Forster: Essayist & Memoirist

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out Benefit of Clergy,” for example—it’s because individual characters, whether Indian or British, step out of the lines drawn by Anglo-Indian ideology. Havholm’s scrupulous attention to Kipling’s short story “Kidnapped” points to an entire category of people who, as far as Kipling was concerned, were out of line—Eurasians, the products of that taboo but widespread practice, miscegenation. These were the “railway folk,” as Kay Robinson called them, “an uncared-for and discreditable excrescence upon British rule in India.” Kipling clearly agreed with his father that miscegenation was a tragic mistake.

In light of Anglo-Indian ideology, Havholm reads “Kidnapped” and many other Kipling short stories insightfully. It isn’t clear to me, however, that he solves the art-versus-politics puzzle any better than many earlier critics such as Edward Said, Zoreh Sullivan, and Daniel Karlin. Havholm might have considered how that puzzle plays out for other writers. Many Victorian and Edwardian authors were imperialists and racists in one sense or another. Few critics claim that Tennyson’s Tory and imperialist politics diminishes his greatness as a poet. Also born in India, Thackeray expresses racist attitudes toward Indians just as blatant and much less sympathetic than Kipling’s (see especially The Newcomes). Dickens wrote that “the savage” was somebody who should be wiped off the face of the earth. Carlyle was even more racist, imperialist, and authoritarian than Tennyson, but no one questions his genius as author of some of the most interesting, idiosyncratic prose ever written. W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and several other modernists dallied with Fascism, yet their major contributions to literary modernism are indisputable. The puzzle about Kipling is perhaps magnified not because he was an “awe”-inspiring writer who was also an ardent imperialist, but because, while he had much undeniable talent for storytelling (especially in the short story genre), he often expressed his brand of imperialism in terms of a jingoist and racist (Anglo-Indian) vulgarity. He also often manages to do so, as in Kim, with so much boyish, naive confidence that the ideology does not hamper and perhaps even enhances the story.

Such is the wonder of Kipling.

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Forster: Essayist & Memoirist

THIS MASSIVE TOME (for once that word seems right) makes available a plethora of writings by E. M. Forster either difficult to access or previously known mainly to scholars of archival inclination who made their way to the superbly catalogued Forster Papers housed at the Archive Centre in the Library of King’s College, Cambridge. The work collected here, or published for the first time, is gathered under four general headings: Talks and Lectures, Essays, Other Memoirs and Memoranda, and Broadcasts. As these suggest, the emphasis falls mainly on a special Forsterian voice, always urbane, at times disarmingly casual, and at moments formal and self-aware.

The collection offers several pleasures, not least a prose style of signal distinction, and serves to makes the point, should it still require reemphasizing, that far from being idle after the publication of A Passage to India in 1924, Forster’s muse altered in character, inspiring writing in several genres, including—a real surprise here—verse.

A nimble mind of diverse “high” culture interests is richly on display. In addition to “serious” literature and “serious” music, there are the many and varied concerns of a man deeply committed to what he himself would have summed up as civilization or humanist values, whether it be reviewing the Aldeburgh Festival or commenting upon Roman museums or Greek ruins. A biographer of friends (the Cambridge don, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson) and relatives (his great aunt, Marianne Thornton), Forster was also much interested in the spectacle of himself, as his autobiographical reflections and memoirs testify. Yet in his public pronouncements on himself, where deftly composed personae operate, their intimacy is modulated; here the mask assumed is either perfunctorily or reluctantly fitted, or simply askew.

This is a major contribution to Forster scholarship, the writer’s texts amplified and extended by the modestly titled “Notes” that, with the introduction, preface, explanatory note on textual procedures, key to abbreviations, four appendices, and bibliography and index, make up nearly 500 pages to Forster’s 300. There is, then, a considerable amount of Professor Heath in this volume, particularly in the “Notes,” for which, given their bulk and nature, the rubric “Commentaries” would have offered a more accurate designation.

These “Notes” display great learning and an acute sensitivity to nuance, both stylistic and intellectual, and make available a lifetime of study and reflection, providing a context, often lively, for appreciating the individual texts and their place in Forster’s output. They also clearly serve a dual purpose: on the one hand, presenting straightforward fac-
tual information—identifying an individual; describing the condition of a manuscript or typescript; providing previous publication information, if relevant; presenting textual variants in some instances—and, on the other, offering comment and even judgment. In a few cases, the “Notes” rival or surpass the length of the authorial texts themselves. The research energy has manifestly been formidable, and just as obvious is that this project has required years of patient devotion.

The “experiment,” Heath’s own word for his procedure, is generally successful. A slight qualification is needed, however, for whilst his discussions are invariably interesting, particularly to readers steeped in Forster, they could at many points have been crisper, more tightly edited. Although discussions of dating and the descriptions of the primary documents are useful, even exemplary, the nonfactual element is uneven in quality, sometimes sloshing over the border from interpretation into outright chattiness, as the classroom teacher breaks into full stride, warming to a much loved topic and glossing the fairly self-evident. Alongside this, other discussions offer well-crafted mini-essays on a specialized topic. (For example, an appendix, fully conversant with the scholarship, deals with Forster and Walter Pater, and makes a highly informed contribution.) Certainly the tag signaling a note ought to have been generally shorter, a fault of a copyeditor asleep at the computer. But that is a cavil, indeed: there is an embarras de richesses, frequently a judicious choice of detail, and throughout a palpable enthusiasm calculated to inspire further exploration and thought.

Heath knows his Forster, and his Forster scholarship, and his erudition is inspiring. It is particularly so, since the editing of Forster’s work has been, with the noble exception of the skill of Elizabeth Heine and Philip Gardner, disappointingly amateurish. The Abinger Edition itself, several volumes of which have been given a second life by Penguin Books, is mainly a flagrant object lesson in “how not to do” a critical edition (wrong copy-texts, editorial tidying, mediocre annotation).

Some items included here are in themselves slight and calculatedly charming; others are the carefully performative pronouncements of the “smiling public man,” fully in the guru-of-humanism and sage-of-King’s mode, the role thrust upon Forster and willingly embraced during the 1940s and 1950s; still others were intended only for Forster himself. In the latter category fall his touching reflections on morality occasioned by the “Death of a Clock,” on his sexuality, on his complex relationship with his mother. In the aggregate we hear a voice so splendidly individual that even when the pieces are slight it doesn’t much matter, for the
honey-flecked tone is evident as much in the small touch as in the self-consciously bravura passage.

The literary essays cover ground and enthusiasms familiar to the Forster buff: Samuel Butler, Cavafy, D. H. Lawrence. Other pieces are mainly of period interest, the bread-and-butter of the literary and broadcast journalist. Particularly welcome, and long needed, have been texts often quoted or referred to in notes and but now here in full: the undergraduate essays “The Relation of Dryden and Milton to Pope” and the laboriously titled “The Novelists of the Eighteenth Century and Their Influence on Those of the Nineteenth.” Likewise important are “Three Generations” and the essay giving this collection its title, “The Creator as Critic.” The Memoir Club talk “West Hackhurst: A Surrey Ramble” (indeed, rambling) helps fills out the author’s family context and history. In short, the selection is generous, by turns revealing Forster the man, at others the writer, and, to use his own word, Forster the creator.

The editorial decisions taken, particularly as regard writing never intended for publication, attempt to balance the differing needs of the scholar and the general reader. By any standard, this is scholarship of the finest kind, shot through with intelligence and taste. This collection of some forty uncollected pieces and thirty BBC broadcasts, presented four decades after E. M. Forster’s death, is relentlessly revelatory. The voice is remarkably fresh, and while some of the topics and concerns look a bit dated (to our age Edward Carpenter seems “old hat” and that once grand literary colossus George Meredith little more than a footnote), many retain their vitality. Lastly, this is never less than “a good read,” for Forster, a self-declared “Janeite,” like Jane Austen never wrote a lumpy sentence, and few without point. It seems appropriate that this collection should open with a piece titled “Happy vs. Sad Endings.” Forster on the basis of his achievement not only as a writer of fiction but of nonfictional prose, has had, in truth, a happy one.

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Wilde’s Fairy Tales


DESPITE THEIR POPULARITY with the general reading public, Wilde’s fairy tales have received relatively little critical attention compared to the rest of his oeuvre. The reason in what is announced as “the