural practice of revitalising modernism is now termed “metamodernism”; hence, Dr Iwasaki chose to examine the extent to which traditional realism, modernism, postmodernism, or metamodernism is plausible in weighing both Forster’s and Smith’s texts.

Together, these presentations highlighted the relevance of Forster’s works to the world in which we presently live, leading to a lively discussion between the audience and the panellists. The symposium has proved that Forster will continue to be an important figure in the study of English literature in the years to come.