



## The Life to Come and Other Stories

*E.M. Forster*

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## **The Life to Come and Other Stories** E.M. Forster

The fourteen stories in this book span six decades—from 1903 to 1957 or even later—and represent every phase of Forster's career as a writer. Only two have ever been published, and those only in magazines to which few people have easy access.

Two very different reasons caused the other twelve to remain unpublished in Forster's lifetime. One was his diffidence, which in his earlier years led him to belittle work that had failed to find immediate acceptance. There are four such stories in this volume, and it is hard, today, to understand why they were rejected by the same editors who were publishing his other early work.

The remaining stories were disbarred from publication by their overtly homosexual themes; instead they were shown to an appreciative circle of friends and fellow writers, including Christopher Isherwood, Siegfried Sassoon, Lytton Strachey, and T. E. Lawrence, who considered one story "the most powerful thing I have ever read." The stories differ widely. One is a cheerful political satire; another has, most unusually for Forster, a historical setting; a third is the fictional equivalent of one of those comic picture-postcards that so delighted George Orwell. Others give serious and powerful expression to some of Forster's profoundest concerns.

The significance of these stories in relation to Forster's famous abandonment of the novel is discussed by Oliver Stallybrass in his introduction.

"[These stories] are often brilliant, aware both of the strictly contemporary...the contrast between Greek and Christian; between 'Goth' and Christian; between spontaneity and duty in matters sensual and instinctive. In short, they bring up all Forster's usual preoccupations and at the same time orchestrate the new song and play it loud and clear." —*World*

—From the dust jacket flap

## **The Life to Come and Other Stories Details**

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## From Reader Review The Life to Come and Other Stories for online ebook

### Kylee Ehmann says

Just about everything I love about Forster in 14 very concise packages. Some of these stories are wickedly funny, others remarkably tragic and half are very gay. My favorites were definitely "The Obelisk," "The Classical Annex," and "Dr. Woolacott," but the rest are very entertaining as well. The stories cover nearly all of his writing career, and all were unpublished for a variety of reasons (that reason for half of them being they are about gay men).

If you're a Forster fan like myself, you'll find yourself pleasantly surprised at these tales. And if you're looking to dip a toe into Forster's work before tackling one of his novels, these are similarly great stories to start with.

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### Eden R says

Finished this book at long last after almost three years of *very* slowly savoring it at a rate of one story every couple of months. I'm both glad and sorry to have finished it - on the one hand, I never regret reading my beloved Forster, but on the other hand I wanted it to last forever...

The stories:

"Ansell" - Probably my favorite story in the entire volume; a beautiful little microcosm of everything Forster was about.

"Albergo Empedocle" - One of the only stories in the collection to have been published during Forster's life; entertaining but hardly the peak of his powers.

"The Purple Envelope" - A little weird but entertaining.

"The Helping Hand" - Clever Forster affectionately skewering the failures of the well-intentioned is always a treat.

"The Rock" - A bit weak as a piece of fiction, but the idea behind it is hugely compelling.

"The Life to Come" - What to say about this one? In his introduction, Oliver Stallybrass writes of this story that "T. E. Lawrence... laughed at it - a reaction that puzzles me as much as it puzzled Forster" (xiii). In perfect honesty, I don't find Lawrence's reaction puzzling. While this is in many ways a typically Forsterian story, its premise is just a bit too implausible and it teeters just a little too close to the brink of melodrama for perfect comfort. The surprise ending is well-executed - it's not often Forster surprises me enough to elicit an audible gasp, but he succeeded sufficiently with this one to earn me strange looks in the library - but overall this particular story, though based on an interesting idea, is in delivery a bit overwrought.

"Dr Woolacott" - A quintessentially Forsterian fantasy that nicely blends the depiction of bourgeois worries and carnal instincts with an eerie otherworldly twist.

"Arthur Snatchfold" - How *Maurice* probably ended.

"The Obelisk" - Not very deep, but funny and a little bit naughty...

"What Does It Matter? A Morality" - Even naughtier Forster is very funny indeed!

"The Classical Annex" - Also very silly, slightly naughty, and generally amusing.

"The Torque" - Not sure what to make of this one... And in fact not entirely sure it's appropriate to try to make anything of it; this is the least complete story in the book, to the point that I'm inclined to question its inclusion among pieces that are generally more coherent. Conceptually it's engaging, but technically it's a bit of a mess.

"The Other Boat" - Absolutely brilliant; this story makes me grieve for the post-*Passage* novels Forster might have written had he been less socially-constrained.

"Three Courses and a Desert" - Amusing concept and amusing story, but hardly the best showcase of Forster's talents; he's out of his element in terms of genre and his contribution may be the weakest section of this collaboratively-written story. While I appreciate the story's inclusion in the collection, I'm not pleased with the decision to place it last in the book - chronologically it belongs between "The Obelisk" and "The Torque", and it would have been better placed there, as its silliness is a real anticlimax after the gut-wrenching conclusion of "The Other Boat."

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### **Brandon says**

5 stars for Arthur Snatchfold.

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### **Olga says**

Since "Maurice" - the most precious and beloved above all novels I've ever read, I literally became obsessed with Forster and his writing. And after "Maurice" nothing could satisfy that craving of mine for something exactly like "Maurice" yet something different.

At last! I have it. The essence of the "darkest corners" of E.M.Forster's soul (certainly I mean his homosexual short stories).

And at last - I am able to appreciate and admire his genius when it is revealed without reserve or restraint.

When he is writing on the subject that is the very core of his soul.

That is unknown Forster - the one that we usually do not meet - and yet that is "The Forster" to the bones. He is harsh, savage and violent, he is wild, he is free and alive - you would be surprised...and yet you wouldn't. For he is subtle, gentle and soul-piercing.

Fascinating: the subtlest blend of passion, emotion, insight, violent power (the darkest power that is), poetry, magic and art. Well - it is bewitching, it is mind-blowing and breathtaking.

"The Other Boat" and "Dr.Woolacott" are the favourites (for the admirers of Forster - definitely must-read).

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### **Rachael says**

I have a love/hate relationship with E.M. Forster. I have suffered through some works, only to fall head over heels for the next one I read! His voice ranges widely, from depressing and nihilistic to uplifting and romantic. Like every writer, E.M. Forster is at his best when focusing on subjects personal to him, such as the love and affection between men. These are an absolute pleasure to read, examples being "The Life to Come," "Dr Woolacott", "Arthur Snatchfold", and "The Other Boat." This collection of short stories was published posthumously due to it's homosexual content, along with his novel Maurice. Such a shame, for Forster's passion really shines through in these works!

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### Claire Gordon-Bouvier says

I think on the whole, E.M. Forster was definitely better at writing novels than at writing short stories. I very much enjoyed "The Purple Letter" and "Dr Woolacott", but many of the others just didn't really hold my attention. It's still worth a read though.

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### Tim says

So great reading Forster after so long. Great collection of stories.

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### Bionic Jean says

E.M. Forster is largely remembered as an Edwardian novelist, essayist, and short story writer. His ironic and well-plotted novels examine class difference and hypocrisy in early 20th-century British society. They are novels of manners depicting British morality and Edwardian society. Five major novels remain popular, but another, "*Maurice*", was never published during his lifetime because of its homosexual content. It was eventually posthumously published in 1971. This review concerns a number of short stories which have themes in common with "*Maurice*".

Many of the stories in **The Life to Come and other stories** were written during a period of silence, when the public assumed Forster to be not writing, between the publication of his first short story collection and his greatest novel, "*A Passage to India*". Of his short stories, two collections were published during Forster's lifetime - "*The Celestial Omnibus*" in 1911, and "*The Eternal Moment*" in 1928. The publication of the short story collection "*The Eternal Moment*" had marked the end of Forster's published fiction-writing. From now on he wrote literary criticism, travel writing, essays, and biographies. But another two collections of earlier stories were published posthumously, significantly later. These are entitled, **The Life to Come** in 1972 and "*Arctic Summer*" in 1980.

This review is of **The Life to Come and other stories**, published in 2013; a collection of fourteen stories, written between 1903 to 1957. All except two of the other stories remained unpublished because of their overtly homosexual themes. Only his friends and fellow writers, including Christopher Isherwood, Siegfried Sassoon, Lytton Strachey, and T. E. Lawrence, read them at the time they were written. His novels concentrated on social satire, and observing what the British wanted to believe was true about themselves. Most include descriptions of prim Edwardian English young ladies, often on their travels and encountering a larger world. **The Life to Come and other stories**, however includes more experimental, previously suppressed works, using a little risqué language designed to amuse and shock. They are about those who were tempted to cross the boundaries, the conventions of the time, in particular homosexual men.

In a personal memorandum from 1935, the author recorded,

*"I want to love a strong young man of the lower classes and be loved by him and even hurt by him. That is my ticket, and then I have wanted to write respectable novels".*

He certainly achieved the latter, but his exploratory writing including homosexual themes was never published. This is unsurprising, since he died in 1970, only three short years after legislation was passed and homosexuality ceased to be a criminal offence. Until 1967 it had been against the law in the United Kingdom. The stories here have a different tone and concerns from his major novels, being more similar to *"Maurice"* which tells of the coming of age of an explicitly gay male character.

E.M. Forster's talent here lies in creating believable characters, and placing them in extraordinary situations. Also, in common with many of Forster's other short stories the stories include a characteristic uniting of realism and fantasy; a fusion of natural and the supernatural. Forster uses the supernatural in his stories to break free from the restrictions of Edwardian society. Some critics believe that Forster's use of fantasy is thus a means of social satire; others dismiss his use of the supernatural as whimsical. In the lights of the horrific realities of World War I, Forster's fantasies seemed particularly outdated and irrelevant. Perhaps the perspective of time was needed to judge them fairly.

In *"Dr Woolacott"* a dying patient refuses the aid of his doctor and chooses instead the spirit-saving love of an unknown boy, (view spoiler) The feeling conveyed to the reader is dream-like, illusory and elusive. We are never sure whether the boy is real or a figment of the patient's imagination, or a spirit. It is a haunting psychomachia about the inner conflict within one's soul, between virtue and vice.

In many of Forster's most critically regarded stories, a character's denial of love is reveals to the reader the restrictions of conventional society. It is a tool to demonstrate contemporary society's repressiveness, and inevitably leads to his physical, emotional, and spiritual death. Always in Forster there are are themes which figure prominently in the longer works: the deficiencies of the undeveloped heart, desire, truth, beauty, the possibility of transcendence, and the saving power of love. As in this story he frequently explores various mythologies using symbolism as a technique. In his novels too, he has been criticised for his attachment to mysticism. Ultimately though, Forster demonstrates a strong secular humanistic impulse toward understanding and sympathy. His attitude to the ambiguous aspects of human experience, shows time and time again that he believed the efforts to reconcile truth and love was always to be attempted, even if such a reconciliation is ultimately impossible.

*"The Life to Come"*, the title story, was written in 1922, and thus only published 50 years later. It is divided into four chapters: Night, Evening, Day and Morning. In the story, the devotion of a tribal chief for an English Christian missionary is betrayed. (view spoiler) This is a typical Forster theme, that of undeveloped emotions and the heart. The story uses satire, prophecy, tragedy and myth, to tell a parable. The reader can see that themes in this story were developed into *"A Passage to India"* in its opposition of Eastern and Western values. As in the novel, Christianity is tested from an Eastern perspective. The author satirises both the Christian hypocrisy of the missionary, and British Imperialism. It is bitter and scathing in tone.

*"The Other Boat"* is the longest story, and reviewed separately here

E.M. Forster's fiction has many aspects. Whether or not the reader prefers the social satires, the experimental mysticism or the lesser-known gay fiction, it is well chronicled that in later years he became a significant moral literary presence, a model for young gay writers such as Christopher Isherwood and W. H. Auden to follow. In the 1930's he was viewed as England's most thoughtful exponent of liberal humanism. He was a writer with a conscience, denying the extremes of left and right alike, committed to humanism and responsible intelligence.

Forster's origins were quietly upper middle-class. He was an only child, raised primarily by his widowed mother and other female relations. His education and intellectual tastes led him towards the Bloomsbury Group, informally led by Virginia Woolf at her London home. Like them, Forster had a belief in the importance of the individual, a commitment to friendship, a dismissiveness of conventional values, and a passion for truth. In *"What I Believe"* (1938), he announced his abiding faith in personal relations and individualism, asserting that,

*"if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."*

In 1928, when Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *"The Well of Loneliness"* was prosecuted under the obscenity laws, he persuaded his Bloomsbury friends Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey to join him in defending it. In the event though, no expert testimony was permitted at the trial.

Some of his late stories here, in this collection of gay literature, are among his finest work, and powerful statements of his ethos. They differ widely in mood and setting, being by turn ironic, witty, resonant, and angry. Some express his rage against what he saw as the hypocrisy of society, expressing in the main his concern with its homophobia. He has been called a *"tireless defender of humane values"*. However, his interest and affinity with the visionary and transcendent were uniquely his own, and distinct from the Bloomsbury group.

### **The collection includes:**

classics which rank among his greatest achievements:

*Dr. Woolacott*  
*The Life to Come*  
*The Other Boat* (link here to a separate review)  
*Arthur Snatchfold*

three comic stories:

*The Obelisk*  
*What Does It Matter? A Morality*  
*The Classical Annex*

and E. M. Forster's only piece of historical fiction:

*The Torque*

### **Further links:**

The three posthumous stories reviewed here are also included in E. M. Forster's Collected Short Stories volume 2 reviewed here

The Collection The Eternal Moment and Other Stories is reviewed here

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## Chris says

When English novelist E. M. Forster died in 1970 at the age of 91 he left behind a large amount of unpublished materials. The reasons for this are simple: either they were not deemed of sufficient quality or they contained sexual content that he felt could not be published during his lifetime. The most important of these works was his fully completed novel *Maurice*, which many, myself included, believe is his best novel—it's his most honest, least contrived, not as overwritten.

Shortly after *Maurice* was published posthumously in 1971, this volume of fourteen short stories, *The Life to Come and Other Short Stories*, was released. The first four are early works too insubstantial or uninteresting to bother reading. To save time, skip these and proceed directly to the title story, "The Life to Come," which is the best of the lot. This, and the following seven stories are mature works; all but one were written after his last and most famous novel *A Passage to India*. These are the stories Forster held unpublishable due to content. If the reader is comfortable with the subject matter of *Maurice*, these eight stories will delight, amuse, sadden, and excite.

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## Paul says

All unpublished in his lifetime most of the stories in this volume were withheld from publication by E M Forster due to their homosexual subject matter - some are quite slight and most definitely 'entertainments' in the manner of Saki, etc though deftly written. A few don't work - probably as the editor suggested that Forster never worked them up sufficiently to a fully-formed version.

However, there are three stories - 'The Life To Come', 'Arthur Snatchfold' and 'The Other Boat' - that are astonishing creations, tragic, beautiful and such indictments of the distorting pressures of homophobia, imperialism, rigid religious orthodoxies, class and racism. All three at the very least the equal of 'Maurice' and worth the price alone.

It is a shame that the book appears currently out of print.

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## Jae says

this is a great book if you love the craft of forster. the stories in this are short enough to read on the bus, but written in the same style and with as much care as his novels. each one is a perfect little package.

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## Aldi says

This collection, complete with introduction, made me realise something I hadn't quite realised in so many words before:

Literary criticism of E.M. Forster is so full of snobby bullshit.

The intro here basically reflects what I've heard and read before - "Maurice" isn't as critically acclaimed or technically accomplished as his other novels; most of these stories weren't meant for publication because

they were too crude and unpolished (read: too gay); he was at his best when he was subtle; whenever he dealt with subject matters close to his heart, his writing wasn't that good; blah blah blah snobbitycakes.

You know what, though, those other novels, the critically acclaimed and technically accomplished ones? *Bored the crap out of me*. They were bloodless and tedious and forgettable. (Looking at you, *A Room With A View*). Maurice, the one that's called sentimental and unpolished and personal wish fulfillment? Is beautiful and real and unforgettable, and I'll fight anyone who says differently :p

It was the same with these stories. The first few, written at a much earlier time, were a bit dull and pointless, and I was debating giving up on the collection altogether. Then came the titular "The Life to Come" and the stories following it; the later ones, the ones "not fit for publication," according to everyone and their uncle, including Forster himself, and what can I say, they were freaking wonderful. No, perhaps they weren't the sort of stories that attract literary acclaim, but you know what, screw that. They had life, and longing, and humour, and tragedy. They had characters with real passions. Some of them were funny (The Obelisk had me cackling out loud), some deeply sad. Some of them shared similar threads and clearly contained early seeds for Maurice (the cross-class relationship is definitely a common theme), and all of them made me feel things.

It's a shame that Forster obviously agreed with and internalised criticism that elevated his "serious" literature and dismissed all his queer-themed work as smutty wish fulfillment stories, because to me it's always felt like the moment he threw his aspirations towards the critically acclaimable aside and just wrote what he *wanted* to write (and/or read, and/or live), his writing really came alive. I wish he could have lived to an era where he could write stories as gloriously queer and raunchy and fun as he bloody well wanted, and be celebrated for them instead of grudgingly (and post-humously) humoured.

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### **Maria Madsen says**

*"Love had been born somewhere in the forest, of what quality only the future could decide. Trivial or immortal, it had been born to two human bodies as a midnight cry. Impossible to tell whence the cry had come, so dark was the forest. Or into what worlds it would echo, so vast was the forest. Love had been born for good or evil, for a long life or a short."*

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### **Giulia Di Marco says**

Un amore omosessuale tra un missionario cristiano inglese e un capo di una tribù africana non meglio localizzata. Un amore che distrugge tutti gli stereotipi e i tabù possibili e immaginabili, ma che alla fine porta alla morte entrambi i protagonisti, perché tutto ciò che viene represso e vietato dalle convenzioni sociali e dalle costruzioni religiose e/o culturali diviene possibile solo nell'aldilà, nella "Vita che Verrà" appunto. Ma quanto si starebbe meglio se si liberassero gli impulsi primordiali dell'uomo senza far finta di essere santi, missionari, profeti e quant'altro?  
Rassegnamoci, siamo tutti esseri umani.

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### **Katie M. says**

(Warning: this book seems to have evoked my inner analytical writing nerd. Sorry.)

Forster's subtle social commentaries tend to blow right over my head, and since subtle social commentary is basically the point of his writing, I tend to have a mixed relationship with it. This is a weirdly compelling collection of mostly-formerly-unpublished stories, though, in large part because it's such an incredibly mixed bag. The first section is made up of very early works, which consistently fall somewhere between mediocre and decently interesting. The second section is made up of his unpublishable gay short stories, which range from touching to slapstick (E.M. Forster slapstick is totally worth the read, if only for its complete incongruity) to painfully irritating. His racism and orientalism are in fine form here and pretty much at their most unpalatable in this middle batch of stories, since they're so disturbingly intertwined with issues of desire and intimacy and power. The last section is a serial piece written by Forster and three of his contemporaries, with each writer contributing a different section. It's silly but an easy enough read, and interesting to compare the different writing styles.

So in conclusion... if you already heart E.M. Forster, give it a go. Otherwise, read *Howards End*. (Or you could not read E.M. Forster at all. That's fine too.)

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