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The BBC Talks of E.M. Forster, 1929-1960: A Selected Edition

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Spanning three decades and a host of subjects, E. M. Forster's radio broadcasts for the BBC were a major contribution to British cultural history, yet today they are rarely acknowledged by scholars of his life and work. But in their day they reached a larger audience than his fiction and established him as a household figure not only in Britain but also in the farthest reaches of its Empire.

As a frequent contributor to the BBC, Forster generally adhered to literary topics but did not shy away from social commentary. This book offers a new appreciation of his vitality and public importance through seventy annotated broadcasts that present him not only as a literary critic but also as a political activist, an advocate for India, and a wary yet cooperative ally of a colonialist government during World War II.

Gathering material either not in print or, if recast as essays, widely scattered, *The BBC Talks of E. M. Forster* reveals aspects of Forster's intellect that have been given short shrift in previous studies. Nearly half the scripts date from 1941 to 1945 and provide an eyewitness account of war from a distinguished perspective. Forster comments on how the arts gallantly survived the blitz—even taking his listeners to the theater as bombing threats loom—and in other cases protests government interference in private life or the limits on free expression caused by the wartime paper shortage.

In these scripts, Forster casts a cosmopolitan eye on contemporary literature from James Joyce to John Steinbeck and provides early exposure for young writers and composers. He also enlarges the scope of European art by pairing Jane Austen or C. S. Lewis with Indian writers and offers pointed comments on contemporary literati such as Aldous Huxley and T. S. Eliot. Annotations to each piece identify Forster's references and trace his revisions from script to broadcast, while the book's introduction places his emergence as a distinctive radio voice within the historical, creative, and institutional contexts of broadcasting in his day.

This significant body of writing, too long overlooked, traces Forster's evolution from novelist to adroit cultural critic and shows how a man who was never comfortable with machines played an important role in shaping a new medium. *The BBC Talks of E. M. Forster* situates Forster as one of the most poignant voices of the twentieth century as it offers new insight into a nation transfigured by war.

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