The Stranger's Child: Alan Hollinghurst's dialogues with the past

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Summary/Abstract: In The Stranger's Child, Alan Hollinghurst retraces the changes that marked English culture and attitudes over the 20th century, especially regarding homosexuals. The author also describes the mechanisms governing the process of creating and re-writing versions of English history. Hollinghurst reveals the multiplicity of contradictory voices with which the historian/biographer has to deal, as well as the apparent historicity of the researcher whose “present” interferes with the investigated “past.” Although the novel gives evidence of the progressing democratization and polyphony of historical writing, it focuses on the factors responsible for misrepresenting history: the fallibility of human memory, the unintentional or deliberate annihilation of heritage, the personal agenda of both witnesses who conceal or falsify certain facts, and researchers whose primary goal is to prove their point.
The Stranger's Child is the fifth novel by Alan Hollinghurst, first published in June 2011. The book tells the story of a minor poet, Cecil Valance, who is killed in the First World War. In 1913, he visits a Cambridge friend, George Sawle, at the latter's home in Stanmore, Middlesex. While there Valance writes a poem entitled “Two Acres”, about the Sawles' house and addressed, ambiguously, either to George himself or to George's younger sister, Daphne. The poem goes on to become famous and the novel Alan Hollinghurst's new novel is undoubtedly one of the best this year. The enchanted garden an autochrome print from 1905. Photograph: SSPL/Getty Images. In many ways, The Stranger's Child has the same qualities as his previous novels. It is elegant, seductive and extremely enjoyable to read, and peppered with astute, apparently casual noticings. (Of a man stumbling around in a shed at a party: “He was drunk, it was one of the hilarious uncorrectable disasters of being drunk.” Of a grand literary wife: “A hard, good-looking face, thoroughly made up, and a manner he knew at once, from its tight smiles and frowns, of getting people to do things.”) The Stranger's Child book. Read 1,356 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. From the Man Booker Prize–winning author of The Line of Bea... Then he realised “The writer of a life didn't only write about the past, and that the secrets he dealt in might have all kinds of consequences in other lives, in years to come” – and this aspect is perhaps the dominant theme of the book, creating a Russian-doll like structure of nested histories. I will have to sue Alan Hollinghurst for damages now.” The article in question, entitled “The Booker can Drive People Mad” by Rachel Cooke, appeared in the 20th May edition. In it, Paul learned of a character in Mr Hollinghurst's latest novel which is clearly based on himself, even to the extent of having his own name. 435 pages ; 24 cm. In the late summer of 1913, George Sawle brings his Cambridge schoolmate—a handsome, aristocratic young poet named Cecil Valance—to his family's modest home outside London for the weekend. George is enthralled by Cecil, and soon his sixteen-year-old sister, Daphne, is equally besotted by him and the stories he tells about Corley Court, the country estate he is heir to. But what Cecil writes in Daphne's autograph album will change their and their families' lives forever: a poem that, after Cecil is killed in the Great War and his reputation burnished, will be it was clear they just wanted to play with the exhibits. “Let's hang the Headmaster's mother,” said Peter, and saw the boys giggle and look at each other. He held up a gloomy canvas in a shiny gilt frame. It wasn't clear to Peter if the Daweses had had children of their own. “I've lent them a couple of things myself,” said the Headmaster. “A portrait and a set of antlers.