WRITERS AND CRITICS

E.M. FORSTER

K.W. Gransden

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Two generations have grown up since E. M. Forster first began writing, and a third has grown up since he published his fifth and last novel. Yet his reputation has never stood higher than today—an "achievement in time" perhaps unique in modern literature.

In this urbane and lucid introduction to Forster's work, K. W. Gransden assesses in detail his achievement as a writer in the great English liberal-humanist tradition. After an introductory chapter which deals with Forster's background and influences, the rest of the book follows a mainly chronological pattern, considering the early short stories, the novels, and the uncollected literary journalism which has formed the bulk of Forster's output since 1924. Forster's own autobiographical and critical writings have throughout been used to illuminate his fiction.

K. W. Gransden, Lecturer in English at the University of Warwick, has published a book of poems, *Any Day*, and a study of Donne. His most recent publication is a critical essay on Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

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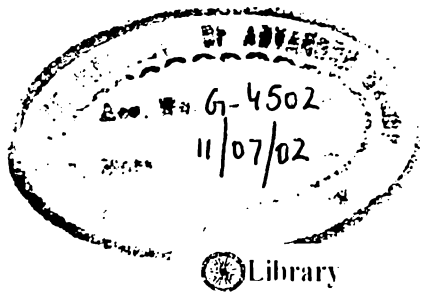

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CONTENTS

I	Introduction	1
II	Explorations	11
III	Italy	22
IV	Portrait of the Artist	38
V	England	54
VI	India	81
VII	Afterwards	108
	Bibliography	119

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K.W.G.

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

I am particularly grateful to Mr E. M. Forster for reading this book in typescript and correcting a number of points of fact. Needless to say, he made no comment on my criticism. He has, however, written and talked to me about his work on a number of occasions, the earliest of these several years before I had any thought of writing a book about him. When, therefore, I attribute observations to him and give no other source, these letters and conversations are my authority.

I should also like to thank the following for their help: Mr O. G. W. Stallybrass, who allowed me to consult his unpublished bibliography of Forster's writings, drew my attention to several items I should otherwise have missed, and gave me information about a manuscript of *A Passage to India*; Mr P. N. Furbank, and my wife, who read my typescript, made a number of valuable suggestions, and saved me from various errors and obscurities.

K.W.G.

ABBREVIATED TITLES BY WHICH E. M. FORSTER'S WORKS ARE CITED IN REFERENCES

A.H.	=	*Abinger Harvest*
A.N.	=	*Aspects of the Novel*
G.L.D.	=	*Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*
H.D.	=	*The Hill of Devi*
H.E.	=	*Howards End*
L.J.	=	*The Longest Journey*
M.T.	=	*Marianne Thornton*
P.T.I.	=	*A Passage to India*
R.V.	=	*A Room with a View*
S.S.	=	*Collected Short Stories*
T.C.D.	=	*Two Cheers for Democracy*
W.A.F.T.	=	*Where Angels Fear to Tread*
W.W.	=	*Writers at Work*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1943 Forster wrote these words about André Gide. They are scarcely less true of himself.

> Here's a man with a free mind, indifferent to authority, indifferent sometimes to logic, indifferent to everything except what he believes to be true. He has remained an individualist in an age which imposes discipline. . . . He believes in good taste. . . . He's subtle and elusive—sometimes annoyingly so—he sets great store by charm.[1]

Eight years later Gide died, and Forster saluted him again:

> Distinguished as ever, he was also content. I realized more clearly how much he had got out of life, and had managed to transmit through his writings. Not life's greatness—greatness is a nineteenth-century perquisite, a Goethean job—but life's complexity. . . . He had in many ways a pagan outlook, yet he had also a puritanical and religious outlook. . . . He had also, and above all, a belief in discovering the truth and following it. This comes out in the fascinating exchange of letters between him and Paul Claudel. Claudel, an authoritative authoritarian, had much that Gide believed himself to lack—more genius, more influence, more money, more will-power, more everything—and he tried to impose his formidable personality upon his correspondent, and to convert him to his own strongly held views. He was a fisher of men. He cast his net. But the fish escaped. Wavering, yielding,

tempted, flustered, Gide nevertheless slipped through the meshes and continued his undulating course upstream. *Il se sauva.* He saved himself instead of being saved. . . . He had not a great mind. But he had a free mind, and free minds are as rare as great and even more valuable at the present moment.[2]

It would be misleading to try to press too far a parallel between Forster and Gide—both are products of their own different cultural traditions and cannot be fully appreciated outside them—but to some extent such a parallel might be valid. It might even be relevant to add Gide's own remarkable knowledge of English literature and the fact that both writers care deeply for music: Forster has played the piano all his life, while Gide was a pianist of exceptional ability. Forster, like Gide, has been wayward and hard to pin down; distrusts "greatness" and authority; from his critics and even at times from his admirers, *il se sauva.*

Forster's career seems to epitomise this elusiveness. He produced four novels before 1914; in 1924 his fifth and last novel, *A Passage to India*, appeared, and has become a classic. After this, he withdrew from the writing of fiction. He remained influential in the 1920s and '30s, but not popular; in 1936 Cyril Connolly wrote "he is still waiting for English fiction to catch up."[3] In 1960 his appearance as a witness for the defence in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial caught the popular press by surprise, for he has never sought or accepted the convenient roles of *éminence grise* or grand old man; yet, in outliving his own creations by half a century, he has become a legendary figure, a survivor from an age which has itself become a legend.

None of this is due to any shyness or aloofness on Forster's part. Though resolutely "private," he has through a long working life spoken out constantly and firmly in defence of art and freedom, and against political

wickedness, interference with liberty and peace, and the materialism and conformity which, in the half-century since he grew up, have been doing their best to discredit the liberal-humanist view of life in which he was educated and to which he still holds.

Four of Forster's five novels first appeared more than fifty years ago, during the Edwardian decade: that is, before the arrival of wireless, television or aviation, in the robust and threatening infancy of the motor-car, during Henry James's last great period, and before the publication of any novel by D. H. Lawrence. Forster's novels do not date, but to understand them fully they must first be correctly dated.

Forster's great-grandfather Henry Thornton was a prominent member of the Clapham Sect, an Evangelical group akin to the Quakers in their wealth and philanthropy, but lacking their touch of mysticism, and consequently, Forster has said,[4] less attractive. But they shared the Nonconformist respect for solvency and indifference to art. Henry Thornton was a notable figure in the banking world, a Member of Parliament and a champion of anti-slavery. The self-help tradition, the solid independence of the English middle-class, is part of Forster's inheritance. Money matters in his books as it matters in George Eliot's, Butler's, and Shaw's. "The poor are less wonderful than we think" is one of the lessons of *Howards End*, and Butler in *The Way of All Flesh* takes the same view. Ernest Pontifex's private income (left him by an aunt) is literally his salvation; the Schlegels in *Howards End* stood high, dry and civilised on an island of six hundred a year. And from Henry Thornton's daughter Marianne, his own great-aunt, Forster inherited £8,000 which saw him through Cambridge and started him off as a writer. Her portrait hangs in his rooms at King's College, Cambridge, and it is her biography that he wrote, as an act of piety and acknowledgment, in his old age, when his work as a writer was done: "She and no

one else made my career as a writer possible."[5] Like many acts of piety, *Marianne Thornton* is conscientious rather than inspired, only really coming to life in the final section when the author himself appears on the scene as a precocious only child. Otherwise the book's main interest is twofold: as a document of English middle-class life; and for the unusually long historical span provided by the longevity of its subject: "born 1797—it is incredible, it begins to assume the proportions of infinity"—and this is vividly brought home to us as we read a letter Marianne sent to her great-nephew recalling an occasion of her own childhood: a scene which occurred at the opening of Parliament in 1804 by George III, who was already mad "and kept calling the people about him peacocks." As for the atavistic English middle-class tradition, with its prosperity and its continuity, Forster had already paid tribute to it, long before writing the history of the Thorntons, in *Howards End*, the story of an English house. This house comes into the biography too: Forster lived in it for ten years as a child but "the impressions received there still glow—not always distinguishably, always inextinguishably—and have given me a slant upon society and history."[6]

Forster's father, an architect, died shortly after he was born, and he was brought up by women. As a child he lived in Hertfordshire in the house he later called Howards End. He was educated (as a day-boy) at Tonbridge School, which he did not particularly like, and at King's College, Cambridge, where he was happy, and where he now lives. He read classics and history, and became friendly with a number of men and women who came to be called the "Bloomsbury Group": Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Bertrand Russell, Maynard Keynes, Clive and Vanessa Bell. All were influenced by the teaching and example of the philosopher G. E. Moore, whose *Principia Ethica* appeared in 1903, shortly after Forster himself had gone

down, and became the bible of the group. Moore held that the contemplation of beauty in art and the cultivation of personal relations were the most important things in life. Of the two states of consciousness, personal affection was the more important and to some extent subsumed the other, since people are more complicated than works of art and involve more of one's mental and aesthetic powers. But both processes involved the correct use of taste and judgment: you should no more try to develop a friendship with someone lacking in attractiveness of mind and personality than you should waste time contemplating ugly or inferior artifacts. Moore and his circle were all charming and attractive themselves, and these qualities are reflected in the group's friendships and its literary and artistic products. On these same qualities its detractors have also fastened.

Forster has repudiated critics' attempts to label him Bloomsbury, and it is not particularly helpful to read his novels with the group too much in one's mind, though this does not mean that one will not notice attitudes and assumptions he and they have in common. In fact, Forster's literary career can more fruitfully be regarded as an attempt to explore and, where this seemed to him desirable, to criticise and modify, the values and attitudes he had learnt as a young man. So there is no need here to embark on a critique of Bloomsbury. Its weaknesses (its exclusiveness, its remoteness from other ways of life, its self-esteem) have long since become common knowledge. But those critics who attack Bloomsbury confidently when its representative is Lytton Strachey find themselves hedging and qualifying when faced with Forster. Dr Leavis is hard on Keynes's nostalgic memoir recalling the group's Cambridge days, forgetting, perhaps, that this was originally a paper read to a private club and not a public apologia. Lawrence disliked the group for its certainty as to what was good, its unawareness of its limitations, and its lack of reverence, its

inability to get to grips with reality. And Katherine Mansfield, in an entry in her journal for 1917, echoes in her own words the Lawrencian dissatisfaction:

> It's not good enough (i.e. *Howards End*). E. M. Forster never gets any further than warming the teapot. He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this teapot. Is it not beautifully warm? Yes, but there ain't going to be no tea.

Dr Leavis offers (more in sorrow than anger) a similar diagnosis: lack of force, robustness, intelligence (*sic*), and vitality.[7]

It will be more to the point here to say something of Cambridge, the "City of Friendship and Truth." It is smaller than Oxford, and having had no Lord Nuffield still retains much of its ancient dignity and charm. It has been traditionally Whig, Nonconformist and Parliamentarian where Oxford has been traditionally Tory, Anglican and Royalist. Supreme in natural science, it has also produced Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Tennyson, and Samuel Butler. In Forster's day King's College was a special enclave in the university, since it was then the only Cambridge college which insisted that all its undergraduates should read for honours. Moreover Forster has pointed out, "Eton, its twin foundation, gave it a tradition for which all non-Etonians must be grateful: a genuine instead of a faked tradition. And mingling with this were the oddities and crudities—people who had not enjoyed their public schools or had been to the wrong school or even to none. They too had contributed. . . . Brains are not everything, as we all keep telling one another, still they do counteract social silliness." Besides it intellectual distinction, King's as architecture offered itself to Forster as a symbol of England (and, ultimately, of his own view of the "muddle and mystery" of life):

> Gibbs's Building [this is the eighteenth-century Fellows' building on the west side of the first court] . . . is pierced midway by a cavernous entry, known to initiates as the Jumbo House, in whose sombre recesses are usually to be found a ladder, a handcart, and a small heap of sand. These too are peculiar to England. The range from them to the soaring chapel-buttresses, pinnacled in the intense inane, is the range of the English mind. They are the unexplained, balancing the inexplicable.

Those passages are quoted from Forster's biography of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson,[8] a King's don whom he knew well. Though never one of his pupils, Forster attended his discussion groups (along with McTaggart, Fry, and Forster's classics supervisor Nathanael Wedd) and was influenced by him. Dickinson was a Shelleyan, a lover of Greece, and interested in the mystical side of philosophy as exemplified in the writings of the Neoplatonist Plotinus. He also helped to found the *Independent Review*, a left-wing liberal periodical to which Forster contributed some of his early stories.

Cambridge at the beginning of the present century was enjoying a philosophical renaissance (through Moore, McTaggart, and Russell—Dickinson himself was not in their class) which was to culminate in the work of Wittgenstein. Clubs or discussion groups flourished, as they had done in the days of Tennyson and the Apostles, particularly at two colleges, King's and Trinity, where there prevailed an Arnoldian "atmosphere of sweetness and light." Most of the Bloomsbury Group and their associates had been at Cambridge, and many of them transferred to the squares of Holborn (still in those days residential) the discussions and relationships begun beside the Cam. Thus for about twenty years Cambridge was the source and inspiration of the most distinguished achievements in English intellectual life.

In his autobiography, *Sowing*, Leonard Woolf has listed some of the authors he and his friends admired at Cambridge during these years: Shaw and Ibsen, Hardy and Swinburne, and Butler's posthumous *Way of All Flesh*: "we read it when it came out (1903) and felt at once its significance for us." Of these writers Woolf recalls that "we recognised them with enthusiasm not merely as writers and artists but as our leaders."

The influence of most of these writers can be detected in Forster's work, and particularly Butler—"though I think I have a more poetical mind": he once thought of writing a book on him and did write an essay on *Erewhon* as "A Book that Influenced Me":

> I like that idea of fantasy, of muddling up the actual and the impossible until the reader isn't sure which is which, and I have sometimes tried to do it when writing myself.[9]

Both writers have a strong autobiographical element; both dislike hypocrisy and pomposity and like addressing the reader direct; both at times like to shock the reader, sometimes by belatedly and unexpectedly releasing information previously withheld. Both writers hate cruelty and prudishness, and question accepted values: it was especially this last quality in Butler, his sublime faith in his own judgment, that made *The Way of All Flesh* such a favourite with Bloomsbury.

Both Butler and Forster retain an ironical awareness of the enemy's strength, and an unwilling respect for it. Moreover, the pattern of *The Way of All Flesh* is repeated by Forster in the most personal and autobiographical of his novels, *The Longest Journey*. Each is a *roman à clef* in which the central figure is a shy, weak, introverted, timid and muddled idealist. Both Ernest Pontifex and Rickie Elliot are failures in the eyes of the world. Both are victims of the wills of others, of the ruthlessness and selfishness of "the great world"; both assert their own wills

only when it is too late or no longer matters. They are anti-heroes, the antithesis of the extravert "cards" of Wells and Bennett. It is interesting to follow the influence of this masterpiece through Forster to his disciple Christopher Isherwood's brilliant first novel *All the Conspirators*. Philip, the central figure of this novel, exemplifies Isherwood's version of the anti-hero, whom he calls the neurotic hero, the "truly weak man," and describes in his autobiography *Lions and Shadows*:

> The truly strong man travels straight across the broad America of normal life, taking always the direct reasonable route. But 'America' is just what the truly weak man, the neurotic hero, dreads. And so, with immense daring, with an infinitely greater expenditure of nervous energy, money, time, physical and mental resources, he prefers to attempt the huge northern circuit, the laborious, terrible north-west passage, and his end, if he does not turn back, is to be lost for ever in the blizzard and the ice.[10]

Ernest turns back; so does Philip in *All the Conspirators*: but Forster is a more romantic and less cynical writer than either of these, and Rickie is lost for ever; Forster identifies himself far more strongly with him than Butler does with Ernest, and presents his idealism nakedly, while Butler interposes his worldly, cynical, Somerset-Maughamish narrator, Overton.

Leonard Woolf does not include Meredith in his list, but Forster has said that about 1900 he was a "spiritual power" at whom "much of the universe, and all Cambridge, trembled," and has praised him as "the finest contriver English fiction has produced."[11] Forster himself is a novelist who depends a good deal on contrivance, and has admitted that he admired Meredith and may have been influenced by him.[12]

But a far more certain influence is Jane Austen. From her Forster learned, what he could hardly have learnt

from Meredith, to write elegantly; from her he learnt the possibilities of domestic comedy, though, unlike her, he "tried to hitch it on to other things."[13] Later, he read Proust, on whom he has written perceptively and admiringly and who he says has given him "as much of the modern way as I could take. I couldn't read Freud or Jung."[14] That last admission is a reminder of the historical distance between us and Forster's novels, though we should recall that Lawrence wrote *Sons and Lovers* without having read Freud, and that Freud himself regarded all his most important discoveries as having already been made by artists, the true innovators in the understanding of the human mind.

With this upbringing and inheritance Forster left Cambridge. He now travelled, especially in Italy and Greece, but also in Germany, and in 1912–13 went to India, which he revisited in 1921. He spent much of the First World War in Alexandria as a Red Cross voluntary worker. Later he settled at Abinger in Surrey. All these places—Hertfordshire, Tonbridge, Cambridge, Surrey, the Mediterranean, Alexandria, India—have entered his writing. He thinks places important, though not as important as people, and the *genius loci* appears in much of his fiction.

REFERENCES

1. *T.C.D.*, p. 234.
2. *T.C.D.*, p. 237.
3. *The Condemned Playground*, p. 113.
4. *A.H.*, p. 241.
5. *M.T.*, p. 289.
6. *M.T.*, p. 269.
7. *The Common Pursuit*, p. 276.
8. *G.L.D.*, pp. 27, 61.
9. *T.C.D.*, p. 227.
10. *Lions and Shadows*, pp. 207–8.
11. *A.N.*, p. 85.
12. *W.W.*, p. 33.
13. *W.W.*, p. 32.
14. *W.W.*, p. 32.

CHAPTER II

EXPLORATIONS

Forster's short stories were all written before 1914, the earliest, "The Story of a Panic," in 1902. He began to publish them in periodicals in 1903. One, "Albergo Empedocle," remains uncollected, another, "The Rock," is unpublished. The rest—twelve in all—were collected in two volumes (1911 and 1928), and subsequently in one. With one remarkable exception—"The Eternal Moment"—they are allegories or fantasies written in a manner more acceptable fifty years ago than now. At that time there was a vogue for their kind of animistic reaction against material progress and urban convention: the works of "Saki" and Kenneth Grahame exemplify aspects of this curious and rather touching episode in the history of English romanticism's long search for an escape from the respectable chains of reality: an episode which petered out in Barrie's *Mary Rose.*

Max Beerbohm, writing in *Seven Men* of Braxton, an imaginary novelist of the eighteen-nineties, records that

> from the time of Nathanael Hawthorne to the outbreak of the 1914 war, current literature did not suffer from any lack of fauns. But when Braxton's first book appeared, fauns had still an air of novelty about them; we had not yet grown tired of them, with their hoofs and their slanting eyes and their ways of coming suddenly out of woods to wean quiet English villages from respectability. We did tire later.

Some of Forster's stories belong to this tradition. His classical education (early in his career he did the introduction and notes for an edition of the *Aeneid*) and his

visits to the Mediterranean directed his poetic imagination along this particular road. He never entirely abandoned it, though he does not use fantasy so naïvely or so undilutedly in his novels. None of the stories may be searched entirely in vain for touches of their author's peculiar felicity or glimpses of the themes to which he was to remain dedicated. Even the uncollected "Albergo Empedocle" has points of interest: it is a time-fantasy about a young man called Harold who on arrival with some other tourists at Girgenti in Sicily thinks himself back into a former incarnation. His companions, including his fiancée, think he has gone mad; only his friend Tommy, who was not of the party, visits him afterwards in the asylum, understands him and loves him. Not for the last time in Forster, we see an apparently sympathetic woman's love discredited utterly, and the love of a friend, which can understand and follow a fellow-soul's flight into the world of the imagination, offered as the real and lasting love; not for the last time, we see a vision both "destroy" and "save."

The point underlying all the stories is the "dangerous" view of reality passionately, if somewhat schematically, held by the young author and offered to the reader in the hope and belief that he must prefer it to the "safe" views held by the conventional—by tourists, respectable business-men, the spiritually and emotionally timid. A few examples will illustrate this. "The Machine Stops," the longest and most tedious of the stories, is straight science-fiction, or rather anti-science fiction, an Orwellian reaction to a Wellsian future with a curiously Kiplingesque ending in which the rebels against the tyranny of the Machine crawl out into the light of the earth gasping

> "We die, but we have recaptured life, as it was in Wessex when Aelfrid overthrew the Danes."

Other rebels are "hiding in the mists and ferns.... Today they are the homeless—tomorrow...."[1]

"The Point of It" seems little more than an expansion of its title, a phrase that rather too evidently took its author's fancy. It contrasts two lives: the life lost young in a glorious moment of physical triumph and the respectable public servant's life, prolonged but emotionally and physically dead. The opening is dramatic and seems a genuine *donnée*: Harold's death, "a rotten business," prefiguring the many "thrown-away" sudden deaths of the novels. But the rest does not live up to the opening.

"The Road from Colonus" is on a higher level. It does not merely touch on a theme developed more convincingly later: it takes such a theme, and an important one, and shapes it into something valuable as it stands, something we are glad to have. An old man, Mr Lucas, travelling in Greece with his tiresome family, is strangely drawn to spend the night in a tiny dirty village *khan* or country inn. His daughter pretends to fall in with the fantasy—he is Oedipus, she Antigone—not seeing that her father means it; he prepares to remain and is angry to find they have no intention of altering their plans. They move on. The moment of vision is vouchsafed and rejected. Later, back in England, the family discover from an old newspaper that the *khan* was destroyed in a storm on the very night Mr Lucas had wanted to stop. But—and it is now that Forster takes the story on from the point where a Maugham or a Maupassant would have stopped, and takes it in his own unmistakable direction—the old man no longer cares; he is peevish and dull, hardly listens to the account, being preoccupied with trivial household matters. His family's victory over the life of the imagination, his own failure through weakness of body and will—they are absolute and complete. This idea of the disintegration of an elderly character after the emotional climax, the moment of vision, recurs (of course in a far more elaborate way) in *A Passage to India*. Mr Lucas might have had *Tod und Verklärung*: he had seen his chance of freedom, escape, self-realisation,

death and immortality; the *genius loci* had beckoned; for him it is a defeat so complete that he cannot now even remember how it came about. For his family, safety has triumphed over danger: this is all they can understand. (This is also the theme of Isherwood's *All the Conspirators.*)

"The Celestial Omnibus" is a whimsical trifle on the text "Except ye . . . become as little children. . . ." A small boy finds a bus that goes to Heaven. No one believes him, but the Erewhonianly-named Mr Bons, a cultured snob with seven Shelleys in his house (an early sketch, perhaps, for Herbert Pembroke in *The Longest Journey*) condescends to accompany him on his next ride. The boy, genuinely humble, thinks the immortals will wish to honour Bons, but it is the boy they crown, while Bons falls to earth with a crash because he did not dare to "stand by himself," confused the letter of art with the spirit, and saw culture as an end instead of as a means to life. This fable is insipidly presented, its literary allusions offered with so straight a face that they might have come out of the well-stocked library of Bons himself. But the piece is interesting, for it is irreproachably anti-Bloomsbury, upholding innocence against experience (full marks for innocence, naught for experience) and the self-effacing response against the self-asserting one. It is better, says Forster, not to have heard of Shelley than to have read him without understanding him. And how can men like Bons understand him? For they are precisely lacking in the quality Lawrence found lacking in Bloomsbury: reverence. The sceptic will never surrender utterly, he will never trust the unseen; he will even doubt the evidence of the senses if it runs counter to what his library tells him.

"Other Kingdom" may be examined briefly as a typical "faun-piece," complete with classical allusions which come true *pour épater*, and a wild, transcendental yet ironic climax. Though preposterous enough, its charm makes it nearly irresistible. Harcourt Worters,

rich and conventional, a sort of younger Henry Wilcox, is engaged to Evelyn, a child of nature. His engagement present is a copse: of course, says Worters, it must not be left wild, but be fenced round, with an asphalt path so that no one need get their feet wet. Evelyn appears to assent meekly, after an initial protest, but gets her own back devastatingly by vanishing into the trees on the inauguration picnic crying rapturously and blissfully the name of her lover, Ford, a boy who has been staying in the house. Mr Worters assumes she has eloped with Ford (whom he has dismissed for subversiveness): again, the conventional cannot believe the evidence of their own eyes, they cannot make the imaginative leap into the absurd. They pursue Ford, whom they find in a London suburban room reading Sophocles. "She has escaped you absolutely," he says, "for ever and ever, as long as there are branches to shade men from the sun."[2]

It must have been on the manuscript of this story that Agnes, in *The Longest Journey*, pencilled, for the benefit of all realists, "a neat little résumé: Allegory. Man = Modern Civilisation (in bad sense). Girl = getting into touch with Nature." Certainly Evelyn is a heroine after Forster's own heart: *elle se sauva*. She escapes from the world, flies our feverish contacts like some female scholar-gypsy. Her love-affair with Ford, which we must assume decided her against Worters finally, is a calculated shock: it is characteristic of Forster that, like most of the sexual passion in his work, it occurs off-stage.

It is no use doubting that Evelyn's transformation is important to Forster at this stage of his career. It is something he has to prove, and he does not mind how he does it: if a miracle is needed, then he will supply one, and classical mythology (the story is narrated by a private tutor who has been teaching Ford and Evelyn Virgil) has one ready to hand: a commonplace, indeed, through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, of poetic composition for over a

thousand years of European culture. But this kind of treatment is rather a case of classics without tears: an altogether too easy and painless business, ignoring the underlying violence, realism, and insight into human behaviour which informs works of genius like Euripides' *Bacchae*, and makes them seem so modern. Forster is here rather more Braxtonian, his classics wear a modish *fin-de-siècle* air; he takes over the machinery ready-made, and its incongruity in its decorous Edwardian setting tends to diminish the moral and artistic effects aimed at. A curious and interesting travesty of Evelyn's vanishing-trick recurs in the scene in the dell at Madingley in Forster's second novel *The Longest Journey*,[3] when Agnes traps Rickie into marriage: being a conventional girl on the side of the Worterses of this life, Agnes only *appears*, to the deluded Rickie, to be transformed: an ironical comment on the conjuring-trick of "Other Kingdom," which solves nothing by solving everything.

I have left "The Eternal Moment" till last, as in manner and technique it is closer to Forster's first novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread*: both are set in Italy, both were first published in 1905; both may recall (in their moral pattern, not their narrative style) James, and especially Strether's great realisation—"Live!"—in *The Ambassadors*; both move from the plane of social comedy towards a climax of isolated psychological intensity. In "The Eternal Moment" Forster casts aside the props of fantasy and offers what he has disarmingly called "almost an honest to God yarn." The story (it is almost a *nouvelle*) explores the mind of an elderly female novelist at the end of its tether. Perhaps partly as a result of his own upbringing, Forster has shown, from early in his career, insight into, and sympathy with, the mental processes of elderly women, especially spinsters and widows, women, that is, on their own, and not in relation to men.

Miss Raby, an elderly English novelist, is returning to the Italian alpine village (here called Vorta, but based

on Cortina d'Ampezzo) which she long ago put on the map in her first novel. She finds it prosperous but vulgar and *touristique*, and feels herself to be responsible for its spiritual deterioration, "remembering that terrible text in which there is much semblance of justice: 'But woe to him through whom the offence cometh'."[4] She also finds a concierge, Feo, who had, on that first visit, felt for her a passion she had repudiated—but put into her novel. Feo is now fat, greasy, middle-aged, respectable, an ignorant *petit-bourgeois* who is shocked and ashamed when she deliberately—for she is about to face what Isherwood called the "test" which awaits every neurotic hero—reminds him of his indiscretion. (As a young man, we are to see him as the prototype of Gino in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the unimaginative Adonis who crops up, under various disguises, in several of Forster's works.)

The whole story leads up to the encounter with Feo. When Miss Raby first hears his name, a bell starts ringing which had on her "the curious effect of blood returning to frozen veins."[5] In a last attempt to "live," or at least to recognise her failure in not having lived, a last surrender to an overwhelming emptiness, a desire to confess, to strip herself naked,

> . . . a great tenderness overcame her, the sadness of an unskilful demiurge who makes a world and beholds that it is bad. She desired to ask pardon of her creatures, even though they were too poorly formed to grant it. The longing to confess, which she had suppressed that morning, broke out again with the violence of a physical desire.[6]

At first Feo denies all recollection of the past; then—what is worse—he assumes a conspiratorial gallantry and winks at her. His degeneration, her shame, are complete. This is the result of her denial: in her obsessive self-searching she still believes that Feo, too, would have been a different man if she had returned his passion. (In

Where Angels Fear to Tread Lilia marries Gino but fails to reform him.) Miss Raby's travelling-companion, Colonel Leyland, with whom she had been contemplating settling down (in a companionship-marriage which would have been her final admission of old age) is furious and embarrassed. He tries to cover up the incident by taking Feo on one side, tipping him and implying that Miss Raby is unbalanced. She is left alone; totally defeated (it seems), without allies, she nevertheless

> was conscious of a triumph over experience and earthly facts, a triumph magnificent, cold, hardly human, whose existence no one but herself would ever surmise.[7]

The self-knowledge to which Miss Raby attains through the physical and moral nagging of her past, her final isolation and the courage to bear it which comes with it, foreshadow the conclusion of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, in which Miss Abbott is left on her strange heights of peace, alone on the shore of a total insight with the sea of experience ebbing away from her, like some Ibsen heroine. Miss Raby has faced the truth, not logically, but with her heart and imagination: the Colonel thinks her deluded. She has forced herself to take on alone a moral burden her sole responsibility for which is far from proven: nor is it relevant to prove it. In her mind, the fate of Vorta and of Feo become one and the same; she had exploited the one and abandoned the other; she equates the town's moral decline and commercial success with the pattern of her own life since the moment when she ran away from passion and took art as a substitute for living. So now she forces herself to suffer. She has the drama played over again, but now the roles are reversed: it is she who is the pursuer, hungry for martyrdom, and Feo who repudiates her. In doing this she has let down the side, "discovered their nakedness to the alien," as Adela does in *A Passage to India* when she publicly with-

draws her charge against Aziz. And as with Adela, we are partly concerned with sexual frustration.

Although on her return to Vorta Miss Raby realises that Feo as he now is means nothing to her she also knows that

> the incident upon the mountain had been one of the greatest moments in her life; perhaps the greatest, certainly the most enduring; that she had drawn unacknowledged power and inspiration from it . . . there was more reality in it than in all the years of success and varied achievement which it had preceded and which it had rendered possible. For all her correct behaviour and lady-like display, she had been in love with Feo, and she had never loved so greatly again. A presumptuous boy had taken her to the gates of heaven, and though she would not enter, the eternal remembrance of the vision had made life seem endurable and good.[8]

Notice the repetition of "great" in this passage. So Rickie in *The Longest Journey* tells Agnes, after her lover's sudden death, with the fierce honesty of the intellectual who can appreciate the passion of others but cannot experience it himself: "the greatest thing is over"; so Philip, at the end of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, contemplates with admiration the unrequited passion of Miss Abbott for Gino and reflects that "the thing was even greater than he had imagined." In all these cases, the passion itself has never been consummated or directly experienced. It is perceived by an intellectual; it is acknowledged: but it never existed, except off stage (in *The Longest Journey*) or as something that could never have been; Miss Abbott must nourish the rest of her life on the never-was, the might-have-been; Miss Raby must triumph in the spirit where she failed to triumph in the flesh. It is a consolation to which Forster continually draws his characters. Passion is important in "The Eternal Moment" and in

all the novels, but it is important in its absence, not in its presence. As an idea, it must be accepted in order that spiritual honesty shall defeat the lie of repression. As an idea. . . . What Forster writes of death in *Howards End* could be paraphrased to express his view of passion: it is "the idea of passion that saves."

What Forster seems to be saying when he writes on this theme is that the intellectual must somehow, sometime, atone for physical failure, and that the point when atonement becomes inevitable is the point of the intellectual's greatest insight into reality, the point at which his salvation is at hand. Miss Abbott atones in her great change of heart at the end of *Where Angels Fear to Tread*; Miss Bartlett atones when she changes sides in *A Room with a View*; Rickie in *The Longest Journey* atones by giving his weak life to save the strong life of his brother.

With the inhibitions of his generation and class, Forster finds it easier to approach passion obliquely, often through someone of another class or race: the working-class Italian with his obvious physical attractiveness becomes in his work an indispensable if equivocal symbol of sexuality. On the whole (there are exceptions) middle-class England does not in his work produce good lovers. The same instinct that led Miss Raby to Feo finally leads Connie to Mellors; in her complete and direct surrender Lawrence vindicates the English working-class; but Forster, a differently-equipped and more devious writer, cannot thus clinch things. In his books passion is not there to be celebrated, but to be understood and respected. It is that aspect of reality which genteel culture shies away from, the truth hidden beneath the polite surface. It is more central to his writings than is sometimes realised; yet it is seen as a shadow of itself, removed from reality, as a historical rather than a living fact, something subsumed in the category of things past: "the greatest thing is over."

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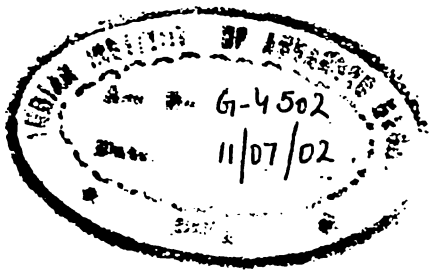

CHAPTER III

ITALY

Forster's two Italian novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *A Room with a View* (1908), are, in order of publication, his first and third novels; we know, however, that he drafted the Italian part of *A Room with a View* in 1903,[1] but put it aside till he had published *The Longest Journey*, a major novel set in England and very different in tone and manner from the two minor ones on either side of it. Both *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View* are studies of English middle-class stupidity and hypocrisy, into whose outwardly decorous conventions (both novels are domestic comedies in the Jane Austen tradition) Italy irrupts, with salutary if catastrophic results in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, and beneficent ones in the sunnier *A Room with a View*.

Where Angels Fear to Tread is the shortest and least ambitious of the five novels; hard, brittle, poised, occasionally moving, its tensions and climaxes calculated with accuracy and sureness of touch. It is about a young girl, Lilia, pretty, naïve, not quite out of the top drawer, who marries into a middle-class suburban family, the Herritons, who are formidable, arrogant, and cold. When the story opens, she is a widow with a young daughter, Irma. Her mother-in-law is unsympathetic and unimaginative. Her sister-in-law, Harriet, is a prim, sniffing virgin. Her brother-in-law, Philip (the "clever one") is an intellectual snob and under his mother's thumb; yet he has a potential warmth and insight which the rest of the family lack. He is "saveable," the others are not.

In the first chapter the Herritons are seeing Lilia off

to Italy with a companion, a Miss Caroline Abbott, who does good works. Philip is enthusiastic; he loves Italy, but he also knows—though with his head, not his heart, for he has never tried it—that it is more important to love Italians.

Lilia promptly loves one, thus putting Philip's theory into practice, and to the horror of the Herritons marries him—Gino Carella, son of a small-town dentist, physically attractive, but, by the standards of "Sawston" (the Herriton suburb), a cad. Attempts to stop the marriage fail; Lilia is written off; Irma remains as a hostage with the Herritons.

Lilia dies giving birth to Gino's child. Mrs Herriton sends her children to "rescue" the baby from its father for the sake of appearances, Irma having announced to most of Sawston that she has a little brother. When persuasion fails, Harriet kidnaps the baby, which falls out of the carriage on the way to the station and is killed.

The last scenes of the book take place in "Monteriano" (San Gimignano) and are melodramatic, indeed operatic: a scene just before the baby's death actually takes place at the local opera house. Here Philip, always so nearly on the side of the angels, is reconciled to Gino: this reconciliation-pattern between intellect and body recurs in *The Longest Journey* and is one of the most important of the "connexions" for which all Forster's work is a plea. This happy noisy scene, showing Italians at their most uninhibited and most un-Sawstonian, makes the baby's death all the more horrifying. Philip has broken free of his mother's influence, but Harriet—stupid, literal-minded, utterly convinced of her own righteousness—is determined to carry out her mother's mission at any price. The price itself is the most horrible thing in Forster's writing: he never essays anything so horrible again.

It is a critical commonplace that Forster relies on death to resolve or twist his plots to a degree unusual in English

fiction—though in *Aspects of the Novel* he observes that novelists find death "congenial"[2] as well as useful. In general, too much has been made of this, but the reliance on death remains curious. Here is a writer who proclaims the liberal-humanist creed ("we must love one another or die"): people matter, friendship matters, kindness and sympathy matter; when these fail, in steps death. And for this severe youthful moralist they fail often and completely. Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel; and a tragi-comedy to those who try to do both. We all fail all the time, the death of the heart occurs continually. But Forster demands victims, sacrifices to appease the gods. Behind the "gentle philosophy" with which he is credited on the back of the Penguin editions of his books there is a callousness which a more religious man might hesitate to display.

The contrast in Forster's work between his "tea-tabling" manner and the violent shocking events of his narrative fascinated the young Isherwood, who wrote in *Lions and Shadows* (crediting the discovery to his friend and fellow-novelist Edward Upward):

> I saw it all suddenly when I was reading *Howards End*. . . . Forster's the only one who understands what the modern novel ought to be. . . . Our frightful mistake was that we believed in tragedy. . . . We ought to aim at being essentially comic writers. . . . The whole of Forster's technique is based on the tea-table: instead of trying to screw all his scenes up to the highest possible pitch, he tones them down until they sound like mothers' meeting gossip. . . . In fact, there's actually *less* emphasis laid on the big scenes than on the unimportant ones. That's what's so utterly terrific. It's the completely new kind of accentuation—like a person talking a different language.[3]

Though misleading—Forster's big scenes are not always played down—this passage does give a vivid im-

pression of the excitement with which the nineteen-twenties rediscovered Forster and of how modern they found him. When Isherwood himself came to write his first novel *All the Conspirators* in 1928 he put into practice the Forsterian technique as seen through Upward: personal relations, the private life, but no violent deaths —only the quarrels, the bickering, the crises appropriate to the tea-tables of Kensington; though, as Cyril Connolly remarked in a brilliant essay on the book:

> Behind the ending, a 'descrescendo of anti-climaxes', is the ghost of that other ending, with Victor murdered and Allen hanged or married.[4]

"That other ending" was perhaps the original Forsterian one, too romantic and dramatic for an age of understatement. Forster has a poet's impatience with the routine of life, the marriage that goes on, the baby that (however inconveniently) grows up. Indeed, every now and then he throws off the board all the steady arrangements of the Victorian fiction-game. James is perhaps partly responsible here: for he believed that the novel should be an artifact, a contrived aesthetic pattern, obeying laws of its own different from those of life and related to them only in a special arbitrary way. Such art is profoundly anti-sentimental; it says, in effect, "it is not *this* which is important"; this perhaps is why we are shocked and held, but not moved, by the baby's death in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. When Forster's characters die, there is an odd resilience around them, so that the other characters, and our own feelings, spring up again unaffected like long grasses temporarily crushed by people walking through a field.

Lionel Trilling has pointed out[5] that the plot of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is Jamesian: an embassy from England (home of the repressed and conventional) to Italy (land of natural emotions); there is even Miss Abbott's change of heart to parallel Strether's. But

Forster's central pattern is his own, and one he uses throughout his work: a triangle of the intellect, the body, and the soul. Philip is capable of understanding the "greatest things": but they can only enter his life through Gino and Miss Abbott. These triangles of Forster's are not of the "eternal" variety: sexuality does not make them, though it contributes to them. This will be clearer if we now consider the novel's climax, and Miss Abbott's role in it, more closely.

When Lilia marries Gino, Miss Abbott leaves Italy, feeling she has failed the Herritons. But later, after Lilia's death, she returns, unknown to Harriet and Philip, who are also in Monteriano to try and get hold of the child. She goes to visit Gino, and sees him with his son; it is the only time we see them together; Caroline realises that he loves the child. It is a scene of great tenderness; but something more happens in it, which we only learn—and this is characteristic of Forster—later. But it is Caroline who is the unexpected element in the scene. We know Gino to be capable of love, for the author has made it clear; it is only to the Herritons that it has to be proved.

Caroline is the first of a series of characters who play a special role throughout Forster's novels. They are his guardians, the medium through which the truth is revealed to those who are capable of understanding it. Throughout the middle of the novel Caroline is latent, dormant, off-stage: a trick Forster uses with all his guardians, to bring them back for the climax. It is Caroline who denounces his mother to Philip and forces him to choose which side he shall be on.

> Your mother has behaved dishonourably throughout. . . . She has lied or acted lies everywhere. . . . I cannot trust your mother.[6]

Both Caroline and the Herritons want the baby, and at first Caroline is prepared to join forces. But after seeing

Gino she no longer wants to take the child, and again it is she who puts the issue clearly to the wavering Philip:

> Do you want the child to stop with his father who loves him and will bring him up badly, or do you want him to come to Sawston where no one loves him but where he will be brought up well? Settle it. Settle which side you'll fight on. . . .[7]

She feels only pity and friendship for Philip, for she knows now in her own heart that there is only one side for her.

> "Oh you appreciate me. I wish you didn't. You appreciate us all—see good in all of us. And all the time you're dead, dead, dead." She came up to him, and her mood suddenly changed and she took hold of both his hands. "You are so splendid Mr. Herriton, that I can't bear to see you wasted. I can't bear—she has not been good to you, your mother."[8]

Amid the Jamesian precision of her modulations, the thrice repeated "dead" rings out with prophetic and Lawrencian directness; yet Forster cannot resist a Butlerian comment on this emotional outburst:

> Their discourse, splendid as it had been, resulted in nothing, and their respective opinions were exactly the same when they left the church as when they had entered it.[9]

But although the author is not yet ready for his miracle, Butler is not going to have the last word. The crisis still lies ahead. After the baby's death, it is again Caroline who, when Gino in a rage tries to kill Philip, intercedes, saves his life and brings the sequence of violence to a halt. "What is the good of another death?" she asks, "what is the good of more pain?"[10] It is Caroline who reconciles the two men, brings them back to that instinctive respect for each other which they had felt at the opera-house: circumstances and ignorance may have

placed them on opposite sides, but as men they have in their hearts elements of mutual love. But it is Caroline who must effect this. She is the most surprising of Forster's guardians, yet perhaps the most touching.

We are left at the end with Philip high and dry, as the tides of deceit, passion and disaster ebb. He sees Caroline as the heroic figure she is; but they will never marry now. "The wonderful things are over."[11] He, the "clever one," has learnt at last, not from books, but life. Only he can fully understand what has happened. "The thing was even greater than she imagined. No one but himself would ever see round it now—and to see round it he was standing at an immense distance." For Caroline—and this is the final revelation—has fallen physically and hopelessly in love: with Gino. She has gone over absolutely to the side of life. She has played her part, transforming confusion, error and pain into something valuable. She has at last given human meaning to that "Olympian understanding" of Philip's on which she once complimented him. "He had seen the need for strenuous work and for righteousness. Now he saw what a very little way these things would go."[12] He has a truer vision now, and Caroline has provided it; he speaks the epilogue; but she has given him its text. "She seemed to be transfigured, and to have indeed no part in refinement or unrefinement (for these are Sawston values) any longer."[13]

The pattern of this epiphany is characteristic of its author. A spinster experiences passionate but unrequited love. It changes her completely. For the rest of her life she will go about Sawston, and no one but Philip will know her secret. An intellectual—his bodily endowments no less meagre than the spinster's—contemplates her apotheosis "from an immense distance." Neither of them is ever to have physical satisfaction. They stand on the periphery of adventure, and tiptoe away. They have acknowledged the forces of life, and though they will never themselves surrender to these forces, yet they have

become wise. And this, Forster is saying, is the best for which the sexually unfortunate can hope. To a writer like Hemingway it would be nothing. Forster's achievement is to infuse it with such eloquence that we think it much.

I have concentrated on the last pages of this novel because they reveal so much of the essential Forster. But something more should be said of the rest of the book. As a piece of narrative it compels admiration. There are hardly any superfluous sentences: just occasionally the author indulges a taste for addressing the reader *in propria persona* (e.g. "not only in tracts is a child a peacemaker"):[14] a taste to which in later books he surrenders rather more freely, so that the sentence becomes a paragraph, the epigram a sermon.

The set-pieces are handled with both dramatic and visual skill: as Upward observed, the trivial and the domestic are invested with significance as well as immediacy. The characters never sit around waiting for a crisis: as in life, the crisis is not "staged" but descends from a cloudless sky. The end of the first chapter is a good example. Mrs Herriton and her daughter are sowing peas, when the mother sends Harriet to see if there are any letters by the second post. She goes reluctantly, she wants to finish the peas and "there won't be any letters." But there is a letter. It announces Lilia's engagement, but comes, not from Lilia herself, but from her mother, an affront which infuriates Mrs Herriton, who is a snob, almost more than the news itself. In her pride, anger and stupidity she tears the letter to bits, and sets in motion the outer life of telegrams and anger. She looks up "Monteriano" in Baedeker. Domestic crises follow, and have to be attended to; then comes a telegram, this time direct from Miss Abbott. Mrs Herriton remarks on its vulgarity. Philip is despatched on the first of his two embassies, "reluctantly, as for something commonplace and dull." It is not until she is going up to bed that Mrs. Herriton

remembers the peas. This "upset her more than anything," and though it was late she went out.

> The sparrows had taken every one. But countless fragments of the letter remained, disfiguring the tidy ground.[15]

Cinematically, Forster has picked out the tell-tale detail, the tiny revealing gesture of petulance and small-mindedness. We have a sense of catching these people unawares, at a moment of their lives the importance of which neither they nor we yet fully realise. The chapter tells us all we need to know about Mrs Herriton, the first of Forster's unpleasant upper-middle-class elderly ladies (he does her again, even more subtly, in *The Longest Journey*). She is also perhaps one of the sources of the "demon-mother" of Isherwood—Mrs Lindsay in *All the Conspirators*, Mrs Ransom in *The Ascent of F6*.

In "The Eternal Moment" and in his first novel Forster establishes Italy as an important symbol of dissatisfaction: a means of measuring the inadequacies of English middle-class values, a confrontation of indirect experience by direct, of indifference by love. Italy plays the same role in *A Room with a View*, though here Italians themselves play a smaller part; the second and longer part of the book takes place in England, Italy being a window through which the good life may be perceived: for the view from "Windy Corner," the heroine's Surrey home, is not in essence inferior to the view over the Arno. Once again, an intellectual, snob-aesthetic appreciation of Italy (its art rather than its people) is discredited; its exponent here is Cecil Vyse, the intellectual to whom the heroine is for a time engaged, a modified Philip Herriton: though "enlightened," he dwells in the dark; though so "advanced," he is spiritually in the Middle Ages.

The story opens in a pension in Florence. Lucy Honeychurch, a young and pretty girl, is staying with her

chaperone and paid companion, Charlotte Bartlett, a middle-aged spinster who is also her cousin. They are disappointed not to have rooms with a view. In the dining-room, an old man, overhearing their complaint, thumps the table and shouts "I have a view." We are at once severely reminded of Edwardian conventions. It was rude of the old man, whose name turns out to be Emerson, to speak without being introduced; even ruder of his son, for so the younger man sitting with him turns out to be, to endorse the father's interruption; and indelicate of both of them to offer to change rooms with the ladies. Much of Forster's writing is a flanking attack on the conventions of his time, and he always meticulously establishes the exact nature and force of each convention before launching his attack. It is hard for us to realise the importance attached to these behaviour-patterns before 1914.[16] I think Forster found them a great help to him. This may even explain in part why he has given us no novel of the post-1918 English scene. He may have lost his bearings, been bewildered by the breaking-down, by common consent, of conventions which, when he was young, required so much art and individual daring to defy. It might be said that Forster even gives the conventions more weight than they need have, more even than the age demanded; the stressing of them gave him his essential framework of social comedy, as they gave Jane Austen hers, and lent greater force to the passion and radicalism of his protests. Without conventions, his kind of fiction cannot be written, for where there are no Miss Bartletts to uphold them, there can equally be no Mr Emersons to thump the table and declare them nonsense.

Thanks, however, to the timely arrival of the Reverend Mr Beebe, a practised smoother-over and calmer-down of storms in teacups, the ladies do exchange rooms, Miss Bartlett, by an exquisite niceness, insisting on taking the larger room:

"Naturally of course, I should have given it to you; but I happen to know that it belongs to the young man, and I was sure your mother would not like it. . . . I am a woman of the world, in my small way, and I know where these things lead to."[17]

The incident, which was small, closes: yet it has provided the author with his title, and with the germ from which the entire novel is to be developed.

Mr Beebe, together with another, less urbane clergyman, Mr Eager, arranges a drive into the country. The driver is a handsome young Italian. He has his girl with them, but when they start to kiss each other Mr Eager sends the girl away. Old Mr Emerson protests: "You have parted two people who were happy." Physical beauty and passion versus asceticism: the battle is joined, and the first round goes to the ascetics. But the second round soon follows. Lucy wanders off and gets lost; she asks the driver where the clergymen are, or tries to, for "*Dove buoni uomini?*" is as near as she can get, and the driver—by a natural fellow-feeling for the truly good man, we are to suppose—leads her straight to young George Emerson, who kisses her among the violets.

Once again, the conventions against which Forster is working as a moralist, work *for* him as technician. It takes the whole of the rest of the book for George to follow up the implications of that one stolen kiss and break down Lucy's formidable reserves of upbringing, self-deceit, and fear. Forster makes it hard for George, keeping him and Lucy apart by every device of plot he can think of. The ending is a happy one—it is the only sexually happy ending in Forster—but it can only come about indirectly, through a comedy of misunderstandings and contrivances.

The kiss is too much for Miss Bartlett, and the two ladies depart abruptly for Rome, where Cecil Vyse is staying. Vyse is George's anti-type (when *he* kisses Lucy

he asks permission first): but he is clever in a bookish, calculating way, and on her return to England Lucy becomes engaged to him. This is the first of the lies she perpetrates throughout the book in a vain struggle to deny her true feelings. George remains a guilty secret (so Lucy thinks) between herself and Charlotte, who has asked her not to tell her mother lest it reflect upon herself as chaperone.

Back in England we meet Lucy's pleasant widowed mother and pleasant medical-student brother Freddy. Forster now starts manipulating: he produces a series of coincidences in order to reassemble his cast for the *dénouement*. Mr Beebe is appointed rector of the parish. Charlotte comes over to stay. The Emersons rent a semi-detached villa nearby.

Although Lucy is not yet ready to surrender to George, the awakening of her heart and judgment which Italy began opens her eyes to the faults of Cecil—his priggishness, his lack of humour, his air of superiority, his intellectual arrogance, his dislike of people; and she breaks off the engagement. Forster calls Vyse medieval: a term of opprobrium which he uses to stand for the repressed, the ascetic, and contrasts with the classical, the pagan, the natural. The supreme symbol of the Middle Ages is the Church, and Forster dislikes the Church. (The Middle Ages were out of fashion with Forster's generation: they saw in Greece and in enlightened modern rationalism the twin achievements of civilisation, and rejected everything in between.)

But Lucy's rejection of Vyse is only the first stage of her journey towards self-realisation. She continues to pretend that George means nothing to her. She hovers among the medievalists; and now battle is joined for her soul between the Emersons (enlightenment) and Mr Beebe, who did not like women "for rather profound reasons" and who, beneath his witty bachelor exterior, is in fact a more subtle and dangerous enemy than the wretched Vyse. For

Vyse, after Lucy breaks off the engagement, recognises his own inadequacy with humility, like Philip in the earlier novel. Yet so far it is only hinted that Mr Beebe is not on the right side. Freddie and George become friends, and Mr Beebe joins them in a nude bathing party, a jolly bachelor affair, all ragging and fun; the chapter reads coyly and embarrassingly today—it is too obviously a lark, and seems blatantly "made up," but it is interesting because it helps us to understand Beebe. When George and Lucy finally come together, Mr Beebe stands stiff, aloof, sinister, "a long black column": it is a striking image. It is sufficiently significant, too, that when the engagement is announced Beebe says to old Mr Emerson:

> "I am more grieved than I can possibly express. It is lamentable. Lamentable.—Incredible."
>
> "What's wrong with the boy?"
>
> "Nothing, Mr. Emerson, except that he no longer interests me."[18]

Thus Beebe condemns himself out of his own mouth. George had "interested" him in Florence as an original, a child of nature, and at the bathing party, with ladies safely out of the way (their abrupt arrival brought the idyll to a muddled end). Lucy, too, had "interested" Beebe, as a virgin, pouring out her soul on the piano, as a sexless creature, almost, possibly, as a boy *en travesti*. Only her final assertion of unequivocal womanhood sends him back into the shadows.

Thus with great skill Forster turns the broadminded Mr Beebe into a figure of darkness. With Miss Bartlett he does exactly the reverse. While we like Beebe less and less, we like Charlotte more and more; the author's dislike of clergymen is balanced by his *penchant* for faded maiden ladies.

Numerous skilful little touches bring her to life: her nigglingness over small sums of money, her peevishness,

her air of martyrdom; she never wants to be a nuisance but unfailingly is one; she creates "atmosphere." Yet these things are her function, for she is a "guardian" as well as an individual. But though irritating, she is kind—Freddie establishes this, and he is a judge of human qualities. We feel her to be fundamentally good.

Her conduct contributes much to the plot. The muddle and deceit through which the story moves are largely of her making. Though she has sworn Lucy to secrecy about George, she herself has confided the whole episode to a chance *pension* acquaintance, a Miss Lavish, a novelist of emancipated views, who puts the incident, thinly disguised, into a novel, a copy of which (by another coincidence) turns up at the Honeychurches', thus giving Miss Bartlett away. All in all, a sad creature; and when Lucy has given up Vyse but has not yet acknowledged her love for George, when she is contemplating running away from George and herself; when, in fact, she seems set for a life of spinsterhood, it is the shrewd Mrs Honeychurch who spots the devastating parallel that jolts Lucy towards the truth:

"Oh goodness," her mother flashed. "How you do remind me of Charlotte Bartlett."

"*Charlotte*?" flashed Lucy in her turn, pierced at last by a vivid pain.

" More every moment."

"I don't know what you mean, mother. Charlotte and I are not in the very least alike."

"Well I see the likeness. The same eternal worrying, the same taking back of words. You and Charlotte trying to divide two apples among three people last night might be sisters."

"What rubbish. And if you dislike Charlotte so, it's rather a pity you asked her to stop. I warned you about her; I begged you, implored you not to, but of course I was not listened to."

"There you go."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Charlotte again, my dear, that's all; her very words."[19]

By "sinning against passion and truth," Lucy joins, though not, it turns out, permanently, the "vast armies of the benighted." "The darkness received her, as it had received Charlotte Bartlett thirty years before."[20]

But Charlotte, being a guardian, must change sides. Throughout the book she flusters like a conspiratorial hen, constantly rubbing in the guilty secret, constantly reminding Lucy of George, until finally, it is suggested, she is instrumental in bringing Lucy to old Mr Emerson. He is Charlotte's co-guardian. Throughout the middle of the book, like Charlotte, he has been off stage, but is brought back to preach Lucy a sermon on "the holiness of direct desire." As an individual, (unlike Charlotte), he is unconvincing: vague, sententious, an elderly rationalist of the Samuel Butler era (he quotes a remark made by "a friend of mine": the remark is one of Butler's).[21] He is a fierce anti-medievalist, a Lawrencian; he preaches (in Yeats's words) "the young in one another's arms." He is vigorous when we first meet him, but later becomes sleepy and unwell, appearing to take a less and less active part in things: this again is typical of a Forster guardian. Early in the book Forster "plants" a scene in a church (Santa Croce), in which Mr Emerson, the apostle of light, confronts the Middle Ages in the person of Mr Eager; now, in the climax, he confronts them again in the person of Mr Beebe, and routs them.

It is thus Mr Emerson who effects the last stage in Lucy's conversion, he who makes her see "the whole of everything at once" (the words remind us of Philip at the end of the previous novel, but Lucy both sees and experiences). The rationalist becomes a saint, and the comedy ends, as the earlier novel ended, transcendentally.

A Room with a View owes more to Jane Austen (especially *Pride and Prejudice*) than any other of Forster's works; yet it is also the most Lawrencian of his novels. By now the strength of his opposition to Bloomsbury should be apparent. And George—passionate, serious, truthful—is a pre-Lawrencian hero. It is true that as an individual he never comes to life. Forster does not show us how he works, because he does not know, he has not felt him from the inside. George is a conventional romantic figure. The kiss among the violets, which on one level (the domestic) seems now a fuss about nothing, must also be seen as a symbolic pagan ceremony, presided over by the godlike and sexually radiant Italian driver, the type of George himself. The pagan elements whose defeat in the stories and in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* spelt disaster are here triumphant. Italy has done her work; and in the remaining novels the battle must be fought elsewhere.

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CHAPTER IV

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

Forster's second novel *The Longest Journey* (1907) is set in England. The author has himself given historical and geographical information about it, and has said that of all his novels it is the one he is most glad to have written and is the only one to have "come upon me without my knowledge."[1] Most readers will not be surprised by this. It is the most romantic and passionate of the novels; everything in it is felt from the inside; the author wants us to sympathise with the tragedy of Rickie, its hero, and obviously puts something of himself into Rickie and identifies himself with the views of his friend Ansell. *The Longest Journey* is Forster's *Education Sentimentale*, his *Way of All Flesh*, his *Of Human Bondage*. It is central to his work, and no one can simultaneously dislike it and care for Forster as a writer. It is a book of youth, and has youthful faults: but it has also a youthful virtue, and lacks the curiously old-maidish touches which make the two Italian novels so very uncharacteristic (for all their vivacity) of a young writer. It offers a radical idealism; it is Shelleyan in more than its title; it cries for the "wine of life" and rejects the "innumerable teacups" of "that fetich, experience." In contrast to the Italian novels, and to *Howards End*, it also rejects the demure domestic framework: indeed it is anti-domestic, and the domesticity in it is evil. Instead of a "view" from indoors, it offers the outdoor life itself, as direct compensation for the stuffiness of suburban interiors and the incompleteness of the British Museum Reading Room. There is no "tea-tabling gossip": but young men talk in it, and become

philosophers and poets, and women talk in it and become enemies of philosophers and poets. It is about love and reality, what Stephen Dedalus called the "big words that make us so unhappy." It is a larger work than anything else till *Howards End*: yet *Howards End* is social drama on a larger time-scale, while *The Longest Journey* is epic in structure, symphonic in pattern, and tragic in its implications.

Rickie Elliot is lame, shy, introverted; there was a lonely childhood, a hated father, a much loved mother (both dead before the story opens). He has inherited money and has a talent for writing. He was unhappy at school, but when we meet him first he is at Cambridge and is happy: for this is Forster's Cambridge, the Cambridge of G. E. Moore, the city of friendship. Throughout the book friendship is opposed to marriage: friendship is idealistic, it does not make exclusive demands, it respects the imagination, it is intellectual and free; marriage is a conventional weapon of the Shavian life-force, it is exclusive, and it does not care what happens to the soul. Of friends Forster writes eloquently:

> Nature has no use for us; she has cut her stuff differently. Dutiful sons, loving husbands, responsible fathers—these are what she wants, and if we are friends it must be in our spare time. Abram and Sarai were sorrowful, yet their seed became as sands of the sea, and distracts the politics of Europe at this moment. But a few verses of poetry is all that survives of David and Jonathan.[2]

This is the central theme of the whole book, and on its issue Forster takes sides passionately. For Rickie, with his artistic temperament, friendship means freedom and the survival of his real self; marriage means slavery and its death. That is the author's view, put into the mouth of the book's guardian, the philosopher Stewart Ansell. (Ansell was the name of a childhood playmate of Forster.[3]) When Rickie is false to himself and the ideals Cambridge

has taught him, and becomes engaged to be married to Agnes Pembroke, who is without insight, it is Ansell who reminds him of some lines from Shelley's *Epipsychidion* which Rickie had read two years earlier and had marked "very good."

> I never was attached to that great sect
> Whose doctrine is that each one should select
> Out of the world a mistress and a friend,
> And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
> To cold oblivion—though it is the code
> Of modern morals, and the beaten road
> Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread
> Who travel to their home among the dead
> By the broad highway of the world—and so,
> With one sad friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
> The dreariest and the longest journey go.[4]

But Rickie, deluded by appearances, which he confuses with reality, takes no notice, and "the spiritual part of him proceeded towards ruin." The tragedy of Rickie is the most profoundly felt and realised study of the disintegration of a personality in all Forster's work. The seeds of this destruction are planted in the lyrical Cambridge opening.

Rickie and his friends are discussing metaphysics: is the cow there when there is no one to see her? Ansell takes the objective view: that which is real exists always, even if we resent it, and what is not real, does not exist, or only as "the product of a diseased imagination." Rickie, poetic but not academic, cannot make up his mind about the cow—"either way it was attractive"—and goes off into a reverie. Suddenly the door opens, and a young, handsome and indignant woman appears: it is Agnes Pembroke; she and her brother Herbert have been invited down for the week-end by Rickie, who has forgotten about them. Thus Agnes symbolically interrupts the Cambridge idyll; the philosophers flee; except for Ansell,

who ignores her. Later he gravely tells Rickie that she was not there, and does not exist. Thus Ansell and Rickie are on opposite sides from the start. Ansell sees through her; Rickie fails to do so, but Forster did and wants us to. By marrying Rickie, Agnes will lead him away from his art, his friends, his freedom, into a "cloud of unreality."

But when we first meet her, nothing is further from Agnes's mind than marriage to Rickie. For she is engaged to Gerald Dawes, who has "the body of a Greek athlete and the face of an English one." He is a boor and a rough who had been at school with Rickie and had bullied him. Agnes feels for Rickie only a kindly pity for his weakness; whereas Gerald's strength excites her. Then—we are only a fifth of the way through the book—Forster springs one of his famous surprises.

Chapter V begins: "Gerald died that afternoon. He was broken up in the football match." Rickie is staying with the Pembrokes when it happens, and has earlier glimpsed the physical passion between Gerald and Agnes. Gerald had kissed her, and she had been transfigured. Rickie has seen this, and realises the strength and value of an experience he has never had. After her lover dies, Rickie adjures her, in an eloquent passage, to "mind." "The greatest thing is over,"[5] he declares vehemently, in the best tradition of a Forster intellectual. If only, like Philip, he had been content to observe passion and then tiptoe away. But he makes a fatal error of judgment by becoming involved with those who are capable of hetero-sexual desire, though it is not his nature to belong to them. As for Agnes, though she cannot have Gerald, she is determined to have someone. She is active and resilient, and the life force moves in devious ways; if she cannot take a man with a body, she will take a man with a soul. Gerald would have kept her will in order, and to him her lack of imagination would not have mattered: for apart from his body he was nothing. But Rickie is weak, and Agnes is too strong for him. Two years after Gerald's

death she becomes engaged to Rickie. Ansell is angry. To a mutual friend he declares "War," and gives his opinions, which, as he is a guardian, are also the author's.

> She is happy because she has conquered; he is happy because he has at last hung all the world's beauty on to a single peg. He was always trying to do it. He used to call the peg humanity. Will either of these happinesses last? His can't. Hers only for a time. I fight this woman, not because she fights me, but because I foresee the most appalling catastrophe. She wants Rickie, partly to replace another man whom she lost two years ago, partly to make something of him. He is to write. In time she will get sick of this. He won't get famous. She will only see how thin he is and how lame. She will long for a jollier husband and I don't blame her. And having made him thoroughly miserable and degraded she will bolt—if she can do it like a lady.[6]

To Rickie himself, Ansell is no less outspoken. After having quoted Shelley at him (and his analysis of Rickie at the beginning of the passage just quoted reminds us of Shelley's own disastrous entries into active pursuit of the ideal through the real); after having Shavianly written "Man wants to love mankind, woman wants to love one man; when she has him her work is over,"[7] he accuses Agnes of being neither serious nor truthful.[8] But Rickie is blind to criticism and advice; and he and Ansell part; the latter remaining, in characteristic guardian fashion, off stage for the middle part of the book (we meet him occasionally for a moment or two) until he reappears at the climax.

Meanwhile two other characters, not connected with Cambridge but vital to the book, are introduced. At the time of his engagement Rickie's aunt (his father's sister), a widow living in Wiltshire, asks him and Agnes to visit her. Mrs Failing has hitherto neglected Rickie; he—and we—find her a disconcerting person, cold, clever, un-

sympathetic, selfish. She is also cruel and malicious; she is one of Forster's subtlest portraits and he does not reveal the whole of her when we first meet her. She keeps in tow a youth of twenty, Stephen Wonham, a sort of noble savage, physically splendid, mentally simple and naïve, but, we find, unlike Gerald, fundamentally decent. Agnes finds Stephen eccentric (his aunt shrewdly guesses that Agnes only pretends to be unconventional, Forster thereby showing that the ability to see through people is not a prerogative of the "saved"): Rickie is embarrassed by him; his aunt sends them out riding together; Stephen meets a soldier and starts drinking. Rickie, prudish and virginal, is embarrassed (so, to tell the truth, is the reader) when the earthy Stephen starts singing rude songs about his aunt, and shrinks off home. But Mrs Failing's whims become more eccentric and more sinister; she suddenly informs Rickie that Stephen is his half-brother. The chapter in which she lets this out (at first so casually that Rickie thinks it a slip, and the reader probably does not realise what is being said) is a *tour-de-force* of horror, and forms one of the great climaxes of the book. The shock is nearly too much for Rickie. The visit ends abruptly; he has a sort of "breakdown" (which anticipates the breakdown of Mrs Moore after the Marabar caves episode in *A Passage to India*), but goes on writing, and marries Agnes.

But—

> Alas that love should be a blight and snare
> To those who seek all sympathies in one. . . .[9]

The second part of the novel traces the decline of Rickie. The values of Cambridge yield to those of Sawston. We have met this place already: then it contended with Italy and lost. Now it contends with Cambridge. And now it is reinforced with a public school, and Rickie's brother-in-law Herbert Pembroke is a master there. With his bogus clichés and lack of humour and awareness, he

stands for all that Forster hates; "he had but one test of things, success: success for the body in this life and for the soul in the life to come. And for this reason Humanity, and perhaps such other tribunals as there may be, would assuredly reject him."[10]

But Herbert and his sister are a strong combination; Rickie becomes a tool in their hands. He lies; suppresses his true beliefs and denies his true values; the only man on the staff who would have been his natural ally, Mr Jackson, an enlightened Hellenist, is Herbert's sworn enemy; Ansell still refuses to see him; Herbert loses no opportunity to belittle Cambridge, art, classics, philosophy, freedom. The second section of the novel is the most Butlerian thing in Forster; here, too, he comes closest to speaking out against the things he hates and does it ruthlessly, without excuses or equivocation. There is no question here of any division or dilution of sympathy.

Rickie is living now without personal relations, without love; for such love as there had been between him and Agnes dies; she is her brother's willing ally; the words of Ansell, "that Hebrew prophet," begin to come true. The crowning horror for Rickie is the birth of a daughter, on whom he had placed all the hopes which in his own life were already destroyed. But the baby inherits the Elliot lameness—we are told she is "far worse" than Rickie—and after a few days dies.

But though Rickie is never to recover from all this, salvation and regeneration do come, in the third and last section of the novel; and come through the new generation (as in the late plays of Shakepeare), though in a manner Rickie (like Leonard Bast in *Howards End*) does not live to see. He has abandoned Cambridge; Sawston has ruined him; there remains Wiltshire.

England—her landscape, her earth, her history—played little part in Forster's first novel: indeed her only representative was Sawston. But in *The Longest Journey* he starts to write about the national landscape in pas-

sages which anticipate the more self-indulgent patriotic set-pieces of *Howards End*. England was still unspoilt then, she was still in essence Hardy's England, a symbol of the good life such as she can no longer be today. (Her corruption is already beginning in *Howards End* three years later.) We first see Wiltshire through Rickie's eyes on that earlier visit to Cadover (his aunt's house).

> The whole system of the country lay spread before Rickie . . . he saw how all the water converges at Salisbury; how Salisbury lies in a shallow basin, just at the change of the soil. He saw to the north the plain, and the stream of the Cad flowing down from it, with a tributary that broke out suddenly, as the chalk streams do: one village had clustered round the source and clothed itself with trees. He saw Old Sarum, and hints of the Avon Valley, and the land above Stone Henge. And behind him he saw the great wood beginning unobtrusively, as if the down too needed shaving; and into it the road to London slipped, covering the bushes with white dust. Chalk made the dust white, chalk made the water clear, chalk made the clean rolling outlines of the land, and favoured the grass and the distant coronals of trees. Here is the heart of our island: the Chilterns, the North Downs, the South Downs radiate hence. The fibres of England unite in Wiltshire, and did we condescend to worship her, here we should erect our national shrine.[11]

In such a passage it is clear that Forster has significantly enlarged the area of his concerns and added to his equipment as a writer. (The Cad is really the Winterbourne; Cadbury rings, which also figure in the novel, are Figsbury rings).

It is characteristic of Mrs Failing that she does not care —though her husband, an enlightened social reformer and essayist, did—for the land or its people. But Stephen cares, in his own way; he has sat out on the downs in the

rain with the shepherds, he has bathed in the streams, he has slept on the grass, he has got drunk in the pubs; he is a part of the place; indeed—just how, we do not yet know—he is a son of the place, it belongs to him. It is through Stephen that Rickie achieves his posthumous salvation and his place. The central climax of the novel, which involves both Stephen and Ansell, must, however, first be considered, and in some detail.

Moved by the wretched news of Rickie, Ansell at last goes down to Sawston. His visit coincides with a visit from Stephen. The two complementary aspects of reality, the intellectual and the physical, come together to try to save Rickie's soul.

It has been part of the Pembrokes' deceit not only to keep Rickie from Cambridge but also from Wiltshire; they sneer at Ansell, and discredit Stephen. Mrs Failing has thrown him out; partly because he stirred up the tenants and labourers (thus carrying on the good work of the late Mr Failing), partly because he got drunk, and partly because he once sang a ribald song about her when out with a soldier. How did Mrs Failing get to hear of this? Rickie had told Agnes, Agnes had told Mrs Failing; she was legacy-hunting.

Stephen's pride forbids him to touch the money Mrs Failing has given him to make a new start in the colonies. Nor is he interested in, or able to read, the document explaining his origins which was her other parting gift. So he goes to Sawston to look for his brother. Ansell is stopping with the Jacksons. They meet, momentously. Ansell needs Stephen to complete his case against Sawston. They have a fight, and make it up; it is Gino and Philip over again. Ansell reads the legal document; but does not tell us yet what it says. Meanwhile Stephen calls on his half-brother. But Agnes intercepts him. She can only suppose him to have one motive for his visit: blackmail. The cheque is ready, Rickie—by now without any will whatsoever—having signed it in advance. Angry,

hurt and puzzled, Stephen departs. Ansell enters the dining room. The whole school is assembled. In a remarkable, rapt, repetitive speech, a dramatic monologue, a deliberately heightened set-piece of poetic realism, Ansell denounces the Pembrokes, and reveals to Rickie in his darkness the nature of reality he has for so long denied.

Ansell looks round the room preparing for his great scene. Stephen has gone. " 'Where is he?' " demands Ansell. Pembroke threatens to remove him by force, but Ansell "seemed transfigured into a Hebrew prophet passionate for satire and the truth":

> 'Oh keep quiet for two minutes' he cried 'and I'll tell you something you'll be glad to hear. You're a little afraid Stephen may come back. Don't be afraid. I bring good news. You'll never see him nor anyone like him again. I must speak very plainly, for you are all three fools. I don't want you to say afterwards "Poor Mr. Ansell tries to be clever." Generally I don't mind, but I should mind today. Please listen. Stephen is a bully; he drinks; he knocks one down; but he would sooner die than take money from people he did not love. Perhaps he will die, for he has nothing but a few pence that the poor gave him, and some tobacco which, to my eternal glory, he accepted from me. Please listen again. Why did he come here? Because he thought you would love him, and was ready to love you. But I tell you, don't be afraid. He would sooner die now than say you were his brother. Perhaps he will die, for he has nothing but a few pence that the poor gave him and some tobacco which, to my eternal glory, he accepted from me. Please listen again. . . .'[12]

The wretched Rickie tries to defend himself by attacking his father. But Ansell has one last word to add: " 'He's not your father's son. He's the son of your mother.' "

Thus—except for a brief generalised comment by the author at his most high-minded, which can neither add

anything to, nor detract from, Ansell's speech—the second part of the novel closes. Ansell's rhetorical outburst is unique in Forster. Dr Leavis calls it crudely unrealistic, but it is surely not meant to be realistic but symbolic, it is nearer to poetry than to prose. This is the moment when the inner life must pay, and pay handsomely; but not in the currency of the realistic novel, the "low atavistic form."[13] Ansell, shamelessly as a Senecan hero in an Elizabethan drama, dramatises himself and the situation as it is at this moment in the narration, which pauses for his soliloquy, and, during it, vanishes, as the supporting characters, the assembled school, vanish. There is only Ansell now, denouncing Sawston, calling Rickie away.

After the crisis there is a brief third and final section or movement: Wiltshire. (This symphonic three-movement pattern of statement, crisis and resolution, represented by Cambridge, Sawston, and Wiltshire, is repeated in *A Passage to India*.)

In a flashback Forster now reveals the circumstances of Stephen's birth, hitherto known only to Mrs Failing (he likes taking the reader into his confidence, giving him all the cards, when the crisis is over). This flashback is curious, for in it Forster, who so often kills off his living characters, brings to life his dead ones, so that Mr and Mrs Elliot reach out from beyond the grave. Mr Elliot's sinister influence, indeed, has never died: it has lived on to frighten Rickie through Mrs Failing. Now the sacred influence of his beloved mother begins to assert itself; Rickie, having failed as friend and lover, hears, in Stephen's voice, his mother calling him again: he is deeply stirred, yet afraid. This back-to-the-womb pattern is the exact opposite of the theme of Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, in which Paul frees himself from his mother and moves on towards life instead of away from it.

Rickie leaves his wife, and starts writing again—the "little stories about getting into touch with nature" which his creator was also writing. But without Ansell his hold

on life would be precarious: Ansell indeed keeps both brothers alive. Rickie goes to Cadover again; Stephen, though forbidden the house, comes to the village and gets drunk, violating a promise he has made to Rickie. Rickie has a final devastating conversation with his aunt, who reasserts the heresy that "people are not important" and that only conventions matter. She thus plays false to her late husband, whose liberal and reformist essays are enjoying a revival: but his widow can admire only their literary style, not their content, for Mr Failing wrote:

> Let us love one another; let our children, spiritual and physical, love one another. It is all that we can do.[14]

Rickie wanders down to the village and finds Stephen drunk. Again he feels betrayed; his father's voice has mocked him again through his aunt, and now "the woman he had loved would die out, in drunkenness and debauchery, and her strength would be dissipated in a man, her beauty defiled in a man."[15] He is still a hopeless romantic, believing he can remake people; in his despair he turns back more strongly to the one pure unspoilt relationship he has ever had, and his retrospective love for his dead mother barely hides the physical disgust which had just survived the passion of Gerald and Agnes. " 'You can't own people'," said Stephen, the anti-romantic; and this is what Rickie cannot face. He forgets that Stephen is the living proof that his mother surrendered to the physical contact and passion he himself shrinks from. Even of his mother he has a distorted picture.

The end is swift, and, for Forster, merciful; for he has left Rickie no grasp of life; on his premises he must cease to exist. Stephen blunders drunkenly on to the level crossing: that same level crossing where, earlier in the book, a child had been killed: Stephen had protested to Mrs Failing—" 'there wants a bridge' "—but nothing has been done. Rickie rescues Stephen, but is himself killed by a train. "He died up at Cadover, whispering

'You have been right' to Mrs Failing." She was afterwards to write of him as " 'one who failed in all he undertook'."[16] It seems as if Sawston, Mr Elliot, unreality, are to have the last word.

But his epitaph is not after all written by Mrs Failing. In a brief epilogue, some years after, we learn two facts: Rickie's posthumously-published stories are a success (Herbert characteristically tries to swindle Stephen out of his share of the royalties); and Stephen has married and has a daughter, to whom—and these are the last words of the novel "he had given the name of their mother." The word "their" is the significant one: Rickie lives on, just as Bast does through Helen's child playing down in the meadow at Howards End; the brothers are united at last, and through the body; and Mrs Elliot's bid for life is justified.

The Longest Journey thus emerges as a meditation on the dangers and attractions of romanticism, the more impressive and subtle in that it is itself romantically conceived and presented. This ambivalence, which is not reflected in the least sign of fumbling or playing down, must nevertheless be firmly kept in mind if we are to avoid oversimplifying the book into *simply* an allegory about the artist (like Mann's *Tonio Kroger*, who always fell down in the dance); or as *simply* an attack on women, or marriage, or *simply* a glorification of "freedom" and the great outdoors. Such abstractions are buried beneath the complexity and sharpness of the narration. Thus, though he does not like Agnes, Forster makes Rickie acknowledge his own part in the failure of their marriage: the catastrophe is his as much as hers, indeed more than hers, for he is more finely equipped for suffering than she. Meredith's lines seem apt:

> The wrong is mixed. In tragic life, God wot,
> No villain need be. Passions spin the plot:
> We are betrayed by what is false within.[17]

The falseness in Rickie is his radical failure to adjust himself to reality—to put it crudely, his failure to grow up: and yet the examples offered him by the grown-up world are uniformly disastrous. Herbert and Agnes are beyond "saving," for they never doubt themselves; they cannot repent for they cannot connect. But Rickie might have: Cambridge showed him; Stephen showed him. But his own limitations were stronger than these. " 'In literature'," says Rickie, discussing his own compositions, " 'we needn't intrude our own limitations,' "[18] which is just what attracts his kind of temperament to it.

Agnes, Herbert, Mrs Failing, all represent aspects of the conventional and the absolutely false. (Dawes is sexually real, spiritually false, real as a lover but not as a man.) Ansell and Stephen represent complementary aspects of the real. In his great outburst of eloquence at the end of Part II, Ansell, the articulate partner, expresses the truth he and Stephen have tacitly and jointly established. The intellectual alone is once again insufficient. He needs the physical, the strength of others. The passion of the imagination needs the passion of the body if it is to be effective, and must reach out to it in love, for the other cannot reach out. Stephen, the child of nature, the symbol of the good earth, waits throughout the book to be valued for himself, not as a toy (as Mrs Failing values him) nor as a relative (as Rickie values him). Only Ansell perceives this and acts upon it.

But "the close-set eyes of mother's boy saw nothing to be done."[19] Stephen does what Rickie could not do, makes their mother live again, in the only healthy and real way, and the child, sleeping out rough on the Wiltshire downs, shares the epilogue with Rickie's brain-children, the little stories Ansell and Stephen helped him to finish after they had rescued him from Sawston. Each must do his own work. Ansell must be a philosopher, though he fails his fellowship and might have earned more as a civil servant (his selflessness has something of G. E.

Moore in it). The moralist in Forster asks us here not just to connect but to define and to distinguish; which is the beginning of wisdom.

The Longest Journey is the first of Forster's two English novels. In it Sawston is all that was at this time wrong with England: bogus traditions, money-worship, the appeal to the herd instinct, prudishness (the Hermes in the Pembrokes' house is "bust only"—one is reminded of Samuel Butler's Montreal Discobolus). Cambridge is all that was then best in the English sensibility. Wiltshire is the unspoilt yeoman tradition of England, the good breeding stock, the weather, the still unstolen land, the open skies. Its role in the novel is sub-Hardyan: Salisbury plain can hardly be said to brood over the story like Egdon Heath. (Indeed its treatment is extremely romantic, just as, in the Cambridge sequences, there is arguably a suspicion of the romanticism of that contemporary Kingsman, E. F. Benson's David Blaize.) Forster is still a little uneasy (as Rickie was) with Stephen's grosser manifestations of reality (Rickie is not, when he does not know who he is, instinctively drawn to Stephen: and the most touching scene between the brothers is that in which they play a child's game of paper boats, in which Stephen becomes gentle and poetical). Nevertheless it is said on Rickie's behalf—and this is important—that "he had escaped the sin of despising the physically strong—a sin against which the physically weak must guard";[20] his creator indeed perhaps overcompensates here, as other intellectuals (notably Lawrence) have done. It is worth remarking that Forster's way of dividing people into the animal and the rational is a classical rather than a Christian way of looking at them.

I said just now that Sawston represents in this novel all that was wrong with England at this time. Now of course, the rot has spread into the country. We see the beginning of this in *Howards End*, three years later; and *The Longest Journey* celebrates the English countryside in its last

golden age, before (as Forster was to write in retrospect fifty-three years later)

> its roads were too dangerous to walk on, its rivers too dirty to bathe in, before its butterflies and wild flowers were decimated by arsenical spray, before Shakespeare's Avon frothed with detergents and the fish floated belly-up in the Cam.[21]

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4. *L.J.*, p. 148 (*Epipsychidion*, ll. 149–59).
5. *L.J.*, p. 62.
6. *L.J.*, pp. 93–4.
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8. *L.J.*, p. 96.
9. Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, ll. 46–7.
10. *L.J.*, p. 194.
11. *L.J.*, pp. 147–8.
12. *L.J.*, p. 262.
13. *A.N.*, p. 27.
14. *L.J.*, p. 314
15. *L.J.*, p. 323.
16. *L.J.*, p. 324.
17. *Modern Love*, sonnet xliii.
18. *L.J.*, 317.
19. W. H. Auden. "August for the people. . . ."
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21. *L.J.*, p. xiii.

CHAPTER V

ENGLAND

Forster's fourth novel *Howards End* (1910) marks a return to domesticity after the passionate romanticism of *The Longest Journey*. The book contains his fullest and most ambitious documentation of the English social scene, and in the portrait of the heroine, Margaret, his most striking and completely realised character. The author's moral attitudes, while not changed, are modified: though the wine of life is still prized, the teacup of experience is no longer rejected.

The novel is about a house: Forster himself has described it as a hunt for a home.[1] It is a house of a novel, too, a house built to last. (So many novels of our own time rather resemble furnished rooms; barely distinguishable now, what will they look like in fifty years?) *Howards End* is, more than any other of Forster's books, an Edwardian novel: indeed some of its patriotic purple passages (which go much further than anything in the earlier novels) are at times Elgarian. In other ways, too, it is a surprising achievement for this author: it offers few autobiographical footholds; its manner is less iconoclastic, more traditional; it seems to rely for its strength less on flair and personal experience than on hard work reinforcing a series of remarkably penetrating and convincing guesses. Though Forster was still only about thirty when he wrote it, the book marks an extraordinary step towards an almost middle-aged maturity and insight into human behaviour.

Lionel Trilling, in his valuable book on Forster, says that *Howards End* is about "who shall inherit England."[2]

It is also about what shall become of England, the England of the years before 1914; it is both an analysis of the English social structure of its time and a prophetic book about the fate of that structure. The period it deals with is the high-water-mark of economic and intellectual expansion. It is no accident that the heyday of the Schlegels (the "Bloomsbury" liberal people in the book) was also the heyday of the Wilcoxes (the Tory business people). In contrasting and bringing together these two families, each with its faults and its virtues, Forster, while himself firmly a Schlegel, is trying to work out a formula, both rational and patriotic, which should preserve the best qualities of each kind of outlook and condemn the worst —and not only condemn, but also punish, for the moralist has by no means abdicated in favour of the social historian. And he found both Schlegels and Wilcoxes at their most articulate and most prosperous. Never did private incomes go further or personal relations seem more inviolable; never had the "great world" been so firmly at the Wilcoxes' feet. In the novel money and freedom are proclaimed enemies, yet they were linked by the society in which they coexisted; the same era produced a strong currency and a strong set of moral beliefs. When Rickie in *The Longest Journey* tried to offer Gerald and Agnes money they snubbed him because, being materialists, money meant more to them than it did to him; when Helen in *Howards End* tried to give the poor clerk Bast money he thought she was not serious; yet the offers were possible, the gestures, inconceivable today, could be made. "To trust people is a luxury only the wealthy can indulge; the poor cannot afford it."[3] Money in the Edwardian age *could* bring freedom; it went, as the saying goes, a long way.

Yet the book criticises its age because it perceives that it is no use amassing money if at the same time you are destroying all the things that make the possession of money worth while: a process our own age has hideously

hastened. In the famous ending of *Howards End* Helen Schlegel points out over the Hertfordshire meadows which surround the house: " 'London's creeping'," she says, and even more prophetically " 'life's going to be melted down, all over the world'."[4] Those fine distinctions by which humanism flourishes and which are nourished by prosperity in the pocket and in the spirit, were already being slowly devalued and blurred. The Wilcoxes are ultimately seen to be only partly responsible for this, but their responsibility is a real and heavy one. We can even see in Jerry the builder, the character in Forster's pageant play *England's Pleasant Land* (1940), with his cynical view of the village—" 'I've not come to live in the place, I've come to develop it' "—a coarser descendant of the Henry Wilcox of a generation earlier, with his continual property deals. Yet in the wider view this is only part of a profounder and more drastic breakdown of the whole of nineteenth-century liberal civilisation, and England's fate, so eloquently lamented in Forster's novel, is part of Europe's, as analysed, in vaster allegory, by Thomas Mann in *Der Zauberberg*.

But for all its insight and far-reachingness, there is a sentimental side to Forster's picture of England. After the passion, the ruthlessness, the impatience, the poetic vision, of the earlier novels, the famous motto of *Howards End*, "only connect," seems at times dangerously like "try to see all sides at once." In aiming at a balanced impartiality, the author has to make certain sacrifices. The book is full of antitheses. Take, for instance, the phrase about building "the rainbow bridge which shall connect the prose in us with the passion":[5] Forster has said that he had Wagner in mind, but the reader today may find the symbol purely decorative in comparison with the use Lawrence makes of the rainbow-symbol. And linked with the prose-and-passion antithesis is another, even more seductive: not "death and life" but "death and money." Death (the argument goes) shows

the emptiness of money which seems to rule life ("you can't take it with you"); love is death's foe but also its peer because love fights death while money pretends it does not exist. "Death destroys a man, but the idea of death saves him"—so runs the famous climax to this meditation, described by Forster (in words that reveal well enough his own difficulties of formulation) as "the vague yet convincing plea that the invisible lodges against the visible."[6] One sees well enough what Forster is saying: that ideas, and love, are immortal, but that economics die with us and that a house is more than the housekeeping. The Wilcoxes, men of the world, who shun the inner life, recoil also from the idea of death because it makes nonsense of their efforts, while the inner-lifers are dedicated to ideas which survive the death of the individual. One comment on this, relevant to the novel, is that money can be inherited as well as ideas; indeed, the whole direction of the novel as a narrative-pattern (running counter, as so often in Forster, to the dabbed-on generalisations) shows that money or property may be a more important inheritance than ideas. Leonard Bast, the poor clerk in the story, has no money, therefore his ideas are worthless; and this does not become less significant because the Wilcoxes have money but no ideas. This may be regrettable, but the Schlegels are honest enough to admit it and only their creator seems to wish it were not so (ever since Arnold intellectuals have tended to sneer at the "battle of life" and the equipment needed to fight it). Even Howards End, the house, the most precious possession passed on in the story, is a material object as well as a symbolic one, though this does not mean that one should have a material attitude towards money. When Margaret Schlegel says that a house " 'cannot stand by bricks and mortar alone'," it is the unworldly Ruth Wilcox, the owner and spiritual embodiment of Howards End, who replies " 'it cannot stand without them'."[7]

There is weakness, too, in the patriotic purple patches, which are often arch and archaic and almost seem to be in a different language from the dialogue. Forster's outer ear is impeccable: his inner ear sometimes lets him down. The following passage may be compared with the much less self-indulgent passage about Wiltshire quoted from *The Longest Journey* in the previous chapter:

> The valley of the Avon—invisible, but far to the north the trained eye may see Clearbury ring that guards it, and the imagination may leap beyond that on to Salisbury plain itself, and beyond the plain to all the glorious downs of Central England. Nor is suburbia absent. Bournemouth's ignoble coast cowers to the right, heralding the pine trees that mean, for all their beauty, red houses, and the Stock Exchange, and extend to the gates of London itself. So tremendous is the City's trail! But the cliffs of Freshwater it shall never touch, and the island will guard the Island's purity to the end of time. Seen from the west, the Wight is beautiful beyond all laws of beauty. It is as if a fragment of England floated forward to greet the foreigner —chalk of our chalk, turf of our turf, epitome of what will follow. And behind the fragment lies Southampton, hostess to the nations, and Portsmouth, a latent fire, and all around it, with double and treble collision of tides, swirls the sea. How many villages appear in this view! How many castles! How many churches, vanished or triumphant! How many ships, railways and roads! What incredible variety of men working beneath the lucent sky to what final end! The reason fails, like a wave on the Swanage beach; the imagination swells, spreads and deepens, until it becomes geographic and encircles England.[8]

I do not think the over-writing, the over-ripeness here, can entirely be excused on the grounds that, in its con-

text, some foreigners are being "impressed" by a view. Some of the language is too like that of a Bloomsbury week-ender. And the swelling optimism of such words as "but the cliffs of Freshwater it will never touch" is belied by numerous other passages which say the opposite and in which the author's critical and prophetic sense proves a surer judge than his "poetic" one.

Howards End is a house in Hertfordshire. It is a real house, though this is not its real name; Forster lived in it as a child and there is a photograph of it in *Marianne Thornton*. The house is still, at the time of writing, as described by Helen at the beginning of the book, though the wych-elm which Forster has said represents the *genius loci* is no longer there, and the surrounding countryside is threatened, as Helen said it would be, by the spread of a New Town, London's overspill.

The story ends, as it begins, in this house, which is, indeed, a character in the book, a guardian in itself, through its owner Ruth Wilcox and through its housekeeper Miss Avery, a somewhat "Cold Comfort Farm" character—one almost expects her to say, and she almost does say, "There must always be a Mrs. Wilcox at Howards End." Much of the middle part of the narrative takes place elsewhere—in London, Dorset, Shropshire—but we are never allowed to forget the house; though out of sight, it is never out of mind, thus conforming to the pattern set by Forster for all his guardians. It represents a touchstone of values; it is the spirit of a vanishing England, and of those who love her and wish to be part of her soil and her history. It is a particular place, not a generalised one, and this is important. "I tell you to do this because I am Cambridge, not because I am the great world," wrote Forster in *The Longest Journey*.[9] The good place must be small enough to be known by heart. This insistence on the local, the truly known, seems especially valuable in our age of "internationalism" in which the values of the great world, designed to appeal to all by

meaning nothing to anyone, are gradually replacing genuinely felt values derived from specific traditions.

But the novel's most remarkable achievement lies not in its symbolism but in the author's realisation of its two leading characters: Henry Wilcox and (more especially) Margaret, the elder of the Schlegel sisters: a Bloomsbury bluestocking, she is shown to us through unsympathetic eyes (*e.g.*, Charles Wilcox's) as well as sympathetic ones, so that we know the worst and the best about her. Earnest, toothy, physically not specially attractive, somewhat shrill, uncompromising, severely rational—yes, but she has also complete honesty and integrity, great insight, and "a profound vivacity, a continual and sincere response to all that she encountered in her path through life."[10] Forster takes her side throughout the book; he himself never criticises her; he speaks through her, more clearly perhaps than through any one of his other characters. Her surprise marriage to Henry Wilcox is essential to the story. Henry, so different from her in almost every way, challenges her. Her response to his challenge is thus a way out of a personal predicament as well as a major development of the moral pattern ("only connect") which the book is planned to reveal. In a way, too, by taking on Henry she achieves something of what Rickie failed to achieve by taking on Agnes. For she is stronger than Rickie, and Henry, for all his faults, is a much better bet for reality than Agnes. Moreover, Margaret is not only stronger than Rickie; she is stronger than Henry; her moral strength does better in the crisis than his physical strength; it is he who breaks down, she who is vindicated and victorious. Through her, the inner life pays its highest dividend.

By the end of the book, we know the Schlegels better than any other family in Forster. They are of German origin; their father left the Fatherland (another prophetic touch) when he saw it abandoning the values of Hegel and Beethoven and Goethe to follow the paths of imperialist

expansion after the Franco-Prussian War. He married a rich English girl and died a naturalised Englishman when his children were still young. He left three: Margaret, Helen, and Tibby, the youngest; a boy of sixteen when the novel opens, we leave him at Oxford. His role in the story is small: Helen's is important: in a way, even more important that Margaret's, though it is Margaret who dominates the book. Helen is physically attractive, less intellectual than her sister, more intuitive and impulsive. In some ways she is more "modern" than Margaret (she smokes). She falls in love easily, and does so in the first few pages of the book. She is staying at Howards End with the Wilcoxes (chance hotel acquaintances of a previous summer holiday); Margaret, though asked too, could not go because Tibby had hay fever: the small touch is typical of Forster. Howards End is to become important in Margaret's life; yet it is not until a long way through the book that she actually sets foot in the house.

Helen abruptly becomes engaged to the younger Wilcox son, Paul. The engagement ends equally abruptly, and after a disastrous visit by a well-meaning aunt, the two families part in a chilly yet slightly ridiculous atmosphere of arguments, reproaches, scenes. It is a brilliant opening in Forster's finest domestic-comedy manner. In thirty pages we have seen the house (Helen describes it in a letter to her sister); and we have seen Wilcoxes through Schlegels' eyes (and since Wilcoxes have no eyes of their own, this is the only way they *can* be seen). Mr Wilcox and his elder son Charles are heavy, rather pompous, self-important but kindly; they have hay fever and motor cars (this is 1910) and say "horrid things about women's suffrage." Mrs Wilcox (it is interesting that Forster gives her Quaker origins) seems at once different from the rest of her family: she loves the garden (she does not suffer from hay fever), but looks tired, her dress trailing over the wet grass, her hands full of hay, smelling flowers—as Helen first describes her, so we always see her and are

meant to see her, for she is the spirit of Howards End. The house—we only learn this later—is hers, not her husband's, and for all her shadowiness and inarticulateness and self-effacingness—indeed because of these qualities—she is central to the book. She represents that "sense of continuity" which Charlotte, in Goethe's novel of personal relations *Die Wahlverwandschaften*, says is more often found in women that in men. This spirit of Ruth Wilcox, and her complete identification of herself with her home as a piece of England, endows her with qualities that the Schlegels, London intellectual nomads, lack and need no less than the rest of the Wilcoxes do.

Thus two families with little in common are thrown together by casual passion and then, when passion repents, go their separate ways: the Wilcoxes to the "outer life of telegrams and anger," the Schlegels to their cultivated inner life: the contemplation of art and the development of personal relations. " 'I know that personal relations are the real life for ever and ever'," cries Helen to her sister, who adds her Amen. Both agree that in a crisis involving personal relations the Wilcoxes—except for Mrs Wilcox—came out badly: they got muddled and rattled, they were terrified of what might happen next: "just a wall of newspapers and motor-cars and golf-clubs, and . . . nothing behind it but panic and emptiness."[11] Here is the central statement of Forster's belief: and here the sisters confirm a pact which surmounts every crisis and matters more than any other relationship in the book: at the crisis, Margaret puts her sister before her fiancé, and the victory is a victory of the sisters together, each in her own way contributing to the final resolution. Thus in this prologue Forster draws up his two sides. The rest of the novel demonstrates how things collapse for those who don't connect and make sense for those who do.

Meanwhile, another key-character is introduced: Leonard Bast, a clerk, clinging precariously to the edge

of respectability, the "abyss" of poverty and destitution never far from his sight. This character is a guess on Forster's part, and an original one: an interesting attempt at portraying the all-but-submerged. Many critics have called Bast unconvincing, but Lawrence, who was highly critical of most of Forster's work, singled him out for praise.[12] Nowadays, of course, the sordid and the seedy are more familiar elements in middle-class fiction than they were fifty years ago; our standards for them are higher; few contemporary writers fail to bring them off even if they cannot bring off anything else; consequently critics tend to judge Bast by Orwell rather than by Wells. In fact, clerkship is neglected as well as pathetic; it is in between, neither the mind nor the body, and few writers have troubled to think about it. The final indictment of "the civilisation of luggage," of "such life as is conferred by the stench of motor cars," and "such culture as is implied by the advertisements of antibilious pills,"[13] is not that it has produced Wilcoxes (who can always look after themselves or get others to look after them) but that it has created Basts: the new slave class, without whom our commercial technocracy could not flourish, working not in galleys with their muscles but in offices with mental reflexes conditioned to the performance of some uninspiring routine.

Leonard tries to escape from his dim, drab existence through "culture," but culture does not speak to his condition. Like Butler and Shaw (*Major Barbara* is the relevant work) Forster sees through poverty: it does not ennoble, it destroys manhood, and renders the influence of art absurd because irrelevant. Leonard's domestic life is wretched: a prematurely ageing prostitute (Jacky) has hooked him, and Leonard is too honourable to leave her: ruthlessness and selfishness are only two of the qualities of "manhood" (Wilcox qualities) which are best developed on a full stomach. Forster shows us Bast's degrading home life: his attempts to escape by reading Ruskin,

"the rich man speaking to us from his gondola," strike with a hollow irony. Bast is in the novel so that we shall not make the mistake of undervaluing money. Wilcoxes overvalue it: but the Schlegels do not fall into the opposite error. While despising money as an end, they value it as a means, the essential means, to the good life, and come near to consenting—even if against their better nature—to the "gospel of St Andrew Undershaft" more brazenly asserted three years earlier by Shaw in his preface to *Major Barbara*:

> The universal regard for money is the one hopeful fact in our civilization, the one sound spot in our social conscience. Money is the most important thing in the world. It represents health, strength, honour, generosity and beauty as conspicuously as the want of it represents illness, weakness, disgrace, meanness and ugliness. Not the least of its virtues is that it destroys base people as certainly as it fortifies and dignifies noble people.

We may compare with this not only the remarks of the Schlegels but Forster's own description of Bast:

> ... He would have died sooner than confess any inferiority to the rich. That may be splendid of him. But he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as lovable.[14]

If Wilcoxes and Schlegels are the head and the heart of Edwardian society, Bast is its victim, its conscience. Schlegels, with their philanthropic liberalism, cannot help him to become a man; Wilcoxes, with their economic Darwinism, will not help him to become one. But whereas the *laissez-faire* Wilcoxes do not worry about him, the Schlegels do. They meet him at a Queen's Hall symphony concert; Margaret sees possibilities in him

beneath his pathetic veneer of culture; the chance acquaintance develops because the Schlegels' creed requires them to take people seriously. Their sense of responsibility for the underdog (their socialist nonsense, Wilcox thinks it) is to provide the motivation of the plot which follows.

Meanwhile, by another piece of Forsterian manipulation (reminiscent of the reassembling of the cast in the second part of *A Room with a View*) the Wilcoxes take a flat near the Schlegels' house in London. The story is thus taken a decisive step forward. For Margaret strikes up a friendship with Ruth (Mrs Wilcox), which is central to the whole novel. The intellectual and the intuitive combine: it is the characteristic process, or one of the processes, without which the chemistry of a Forster plot cannot work.

The rest of the Wilcoxes are away motoring. Christmas is approaching. London is foggy. Mrs Wilcox is tired and unwell. She alone behaved with dignity over the Paul-Helen episode and had quietly rejected Margaret's typically honest and dramatic suggestion that the two families should not meet again. When we meet Mrs Wilcox in London cut off from her life's blood, Howards End, she seems vague, dispirited, unresponsive, almost ghostlike in the fog. One day she and Margaret are out shopping when, on an impulse, she says

> "Come down with me to Howards End now. I want you to see it. You have never seen it. I want to hear what you say about it, for you do put things so wonderfully."

Now we feel the somewhat leisurely movement of the narrative quicken. But Margaret, who has always prided herself on her unconventionality, fails to respond to the queer request: the house is shut up, Mrs Wilcox is tired, the weather too bad; but later in the afternoon she repents this failure of sympathy and hurries to King's Cross just before the train is due to leave. In the passage which

"the rich man speaking to us from his gondola," strike with a hollow irony. Bast is in the novel so that we shall not make the mistake of undervaluing money. Wilcoxes overvalue it: but the Schlegels do not fall into the opposite error. While despising money as an end, they value it as a means, the essential means, to the good life, and come near to consenting—even if against their better nature—to the "gospel of St Andrew Undershaft" more brazenly asserted three years earlier by Shaw in his preface to *Major Barbara*:

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The rest of the Wilcoxes are away motoring. Christmas is approaching. London is foggy. Mrs Wilcox is tired and unwell. She alone behaved with dignity over the Paul-Helen episode and had quietly rejected Margaret's typically honest and dramatic suggestion that the two families should not meet again. When we meet Mrs Wilcox in London cut off from her life's blood, Howards End, she seems vague, dispirited, unresponsive, almost ghostlike in the fog. One day she and Margaret are out shopping when, on an impulse, she says

> "Come down with me to Howards End now. I want you to see it. You have never seen it. I want to hear what you say about it, for you do put things so wonderfully."

Now we feel the somewhat leisurely movement of the narrative quicken. But Margaret, who has always prided herself on her unconventionality, fails to respond to the queer request: the house is shut up, Mrs Wilcox is tired, the weather too bad; but later in the afternoon she repents this failure of sympathy and hurries to King's Cross just before the train is due to leave. In the passage which

follows, the opening sentence is an instance of Forster's favourite prophetic trick of planting what appears to be a casual detail, easily overlooked, which will be picked up later and become significant. (A related, though not parallel, instance, of apparently incidental detail whose significance is "reserved" until later, occurs in *The Longest Journey*, when Forster, describing Rickie's room at Cambridge at the beginning of the book, mentions a photograph of Stockholm: we learn, hundreds of pages later, that it was to Stockholm that Rickie's mother went with Stephen's father.)

She took a ticket, asking in her agitation for a single. As she did so, a grave and happy voice saluted her.

"I will come if I still may" said Margaret, laughing nervously.

"You are coming to sleep, dear, too. It is in the morning that my house is most beautiful. You are coming to stop. I cannot show you my meadow properly except at sunrise. These fogs"—she pointed at the station roof—"never spread far. I dare say they are sitting in the sun in Hertfordshire, and you will never repent joining them."

"I shall never repent joining you."

"It is the same".

They began to walk up the long platform. Far at its end stood the train, breasting the darkness without. They never reached it. Before imagination could triumph there were cries of "Mother, mother," and a heavy-browed girl darted out of the cloakroom and seized Mrs. Wilcox by the arm.

"Evie" she gasped. "Evie my pet."—

The girl called "Father. I say. Look who's here."

"Evie, dearest girl, why aren't you in Yorkshire?"

"No—motorsmash—plans changed—father's coming."

"Why, Ruth." cried Mr. Wilcox, joining them.

"What in the name of all that's wonderful are you doing here Ruth?"

Mrs. Wilcox had recovered herself.

"Oh Henry dear,—here's a lovely surprise—but let me introduce—but I think you know Miss Schlegel."

"Oh yes" he replied, not greatly interested. "But how's yourself Ruth?"

"Fit as a fiddle" she answered gaily.

"So are we, and so was our car, which ran A1 as far as Ripon, but there a wretched horse and cart which a fool of a driver—"

"Miss Schlegel, our little outing must be for another day."

. . . The voices of the happy family rose high. Margaret was left alone. No one wanted her. Mrs. Wilcox walked out of King's Cross between her husband and her daughter, listening to both of them.[15]

So ends Chapter Ten, with Howards End still eluding Margaret, and Henry "not greatly interested" in her, though he is to turn to her when he becomes a widower. Meanwhile, he is more concerned about his car. The scene as a whole epitomises Forster's technique. It marks, too, a climax of the novel, for the very next chapter opens with one of the author's calculated surprises. "The funeral was over. . . ." So this scene is our last glimpse of Mrs Wilcox alive.

"Before imagination could triumph . . ." are the key words in which the moralist in Forster underlines and makes explicit what the whole vivid scene itself implies and illustrates (the moralist is always a little anxious, particularly in this novel, that his readers should not have the experience and miss the meaning). "Before imagination could triumph": for the projected visit would have been an important achievement of the inner life, a decisive victory for the intellectual and the intuitive. But the victory is not to come so soon, or so easily. Wilcoxes,

chattering of the outer life, burst in and stop it. Observe how accurately Forster delineates Mrs Wilcox's reactions. She betrays no trace of disappointment, whatever she may have felt. Margaret may sense that she is "different" from her noisy menfolk, more sensitive and withdrawn, with even a hint about her of those psychic powers half-predicated also of Mrs Moore in *A Passage to India*: but Ruth's public loyalties are simple and unshakable; her family rely on her; she does not let them down; she turns away from Margaret because it is her duty. The family expect her always to come up to scratch, so she tells them she is "as fit as a fiddle" though she is about to die. Yet she sees further than they do. Her dying wish—" 'I should like Margaret to have Howards End' " —seems to them disloyal, but is in fact prophetic.

In the symbolic figure of Mrs Wilcox the spirit of a vanishing England saw what was good and tried to save it: in the timeless moment of her encounter with Margaret Schlegel, Ruth still seems, inarticulately, to offer salvation. Through Ruth, Forster thinks back, at the last moment when this was to be possible, to the England of his own inheritance, and tries to relate it to the values of his education, which seemed at one time to refer beyond the Thorntons' England and to be in opposition to it. It is thus, in a sense, of greater significance to connect Margaret and Ruth than to connect Margaret and Henry: Margaret's subsequent marriage is a means to an end. Historically, Henry is past saving, and so, consequently, is "his" England; and indeed, even with the help of Howards End the Schlegel values are powerless to prevent the coming deterioration and the ultimate breakdown of the old order. Criticism, the fine tool of the intellect, becomes useless when the barbarian is at the gates. Yet Ruth teaches something more valuable than Henry's manly empiricism: she reminds us that places are values anchored and ideas made tangible, and that if places cannot confine the spirit they can define it; and

that people matter, ultimately, for themselves and not for their "relationships" (the very word is a Bloomsbury sacred cow). Family ties mean much to Ruth, but in her dying message she sets them aside for something she feels to matter more.

After Mrs Wilcox's death Forster begins to entangle the fates of his three families, Basts as well as Wilcoxes and Schlegels (and we admire the means rather as we admire a juggler who after performing with two balls adds a third). Basts and Schlegels have already encountered each other, and so, too—though this we do not yet know —have Basts and Wilcoxes.

Margaret and Helen discuss, as a Bloomsbury academic question, what may be done for Leonard. They see good in him beneath the literary quotations. If London office life had not stunted him he would have been a manual worker; he represents good material gone wrong, spoilt by "civilisation": he is the price our society pays, not just so that Wilcox may ride about in a car but so that Ruskin may be able to write *The Stones of Venice*. But one night Bast tramps into Surrey to see the dawn, an occurrence he had frequently read of; he tests art by nature, and thus at once is one of Forster's saved; and the honesty of his response to what he sees impresses the sisters, and constitutes his "epiphany" as a human being. It is his last and only moment of glory, but because of it he is worth saving.

> "But was the dawn wonderful?" asks Helen. With unforgettable sincerity he replied "No." The word flew again like a pebble from a sling. Down toppled all that had seemed ignoble or literary in his talk, down toppled tiresome R.L.S. . . .[16]

By getting outdoors to see for himself Bast has gone behind his public library culture, his mind has grasped "something that was greater than Jefferies' books—the spirit that led Jefferies to write them." Forster has made

fun elsewhere[17] of the "literature of the open road," the pathetic reaction of the age of property against itself. Now Bast has seen through it. In that " 'No' " of his we hear again the voice of Stephen Wonham, whom Bast might have resembled if the hungry generations had not trodden him down; and we understand why at the conclusion of *Howards End* Bast's child, like Stephen's, shall inherit the earth.

The Schlegels mention Bast to Mr Wilcox, who, airing his knowledge of the commercial world, advises a change of job. The Porphyrion Insurance Company, it appears, is not "sound." Leonard takes a worse-paid job in a bank. But the bank reduces its staff, and the last to come is the first to go. Worse follows: the Porphyrion recovers, and when Henry blusters about the mysteries of commerce Helen says "Is that your point? A man who had little money has less—that's mine." Helen, the intuitive and passionate, sees less good in Henry than her sister does; indeed, while the Basts slip towards the abyss, Henry and Margaret, drawn together by mutual loneliness, become engaged. The Schlegels' lease is due to expire; Henry is practical and can find houses. But Helen does not let Henry get away with it. She confronts him with the now destitute Basts: it turns out that Jacky was once his mistress. Angrily he throws them out; his attitude closely resembles the Pembrokes' when confronted with the homeless Stephen: he can only see other people as threats to his own security. With the Basts Helen departs also, temporarily divided from Margaret by the misery of Leonard. Wilcox will do nothing for him. Margaret can do nothing. It is Helen who acts. She offers Bast money; he refuses it. She also offers herself; he accepts. Thus she saves him by making a man of him and giving him a future. She disappears from the story: when she returns to it, she is pregnant by Leonard. In their child there lies an economic prophecy as well as a moral hope: the classes mix, the cruel structure breaks down.

Helen goes abroad, but returns to England when her aunt becomes ill. Her pregnancy is revealed. Leonard turns up at Howards End. Charles Wilcox, faced with a situation which fits in to his conventional ideas about the manly thing to do, advances on the "seducer." " 'I now thrash him within an inch of his life'." But Bast dies; Charles's trial for manslaughter and subsequent prison sentence break Henry; Margaret takes him down to Howards End to recuperate; at last she has reached the house, and will not again leave it. Henry in his will arranges that it shall pass to her, thus fulfilling Ruth's dying wish. The cycle is completed. And Margaret will bequeath the house to her nephew, the child of idealism and failure, the boy who is to be given the second chance his father never had.

Melodrama and coincidence contribute freely to this *dénouement.* It seems, for instance, wholly in the interests of the novel's moral pattern that Jacky is made Henry's cast-off mistress. One might ask, in Forster's own manner, did Henry deserve to have Jacky built in to his past? My own view is that he was unlucky. But he must bear it so that he may be forced to connect. How can he now condemn Helen? Yet he does condemn her. When Margaret asks if she and her sister may spend a night at Howards End Henry refuses his second wife's request as he had refused the last request of his first wife: he feels he is being "got at" through personal feelings, which frighten him, as Helen had observed when she first met him. And because he is a hypocrite as well as a coward he gives, as the reason for his refusal, the sacred memory of his dead wife. In a great outburst of passion Margaret cries:

"You shall see the connection if it kills you Henry. You have had a mistress—I forgave you. My sister has a lover—you drive her from the house. Do you see the connection? Stupid, hypocritical, cruel—oh, contemptible.—A man who insults his wife when she's

alive and cants with her memory when she's dead. A man who ruins a woman for his pleasure and casts her off to ruin other men. And gives bad financial advice, and then says he is not responsible. These men are you. You can't recognise them because you cannot connect. . . . All your life you have been spoilt. . . .[18]

This is one of the finest and deadliest pieces of feminism to have been written in the era of the suffragettes. How accurately Margaret diagnoses Henry's trouble: he has been spoilt. He inherited a man's world; he has always commanded; he has always been obeyed. When he took her out to lunch, he told her what to eat. Where it was his duty he considered other people's welfare, but never their feelings. He is a full-scale portrait of a late Victorian humbug, weak beneath the manliness, pathetic beneath the success, obtuse in all that concerned people and feelings. Helen is impulsive; she says what she feels and her feelings change; after first attacking Henry over Bast she later feels she was wrong to isolate Henry from all the other causes of Bast's downfall. But when Margaret attacks, she attacks with her head as well as her heart and what she says is ruthless and unanswerable. Charged with failure to connect, Henry goes on not connecting. There must still be one law for him and another for Helen, even though the connexion could hardly be made more obvious for him: for his mistress is now the wife of Helen's lover.

This indeed is part of Forster's plan and of his method. He always intertwines his characters until their lives can no longer be separated or considered in isolation. Yet his own feelings towards Henry's past misdoings are—to modern taste—oddly prim. Henry, he tells us,

confused the episode of Jacky with another episode that had taken place in the days of his bachelorhood. The two made one crop of wild oats for which he was heartily sorry, and he could not see that those oats are

> of a darker stock which are rooted in another's dishonour. Unchastity and infidelity were as confused to him as to the Middle Ages, his only moral teacher. Ruth (poor old Ruth!) did not enter into his calculations at all, for poor old Ruth had never found him out.[19]

This moral indignation is all very well, but only the sharp last sentence of that passage will really bear scrutiny. Earlier, the unfortunate metaphor betrays an uneasiness; and it is typical of him to blame his hated Middle Ages (see *A Room with a View*) for what is after all common-or-garden Victorian hypocrisy; though it is fair to add that the Victorians had not in 1910 been so thoroughly found out as they have today. By isolating the Jacky episode in Henry's past, Forster makes heavier weather of it than we would now. We dislike Henry much more for being unkind to Helen and for failing to treat Bast like a human being than we do for his having been saddled with this squalid and joyless bit of past unfaithfulness. For the latter, given what is now known about Henry's type, might have been predicated. Moreover the "recognition scene," in which Jacky confronts Henry, reads like Victorian melodrama; in sharp contrast to the excellence of the writing whenever it involves the sisters. I think the truth is that Forster had to guess about Henry just as he did about Bast. He guessed pretty well; but Henry is more convincing as tycoon and speculator than as man of the world "with a man's past."

If the Basts become artificial and unconvincing when they have to be linked to Henry, they are no less so when they have to be linked to Helen. The affair between her and Leonard is played off stage, and related casually. We only learn about it, as we learn about so many important things in Forster, after it has happened. (Forster has said that he finds that the best way of surprising the reader is to surprise his characters too.) There

are two subsequent attempts to explain this affair, vitiated, I think, by some words of the author: "Leonard seemed not a man but a cause." (And Margaret even wonders "Was he also part of Mrs. Wilcox's mind?".) Admirably drawn in his isolation, Leonard fades as soon as he is put into relation, conflict, action; it is as if Forster can only draw him sitting down, as the central figure of one of those contemporary Camden Town interiors of Sickert's. When he starts to move outside, he is lost; he surrenders his identity and becomes a symbol. Indeed, once the melodrama starts in this novel, all the characters become less real: it is as if, already, the house and its future matters more.

As for Helen, she too seems to have acted less as a real woman than for "the cause." We are told that "she loved Leonard absolutely, for perhaps half an hour." It may help to quote here a paraphrase given by Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* of a remark made by the French critic Alain:

> What is fictitious in a novel is not so much the story as the method by which thought develops into action, a method which never occurs in daily life.[20]

So here: Helen *thought* "Bast has been wronged, I should like to help him, to show him someone cares"; the thought is developed by Forster into the half-hour of sexual encounter which alone can ensure continuity for Howards End. The *dénouement* is the more telling because of the implied influence of Ruth Wilcox, working through melodrama and beyond the grave to one end: the life of her house and the redemption of England. (If "poor Ruth" had found Henry out, or if he had confessed, then Margaret could not have played Jacky for Leonard and the sermon could not have been preached.)

And Henry—poor old Henry: he must swallow it all: the child of the man his own arrogance helped to ruin and his own son killed. It is not made easy for him, and it

is not intended to be. "It was hard going," writes Forster, "in the roads of Henry Wilcox's soul."

Henry is one of the most remarkable successes in the novel, and the one for which we are least prepared. He is no straight caricature, without redeeming features, like Herbert Pembroke, but an original creation, and his joining with Margaret represents a considerable modification of Forster's earlier views, a more subtle and surprising criticism of Bloomsbury academic liberalism than anything provided by Italy, Cambridge or Wiltshire. For the inner and the outer life here complement each other: and when has the inner life needed the outer before, or the outer surrendered so happily to the inner? Henry is no Stephen: he is strong, but not with an outdoor strength; his strength lies in his ability to manipulate the weapons of the age of property, he is a Galsworthy man: his weapons are a motor-car, a telephone, a house-agent's list.

It takes some time for Helen and Tibby to admit that Henry has any redeeming features at all. But Margaret sees something in him. Partly, she is again guided by Ruth Wilcox; partly, she is a spinster past thirty, and she sees in him a man; partly, as a woman on her own she sees a man who knows the trick of survival: a manager in a managerial age. She sees a man who needs her for those qualities in her which he himself lacks: wit, intelligence (as distinct from business-acumen), insight, sympathy; she loves him less for what he has than for what he has not. To Henry Howards End is not a place to come to rest in: no house is; it is something to buy, do up, get tired of, and sell again. Howards End, according to Henry, " 'didn't do; it is neither one thing nor the other, and one must have one thing or the other'." Forster is very funny about Henry's property deals, parodying the ways in which he half-unconsciously falsifies facts for the sake of a bargain, and contrasting the infinite pains he takes over financial investments with his casual attitude

to personal relations. We see him here through Margaret's eyes, after her engagement:

> He had not the knack of surrounding himself with nice people—indeed, for a man of ability and virtue his choice had been singularly unfortunate; he had no guiding principle beyond a certain preference for mediocrity; he was content to settle one of the greatest things in life haphazard, and so, while his investments went right, his friends generally went wrong. She would be told "Oh, So-and-so's a good sort—a thundering good sort", and find, on meeting him that he was a brute or a bore. If Henry had shown real affection, she would have understood, for affection explains everything. But he seemed without sentiment. The "thundering good sort" might at any moment become "a fellow for whom I never did have much use and have less now" and be shaken off cheerily into oblivion.
>
> . . . Oniton had been a discovery of Mr. Wilcox's—a discovery of which he was not altogether proud. It was up towards the Welsh border, and so difficult of access that he had concluded it must be something special. A ruined castle stood in the grounds. But having got there, what was one to do? The shooting was bad, the fishing indifferent, and the women-folk reported the scenery as nothing much. The place turned out to be in the wrong part of Shropshire, damn it, and though he never damned his own property out loud he was only waiting to get it off his hands. . . . As soon as a tenant was found, it became a house for which he never had had much use and had less now, and, like Howards End, faded into limbo.[21]

Margaret, a second-generation exile wandering on the eternal flux of metropolitan existence, longs to put down roots. But no sooner does she try than Henry—"always moving and causing others to move"—whisks her away. The chatter and change of the Schlegels' intellectual life,

though a more noble thing than Henry's existence, is shown as shrill and trivial when exposed to the mild, blurred gaze of Ruth Wilcox. Without Henry, Margaret would have been condemned to a lifetime of rootlessness, dissipating her brave qualities in the urban wilderness. And without Margaret and Helen, and their strong wish to be at home, Henry's epitaph would have been written when he abandoned Oniton:

> Day and night the river flows down into England, day after day the sun retreats into the Welsh mountains, and the tower chimes "See the conquering Hero." But the Wilcoxes have no part in the place, nor in any place. It is not their names that recur in the parish register. It is not their ghosts that sigh among the alders at evening. They have swept into the valley and swept out of it, leaving a little dust and a little money behind.[22]

In these beautiful words Forster defines the fate of Wilcoxes if left alone, and of England if left to Wilcoxes alone. Margaret by her marriage, Helen by her quixotic penetration into the underworld of a Wilcox victim, become the temporary saviours of England. For another generation at least, the restlessness is halted, the eternal draining away of life is checked. In this novel Forster sees the entire middle-class becoming rootless, cluttered with movable possessions, belonging nowhere. And the danger of this lies in the attitude toward England, the wrong sort of patriotism, it engenders. England becomes something to be exploited rather than loved: no wonder Wilcoxes are empire-builders and are always going abroad. They dare not stay too long in one place lest it turn and accuse them: accuse them of taking and never putting back, of working England and not working for her. Ultimately, this short-term selfishness can only lead where it has in fact led: to the jerry-builders of the nineteen-

thirties, the ribbon development, the spiritual poverty and material proliferation of subtopia. All this is foreseen and implied in *Howards End.*

Forster does not try to pretend that his solution is permanent. He is too clearsighted to suppose that the clock can be turned back. It is far too late now, it was far too late in 1910, to undo the work of all the Wilcoxes or to transform all the Basts. The liberal and socialist movements of the last fifty years have done something for the Basts: Leonard today would be better fed, he would have more sense and be less innocent, he would leave Jacky, and the B.B.C. would teach him how to pronounce Tannhäuser. The Schlegels' "islands" of six hundred a year would have shrunk to a tiny rock, just large enough to keep heads above water. Only Henry would not have changed. His sort never learn; though they can be broken by defeat, they cannot be enlightened by success.

Nevertheless the victory in the novel, even if temporary and contrived, is not without significance. It is perhaps the last victory of the inner life, the last time it will "pay" so handsomely. After a world war, things will be less easy; and after two—well, an age of defensive orthodoxy, suspicion, and fear can hardly be an age in which love and friendship can hope to flourish. This may explain Forster's own feeling that fiction nowadays is less interested in people as individuals. We are much less different from each other than we used to be. Bloomsbury has vanished, liberal humanism is unfashionable, and even intellectuals have become Wilcoxes, buying and selling culture like houses:

> There will be time
> To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.

Never did private incomes go less far, never did personal relations seem to count for less. Vulgarity without optimism, intellectual efficiency without imagination—we are all organised into types and groups, patriotism means

nothing under the shadow of cold war, the English countryside has almost disappeared beneath the structures of militarism and money. We do not merely intrude our limitations, we impose them on others; even love is a weapon in the new class-war, by the waging of which everyone hopes to be indistinguishable from everyone else. Henry's motor-car has spawned millions; the civilisation of luggage has become a conveyer-belt on which movables are multiplied until England has become a vast supermarket. Perhaps in all this lies part of the reason for Forster's long silence as a novelist—a silence he has broken only once since 1910, to produce a novel which turns its back on Western values and shrugs them into silence.

During the years 1905–10 Forster undertook a task which in retrospect is little short of heroic: the task of reminding us that each individual is unique and that only the particular can be loved, and then only if the power-mongers, with their itch towards generalisation, will leave it alone. In order to bring Margaret to Howards End values must be asserted which were precarious then, and which now scarcely survive. This is why *Howards End* is both a prophetic novel and a historical one. It is one of the last statements of the liberal enlightenment; and if, in the rather contrived happy ending, and in the patriotic set-pieces, we now detect a blurring of Forster's earlier idealism, a tendency to compromise, this may be because, even while he was getting it down on paper, the England of his vision and memory was already fading, as "month by month the roads smelt more strongly of petrol, and were more difficult to cross, and human beings heard each other speak with greater difficulty, breathed less of the air and saw less of the sky."[23] Perhaps, too, as Europe waited on the brink of a new homelessness, Forster's "atavistic, Thornton-derived slant upon society and history" was already undergoing that correction which he later recalled in *Marianne Thornton*, "through contact

with friends who have never had a home in the Thornton sense and do not want one."[24]

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CHAPTER VI

INDIA

One way of looking at Forster's last novel *A Passage to India* (1924) is to see it as his final corrective to liberal humanism, an ironical comment on the historically brief, egocentric Western Enlightenment. Mrs Moore in *A Passage to India* is Mrs Wilcox withdrawn even further from articulation, from protest, from the effort to assert in a falling world the dangerous fluency, the self-satisfaction, of Bloomsbury ethics. The entranced, static figure seated before the Marabar caves, as wooden and mum as an Indian god, de-Westernised, depersonalised, is one of the most haunting images in *A Passage to India.* She seems to occur again as Mrs March in the fragment, "Entrance to an Unwritten Novel": its scene is on board a ship on a voyage home from India to Southampton; it describes children with charm and understanding ("the battle this morning was a perfect fast," says one child, misrepresenting an unfamiliar adult word), but we soon move to Mrs March:

> tired with the voyage and the noise of the children, worried by what she had left in India and what she might find in England, Mrs March fell into a sort of trance.[1]

From the very outset of his career—from his first story of all, "Albergo Empedocle"—Forster has been attracted by the visionary; he has always required it to be included in any complete understanding; but now it begins to undermine surface responses and rationality; it begins to criticise by a complete devastation of those mental facul-

ties Western humanism would regard as "normal." With *A Passage to India* it is, indeed, the norm itself which vanishes. (Geographically, it vanishes at Suez.) India added a dimension to Forster as a creative artist and provided an image of the "unexplained, balancing the inexplicable," more universal than King's Chapel with its buttresses and its sand-heap. Or rather, to be more accurate, an Indian did: Syed Ross Masood, whom Forster first met in 1907 and who became one of his closest friends. After his death Forster wrote of him:

> My own debt to him is incalculable. He woke me up out of my suburban and academic life, showed me new horizons and a new civilisation and helped me towards the understanding of a continent. Until I met him, India was a vague jumble of rajahs, sahibs, babus and elephants, and I was not interested in such a jumble: who could be? He made everything real and exciting as soon as he began to talk, and seventeen years later when I wrote *A Passage to India* I dedicated it to him out of gratitude as well as love, for it could never have been written without him.[2]

A Passage to India was the outcome of two visits to the country. The first was made in 1912–13 with Lowes Dickinson. The following extract from a letter of Dickinson's (oddly enough, to a Mrs Moor) epitomises much of what Forster himself was later to say about India. The tone and detail are relevant also.

> The butterflies are exquisitely beautiful. Unfortunately there are other flies, at this moment tormenting me. But you can't have everything; or, rather, you must have everything. A wasp has been depositing paralysed spiders in a hole in one of the tables, laid her eggs, and carefully sealed it up with wax. What a thing nature is. How do the spiders feel? Let's hope they're unconscious. In the face of these things, most religious talk seems

'tosh'. If there's a God, or gods, they're beyond my ken. I think perhaps after all, the Hindus took in more of the facts in their religion than most people have done. But they too are children, like the rest of us.[3]

Forster's second visit to India was made in 1921 as private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas Senior. These visits are both described in *The Hill of Devi* (1953) which prints letters written home at the time. The book conveys the excitement, amusement and curiosity India aroused in its author; it puts down as vivid immediate impressions details and incidents sometimes used again in the novel.

This was all long ago, in the India of the British Raj. " 'If I don't make you go'," says Aziz to Fielding at the end of the novel,

> 'Ahmed will, Karim will, [these were Aziz's children]; if it's fifty five hundred years we shall get rid of you; yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then'—he rode against him furiously,—'and then', he concluded, half-kissing him, 'you and I shall be friends.'[4]

It did not take so long; in Ahmed's and Karim's own lifetimes the English left; thus Forster's India is a historic India, and *A Passage to India* is both a historical and a prophetic novel about India, just as *Howards End* was about England. It is also extremely anti-nationalist, the novel of a man who, as we know from his later essays, came to dislike nations and powers. Forster's viewpoint might be described as "India is a spirit, and those who would understand her must regard her spiritually." At the end of the novel—just before the passage quoted above—the active, ardent Moslem Aziz, "the pathos of defeated Islam in his blood," shouts his frustrated dreams at Fielding, his friend as a man, his enemy as an Englishman. " 'India shall be a nation!' No foreigners of any

sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and all shall be one!" At this Fielding, and Forster, mock:

> India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth-century sisterhood! Waddling in at this hour of the world to take her seat! She, whose only peer was the Holy Roman Empire, she shall rank with Guatemala and Belgium perhaps.[5]

In contrast to this exclusive India, hate-engendering (no foreigners), playing the Western power-game, is the India of Godbole, the India of love, enlightened, inclusive, international, not aiming at temporal power at all but at preserving and cherishing a traditional culture and ancient values. Romantic Aziz writes poems, but we learn that the only one of his poems Godbole likes is one in which Aziz "had gone straight to internationality": of this Godbole says that he would like to translate it into Hindi: "in fact, it might be rendered into Sanscrit almost, it is so enlightened."[6]

A Passage to India has had perhaps two successors. J. R. Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday* is an autobiographical journal (its author, like Forster, went out as secretary to a Native Ruler) describing personal relations with Indians: its blend of amusement, affection and exasperation is not unlike Forster's, though more like *The Hill of Devi* than *A Passage to India*. The British scarcely come into the book. Orwell's *Burmese Days* is a powerful but crude account, written from bitter personal disenchantment, of the struggle between the Raj and the natives. Its English hero, Flory, like Fielding in *A Passage to India*, is decent and tries to be enlightened, and has an Indian doctor friend: but Dr Veraswami, though worthy, entirely lacks the passion and charm of Aziz (Orwell was incapable of conveying charm and impatient with it as a quality). Moreover, although all the British characters except Flory are caricatured as drunken, lecherous, nigger-

baiting boors, and although Orwell agrees with Forster that the British memsahib tends to be even more impossible than the British sahib, his novel's real villain is a native; its theme is hate, Forster's is love.

In *The Hill of Devi* Forster states that he began *A Passage to India* on his first visit, and took the opening chapters out with him on his second and more extended visit. They there went dead on him, and only after his return to England was he able to finish the book.[7] A manuscript survives, and suggests that Chapters 1–7 and a few later passages were drafted about 1913, the rest after 1921. The India that enters the book is thus primarily a pre-1914 India; the wartime gap would not have had much significance, for the World War had little effect on India, where the social and political pattern imposed by the British continued largely unchanged until almost the time of the final withdrawal.

The second visit provided Forster with two incidents which are recorded in *The Hill of Devi* and reappear in the novel. On a drive, a villager points to a black thing three feet long and motionless. "A snake!" Forster said it looked to him more like a small dead tree, was told "Oh no": but it turned out that it *was* a small dead tree.[8] This incident is transformed in the novel in order to throw light on one aspect of the Indian character: its way of regarding truth as relative and less important than courtesy (which so easily becomes ingratiatingness), the obligation to give pleasure, to come up to scratch. In the novel, the incident appears in the section on the expedition to the Marabar caves. Miss Quested sees the small black object "reared on end" in the distance (the description closely follows that in *The Hill of Devi*). Ronny Heaslop, the City Magistrate (or, if you are an Indian, "the red-nosed boy"), supplies field-glasses, which prove the thing not to be a snake after all. But Aziz, who is determined that his expedition should in all respects come up to scratch,

admitted that it looked like a tree through the glasses, but insisted that it was a black cobra really, and improvised some rubbish about protective mimicry. Nothing was explained, and yet there was no romance. . . .[9]

Thus the tiny incident exemplifies India's refusal to make sense according to the rules of Western logic. As Forster notes in *The Hill of Devi*, "everything that happens is said to be one thing and proves to be another."

The other incident is mentioned in *The Hill of Devi* as having occurred a month or so later. Two visitors on their way from Dewas to Indore encountered an animal which charged their car and nearly caused an accident. The Maharajah, when the incident was recounted to him, said, "in an ordinary tone of voice," that it was the ghost of a man he had once accidentally run over on that road. " 'Ever since he has been trying to kill me in the form you describe'."[10]

This incident is used in Chapter 8 of the novel. The details correspond exactly. The result is muddle, inconvenience—" 'no great crimes, no great crimes, but no white man could have done it'," says the City Magistrate. [illegible] mother, Mrs Moore, the "guardian" of the novel, the impressive elderly lady, shivered:

'A ghost'. But the idea of a ghost scarcely passed her lips. The young people did not take it up, being occupied with their own thoughts, and deprived of support it perished, or was reabsorbed into that part of the mind that seldom speaks.[11]

Mrs Moore is endowed with the kind of non-Western "second sight" (if the term is not too crude) ascribed to the Maharajah, and as the novel proceeds her own people comprehend her less and less, India, in some strange manner, more and more.

These two small incidents are apparently unimportant. But they form part of the complex total pattern of the

novel, in which the symbolism is more elaborate than anything Forster has previously attempted. Each incident, each word, even the unspoken thought, takes its place in the whole. And this is not only a matter of structure, or technique, but of philosophy: for in the Hindu universe, nothing is lost, nothing overlooked; nothing is important, nothing unimportant. In the novel this is dimly perceived, at the hour of her own disintegration, by Mrs Moore: but fully comprehended only by the book's other guardian, the old Brahmin Professor Godbole. In the last section of the novel, when the main drama has been played, Godbole suddenly remembers ("though she was not important to him") "an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days," Mrs Moore:

> chance brought her into his mind . . . he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found.[12]

In so far as there is any mediation between chaos and cause, it comes through Mrs Moore and Godbole, as influences, not as agents. For the active characters no solution, no happy ending, is conceivable.

The novel is in three parts whose names indicate its religious preoccupations; "mosque" (the Muslim Aziz meets Mrs Moore in a mosque), "caves" (the Marabar caves where the central situation of the novel is developed), and "temple" (a short epilogue, presenting the parting of Aziz and Fielding and the Hindu view of the universe). Part I takes place in the cold weather; but by the end of it the heat has begun, and the central crisis of Part II takes place in the hot weather; Part III takes place in the rains and thus brings to a close the cycle of the Indian year. It has also been pointed out, by Peter Burra, in a brief but highly suggestive essay, that the three parts resemble the movements of a symphony; and

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certainly of all Forster's novels this one most "aspires to the condition of music," that art "deep beneath the arts" which Forster most values. Quite apart from this Western symphonic pattern, with its use of recurring themes, the novel also makes use of Indian music, which caught Forster's imagination. In *The Hill of Devi* he describes being woken up in the small hours by singing of a sudden beauty: "I have no doubt that I was listening to great art, it was so complicated and so passionate." Religious singing, especially by Godbole, plays a significant part in the novel, both in Part I and at the Krishna festival which forms the opening of Part III. This festival of Gokal Ashtami (the Hindu equivalent of Christmas)—"the strongest and strangest Indian experience ever granted me"—is described light-heartedly, even flippantly, in *The Hill of Devi* but recreated in the novel around Godbole to form the resolution and the summing-up.

Part I sets the scene—Chandrapore, a British station—and introduces the main characters. The short first chapter is purely descriptive—like the opening of a film in which the camera offers a bird's eye view. The phrase "the Marabar caves" strikes its ominous drum-tap in the opening words. We move from the ground to the sky—the over-arching sky which is universal, which settles everything, and which reappears as a *coda* in the last words of the book. In the second chapter the camera tracks closer, we meet people: after the calm descriptive opening comes the contrasting animation of Aziz and his friends.

Aziz—charming, passionate, emotional, poetic—by turns violently proud and deeply anxious to be loved—is the outstanding active character of the book. He is India's living faults and virtues, as Godbole, the old Hindu teacher, is her ancient wisdom.

After a brush with his superior, Major Callendar, the crusty Civil Surgeon, Aziz enters a mosque to recover

his composure. Here he meets Mrs Moore, newly arrived on a visit to her son (by a previous marriage), the City Magistrate Ronny Heaslop. Aziz's encounter with Mrs Moore in the half-darkness of the mosque is central to the book. She respects him, she sympathises with his wrongs; and when she says that she does not understand people but only knows whether she likes or dislikes them, he tells her, " 'You are an Oriental'," and his words are prophetic. Already, she has slipped away from Anglo-India, even from her companion, Adela Quested, who is expected to marry Ronny and who is so earnest and theoretically enlightened and wants to see "the real India" (not Indians). Later, in the club, Callendar distorts his own rudeness to Aziz into "let down by some native subordinate" and Mrs Moore recounts her meeting, including Aziz's indiscretions about the Major. She is horrified when her son threatens to pass these on to him. She has come out believing in personal relations, which Anglo-India declares null and void, though on her insistence Ronny reluctantly agrees to respect her confidence. This is the first time Mrs Moore saves Aziz; she will save him again, from a far greater danger. Later, she reconsiders the scene in the mosque. Aziz had been "unreliable, inquisitive, vain," changing his words according to what he thought would please, what he could get away with. " 'Yes, it is true, but how false as a summary of the man'." She notices a wasp on a hat-peg; no one else is with her, but the wasp is a part of India, a part of the universe, and will recur in the mind of Godbole hundreds of pages further on.

To amuse the two newcomers, "bridge parties" (parties aimed at bringing together English and Indians) are arranged; they are not a great success. The problem of hospitality is not to be solved by Christianity, which believes that "unless we exclude someone we shall be left with nothing." This would not worry Godbole, and again, much later, the Hindu inclusiveness is stated as a

corrective to the Christian uneasiness in the face of divine hospitality: "wasps? oranges, cactuses, crystals, and mud? No, no, this is going too far." But not too far for Godbole. Meanwhile, his mother's presence, and the bridge parties, force Ronny to proclaim the creed of the Raj: "The English are not in India to be pleasant, but to do justice and keep the peace." Mrs Moore does not agree; disliking the sentiments, she dislikes even more her son's relish in stating them, his lack of regret. To his Wilcoxian logic she opposes a personal argument, a religious argument, an Oriental argument:

> the English *are* out here to be pleasant . . . because India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth to be pleasant to each other. God . . . is . . . love.[13]

"God is love": again, her tentative words will unexpectedly, and not even accurately, recur at the Hindu religious festival presided over by Godbole in the third part of the book. Ronny puts his mother's religious feelings down to bad health (a true Wilcox attitude), but she continues: " 'the desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God'." So, too, Godbole the Hindu, who in effect takes over the spiritual direction of the novel where Mrs Moore leaves off, will later argue that God is present in the good. We are made aware that Mrs Moore's thoughts since arriving in India have been constantly, and for her perhaps disconcertingly, on God, "though oddly enough he satisfied her less." The English God, the Christian God, became less real, the answer to too little; yet, faced with the contradictions of India she grew not less religious but more, God becoming more elusive and more of an obsession, less definable and more Indian: "Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo of silence."[14] The word "echo" falls like another ominous drum-tap, anticipating the echo in the caves which dominate Part II. The whole novel, though, is a

construction of echoes, a series of Chinese boxes in sound, the aural equivalent of the square within the circle and within that another square, which symbolises Ansell's search for ultimate reality in *The Longest Journey*.

But while the echoes boom and whisper underneath, the life of action continues on the surface, the narrative proceeds—in Forster's own half-regretful words, "yes—oh dear, yes—the novel tells a story." Ronny and Adela become engaged, and Mrs Moore, the outwardly real, the "story" reason, for her visit fulfilled, prepares to return to England. The hot weather approaches. The tension begins to mount. Aziz has invited Miss Quested and Mrs Moore on a picnic to visit the Marabar caves. He has also invited his English friend Fielding, the unconventional, tough-romantic bachelor head of the local college; and old Godbole. These five, who form the main cast of the drama, first assemble at a tea party at Fielding's college. Godbole sings a religious song, a plea for the visitation of Krishna. " 'He refuses to come'." " 'But he comes in some other song, I hope?' " The question is Mrs Moore's: the only time the one guardian addresses the other directly. " 'Oh no, he refuses to come'," repeated Godbole, perhaps not understanding her question. The key-word here is "perhaps." It is Mrs Moore's last attempt to be Western, positive, optimistic; it is the beginning of India's conquest by negation, absence, vagueness: to which the old woman will herself finally surrender.

Godbole carries his negativeness further when asked to describe the Marabar caves. His description is colourless: the caves are not holy, not ornamented; they seem in fact attributeless, they have an entrance and—but he will say no more, and only Aziz senses that he has kept something back.

In the second part of the book they visit the caves—all of them, that is, except Fielding and Godbole, who miss the train because the latter spends too long praying

—the ultimate significance of this will be obvious. The heat is now considerable. Forster succeeds in conveying a vague sense of menace, of something nameless impending; the expedition is doomed, is bound to be, because it is organised by an Indian: thus Anglo-India, and rightly, though for the wrong reasons. The episode of the caves is the heart of the novel, the "solid mass" of which Forster has said that it is essential to him as a novelist, "the mountain round or over or through which the story must go." The caves are "an area in which concentration can take place."[15] They are also, says Forster, with deliberate and ironical sprightliness, "readily described." Where Godbole was reticent, the Western spirit of Baedeker takes over briskly: dimensions, lay-out, etc., are soon given. The caves are indistinguishable from one another. "Nothing, nothing attaches to them"—this repeated "nothing" recurs throughout the description: the spirit of Baedeker has not been able to survive after all and we reach towards what, perhaps, Godbole himself might have said if he had thought it worth while: the caves are void, they offer nothing to the curious, if they were excavated "nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil." The emphasis on "nothing" recalls the universe of Jacobean nihilism; and the vision we are offered is of a universe disintegrating, of values turned upside down and lost:

'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerance gone. . . .

We shall now be concerned with the effect of the caves on people in certain conditions of receptivity. The two ladies embark on the outing in a mood of apathy, accepted by the older woman but resented by the more intellectual Adela, who feels that India should excite, stimulate, clarify the mind: it is implied that she regards it as a tourist regards Italy; instead, India seems to blur and dim all impressions as if in a heat haze or mirage. Mrs Moore grows more withdrawn, the active world of

people and their lives begins to lose its grip on her. She is already passing imperceptibly from being an elderly Western lady in poor health to being a ghost, an oriental legend, a deity. Personal relations, which had brought her so far from home, cease to matter.

> She felt increasingly (vision or nightmare?) that, though people are important, the relations between them are not. . . .

She has entered a mosque, she enters a cave, she is becoming a heretic, a rebel against her own creed, an indifferent ally of old Godbole; she reminds us of Ruth Wilcox, but she has already gone much farther into the dark.

The question "what actually happened in the caves?" can only be answered in a number of ways, or perhaps cannot be answered at all. Forster has deliberately left the episode ambiguous, though in one of the earlier drafts Adela was apparently assaulted, by one of the guides. In this connexion a remark of his is of special interest:

> The novelist should I think always settle when he starts what is going to happen, what his major event is to be. He may alter this event as he approaches it, indeed he probably will, indeed he probably had better, or the novel becomes tied up and tight.[15]

What is important about the caves is symbolic: for they are the universe, in which the malign goblin footfall is heard, and whatever happens in them for good or evil, happens to the whole of creation. They are both the focus of experience, and the judgment on experience. They are the minds of all who enter them, the subconscious fears and desires; they hasten the process by which each becomes what he or she must become: they hasten Miss Quested's spinsterhood, Mrs Moore's death, Aziz's repudiation of the English.

When the party enters the first cave, Mrs Moore finds it disagreeable—stuffy, overcrowded (Aziz thinks it proper that a retinue should attend) and smelly: "there was also a terrifying echo." This echo dominates the entire second section of the novel. Its peculiarity is that it is the same whatever sound is made: "hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce 'boum'." It is the panic and emptiness of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as heard by Helen Schlegel, but it is more than that, for it is final, it is the Last Judgment: all distinctions, all the superstructures erected by man's wit and pride, are reduced to nothing. Yet Mrs Moore decides that there had been nothing evil. She concurs with Godbole once again: the caves are in themselves nothing: they affect, they reflect, what enters them. But she decides not to visit another, and remains behind while Aziz and Adela proceed, without her protection, towards disaster. She tries to write home to her other children, Ralph and Stella, but in retrospect her experience in the cave becomes more disquieting; the echo

> began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur "Pathos, piety, courage,—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth, everything exists, nothing has value."

The world falls in on this old, infirm woman, exiled in the glare and heat. The horror becomes Conradian, becomes—in the remarkable passage which follows—the heart of darkness; vision becomes nightmare.

> She tried to go on with her letter, reminding herself that she was only an elderly woman who had got up too early in the morning and journeyed too far, that the despair creeping over her was merely her despair, her personal weakness, and that even if she got a sunstroke and went mad, the rest of the world would go on. But suddenly, at the edge of her mind, religion

> appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from 'Let there be light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum'. Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul; the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realized that she didn't want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone, not even with God. She sat motionless with horror . . . then she surrendered to the vision. . . . She lost all interest, even in Aziz. . . .[16]

Thus Mrs Moore, old, unwell, far from home, falls into a kind of trance, part physical, part spiritual, from which she never returns. When we first met her, she seemed kind and sympathetic, but was really at the end of her tether. Now we see her as Forster wants her to be. Many years later, having himself reached the late seventies, Forster wrote an essay "*de senectute*," in which he is openly mystical about the wisdom of the old: the phrases in which he seeks to define its quality illuminate Mrs Moore and remind us that besides being a symbolic influence, a passive surrender to India, she also represents humanity at that extreme point of inarticulate insight which immediately precedes death. The wisdom of the old, wrote Forster,

> has nothing to do with making decisions or with the conveyance of information, it is only indirectly connected with the possession of knowledge. It does not specialise in sympathy. But it has the power, without proffering sympathy, of causing it to be perceived, and it is certainly not cynicism. . . . When it is intermittent—and it may become so through weakness or disease—it is most alarming to watch, and has the effect of witchcraft.[17]

Mrs Moore's conduct, for the few chapters in which she remains a living character of the novel, is alarming and

strange in just this way. She no longer responds to life, or asks it to respond to her. She is more like Godbole now, withdrawn, indifferent, in the state the Greeks called "*ataraxia.*" She has apprehended abstractions for which her life before her passage to India would not seem to have prepared her; like Mrs Wilcox, she becomes lost to her family; the particular fades from her grasp, the universal, the totality which is also nothingness, claims her as part of itself. She moves into another dimension, another world.

So much for the effect of the caves on Mrs Moore; meanwhile Adela climbs with Aziz to the other caves. As she climbs, her thoughts are on her forthcoming marriage, and she suddenly perceives that there is one thing wrong with it: she and Ronny do not love each other. Though inclined to think this may not matter, she is worried by it. Now she notices (with no personal warmth or any conscious sense of attraction) that Aziz is good-looking, and inquires of him, in her brisk, tactless, bluestocking manner, " 'Have you one wife or more than one?' " Aziz, a widower with two children, is annoyed: " 'Damn the English'." With these thoughts and words in the air, they enter the next cave. Aziz loses Adela, panics, shouts; sees her, a few minutes later, talking, down below, to Miss Derek, a Chandrapore acquaintance who has arrived in her car. He is relieved, and does not suspect that anything is wrong—not even when he finds Adela's field-glasses, their strap broken, lying half-way down the entrance to a cave. He picks them up, and starts down the hill. He finds that Fielding has belatedly arrived, in Miss Derek's car, but that Adela has left with Miss Derek for Chandrapore. It all seems odd, but no one thinks it is worse than odd until, when the main party arrives back at Chandrapore by train, Aziz is arrested: Miss Quested has accused him of assaulting her in the cave. The tension snaps, the strangeness explodes, the outer life of telegrams and anger takes over.

We are to suppose that for each of the two Englishwomen her experience in the caves represents the moment of truth, which is very different for each: Mrs Moore just slips out of active life, becomes incommunicada, bothers no one and wants to be bothered by no one. The echo is her epitaph; and, through her, the epitaph on all human effort, all emotions, all values. But Adela is young, rational, a spinster with no experience of life or passion behind her. Mrs Moore has with her a hint of Oedipus at Colonus, she has reached the end of the road: but Adela is brought up short, by a sudden shock, when only a little way along it. She has heard the echo too; it frightens her, not into resignation, but into accusation; where Mrs Moore accepts the vision totally, though the horror of its nothingness dazes her, Adela fights it, rationalises it, treats it as a Westerner. The old woman's thoughts had been on religion, and for her the echo is the indifference of God. Adela's thoughts had been on marriage and love, and for her the echo is the emptiness of life without sexual desire. So—to put it on one level—she has a hallucination, a virgin's fancy in a hot country, imagining a rape she secretly desired. This is in effect Aziz's explanation—an obvious explanation of anyone with a smattering of Western psychology.

In the anger and bitterness which follow, Fielding takes Aziz's side against Adela; all the other British officials take Adela's; there is an angry scene at the club, and Fielding parts from his compatriots for a straight fight between convention (compare the Wilcox attitude to the Bast-Helen affair) and personal loyalty and affection. On the plot level, the story now proceeds as tragi-comedy. The trial takes place, and becomes a farce when Adela suddenly withdraws her accusation: the British are routed, and the jubilant Aziz, hard, arrogant, unforgiving in victory, carries off his English friend in triumph.

I have summarised the remainder of Part II, but of course it is not as simple as that. To Godbole indeed it is

not simple at all: he turns the cave-incident into a complicated lecture on Hindu philosophy. If an evil action was performed in the cave, all performed it, for " 'when evil occurs it expresses the whole of the universe. Similarly when good occurs'." Thus Godbole generalises the incident, removes it from personalities, lifts it into the universal; in the vast perspective into which he places it, it becomes unimportant: as it is, also, for Mrs Moore. To Godbole, only the manifestations of God—of His presence in good, His absence in evil—only these matter: it is all part of the pattern, and the old man refuses to look at the matter in any other way. To Fielding's blunt, urgent question " 'did he do it or not?' " there can be, in Godbole's terms, no answer. For the old man's wisdom sees beyond the phenomenon, the subjective illusion, to the infinite reality. His advice could be summed up as "stop arguing about the fallible and invoke the divine." After giving it, he slips away from Chandrapore and the book, in characteristic guardian fashion, and we hear no more of him for over a hundred pages.

There remains the other guardian, Mrs Moore, and the question of what role she will play, after her own experience in the caves, in Adela's personal crisis. During the period after Adela's collapse and Aziz's arrest, the old woman will see no one; she retires into herself until her passage home can be arranged. Adela wants to see her, for she feels that only Mrs Moore can drive away the echo which persists inside her head: because she does not come, the echo flourishes: it is as if Adela tries to put Mrs Moore into the position of the God in Godbole's song—a role which the old woman is in fact to fulfil after her death.

But in Chapter 22 the two women are finally brought together again: it is Mrs Moore's last act on earth, her last direct intervention, though not her last message. Of the whole of Adela's crisis, only her echo arouses any interest in the old woman. For the rest, she complains

and mumbles gnomically—" 'love in a mosque, love in a cave, as if there is the least difference' "—heresies to her son, but the orthodoxy of Godbole. Then Forster introduces an effect of "witchcraft" or telepathy. Adela thinks she hears Mrs Moore declare Aziz to be innocent, but Ronny, who is present at the interview, tells her she imagined this: and the words indeed have not been spoken. But the *idea* is clearly intended—like the ghost that charged the car—to be re-absorbed, to remain in existence. For Mrs Moore's non-human qualities begin to be more and more insisted on: when she is present good is present, and Adela's echo fades somewhat. Confused, the wretched girl asks Mrs Moore point-blank if she has mentioned Aziz.

> 'I never said his name.' 'I thought you said "Aziz is an innocent man" ' said Adela. 'Of course he is innocent,' she answered indifferently.

The last word is important: one part of her mind no longer cares—but another part, the part Aziz had recognised when he cried " 'Then you are an Oriental'," makes a final effort to sort out the muddles for the sake of those to whom sorting out muddles is still important. She does not act directly for Aziz's sake, though her words have the same effect as if she did. It is rather that she is a mouthpiece through which divine order must be asserted: she angrily denies it when Adela calls her good —" 'I am not good; no, bad; a bad old woman; I used to be good . . .' "[18] But although she too has suffered the disintegration of her personality in the cave, she remains an influence for good despite herself.

Mrs Moore's active part in the novel is now over. She refuses to attend the trial, manages to get an early passage home, slipping away from the heat, the muddle, the echo; on the voyage to England she dies. After her departure from the book, Adela's echo becomes worse, and continues so long as she perseveres in error. At the trial,

Mrs Moore's name is mentioned—she could have given evidence, but was not called—hurried out of the country because she knew the truth, say the defence, and, as Ronny stiffly announces to the court the news that his mother has died, the chanting crowd outside takes up the name and indianises it into "Esmiss Esmoor." The old woman's translation is complete: she has surrendered to the vision of reality, as old Mr Lucas, in that early short story "The Road from Colonus" failed to do. Adela retracts, to the horror and anger of the British; she renounces her own people, India has won, she is free: the echo leaves her. She has acted with courage; but not with love. Her experience has left her spiritually bankrupt; she will never marry now; she returns to England.

Aziz, at Fielding's prompting, does not press her for damages. But he has finished with British India. He leaves Chandrapore to take service in a native state—Mau, where Godbole has preceded him. He parts, too, from Fielding, who is going on leave to England. A further muddle spoils their parting. Aziz hears a bazaar rumour that Adela was Fielding's mistress, and Fielding cannot entirely remove his suspicion that the Englishman had urged him not to sue for damages because he intends to marry Adela in England.

The final chapter of Part II describes the voyage to England, away from the strange, the extraordinary, the monstrous, back to the Mediterranean norm with its decorum and harmonies: looking at Venice, Fielding thinks " 'poor India'." It almost seems as if the book might be finished. After such sundering, what reconciliation? After such disintegration, what renewal? The answer is, on the active plane, none or almost none; but between the second and third parts of the novel there is a Kierkegaardian "qualitative leap" on to another plane. The brief finale is architecturally essential to the structure of the whole; in it the fragments are brought together into a pattern:

And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.

The final section begins: the theme of the last movement of the symphony is stated:

> Some hundreds of miles westward of the Marabar caves, and two years later in time, Professor Narayan Godbole stands in the presence of God. God is not born yet—that will occur at midnight—but He has also been born centuries ago, nor can He ever be born, because He is the Lord of the Universe, who transcends human processes.

In the superb description of the Krishna festival which follows, there are still occasional tones of light-heartedness, even ludicrousness, reminiscent of the corresponding description in *The Hill of Devi* where the central figure is Forster himself—a sceptical though sympathetic Western liberal enjoying an impressive spectacle and a not-too-serious religious romp: and it is right that such elements should be retained here, for they are part of Hindu inclusiveness, which does not mind a joke: "by sacrificing good taste this worship achieves what Christianity has shirked: the inclusion of merriment." Thus the spectacle may be amusing, and may even be seen through Western eyes to be amusing, as when we are told that the local draughtsman's spelling of the English slogan contained "an unfortunate slip":

God si love.

But power is lent to the description through the presence of Godbole, the Hindu believer.

At the festival only Hindus matter: Moslems and English are equally unimportant, equally outsiders. The festival is a muddle in their eyes, just as the caves were a muddle: yet the festival is also "the triumph of India";

if understanding is to be sought, it must be sought here; if the caves raised questions, only the temple can answer them: neither the mosque nor the church, with their personal, romantic creeds, are adequate. At Gokal Ashtami form and reason are outraged—the band plays selections from English musical comedy; "God si love." "Is this," asks the author, "the final message of India?" Mrs Moore's tentative words, spoken to her son two years before, have been deformed but they have not been lost. Details may be absurd, personalities warped, but the Hindu worshippers, when they see the image of God, take on

> a beauty in which there was nothing personal, for it caused them all to resemble each other during the moment of its indwelling.[19]

The divine removes differences, annihilates distinctions: Mrs Moore's vision, the echo in the cave, was true: at the moment of the birth "infinite love saved the world" and sorrow was ended, not just for Indians, but for "foreigners, birds, caves, railways, and the stars." Godbole's religion is absolutely inclusive; all creation is one, and shares in joy. During this, his spiritual climax, Godbole again has a vision of Mrs Moore "and round her faintly clinging forms of trouble." "It made no difference whether she was a trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal."[20] She is a part of infinite love; human and divine are interchangeable; no one and nothing is rejected. Godbole's humility is contrasted with the pride of the active characters; the only other character in the book who wants nothing for herself is Mrs Moore. In the pouring rain—for the rainy season has come—the fragments float together, and the rain washes over the world, recreates and unifies it, bringing refreshment, and the semblance at least of a new start: it is the happy time of the Indian year, the time of reconciliation and relaxation.

Godbole connects everything, though not as the West

connects. Only Hinduism, indiscriminating in its hocus-pocus and butter-smearing horse-play, its joyful belief in the universal, can comprehend and assimilate the wisp of hay, the echo in the cave. If you widen the context sufficiently, you will embrace the whole of creation, not just the "civilised" Western minority. Aziz and Fielding have taken their stand on enlightenment; when it fails, the part, defeated. Both are vigorous passionate men who pay, at best, lip-service to an imported, alien religion. But Hinduism, an ancient religion flourishing in an ancient part of the earth, implies that the transient emotions which beset us are in the long run unimportant. The influence of Mrs Moore, the wisdom of Godbole, become more important than the passions they have witnessed and ultimately disclaimed.

As a character-creation, the enigmatic Godbole seems to have a different kind of life from that of Aziz: but Forster has Hindu as well as Moslem friends, and Godbole is probably, like Aziz, a composite portrait. He is certainly assimilable in the context of Forster's total work, and much more convincing in his setting than that earlier saint and guardian, Mr Emerson, had been in his. Godbole is the mouthpiece of the contemplative life; he practises universal love, and to love everything is in a sense to love nothing; he surrenders his own identity to that of love, which he sees as the right use of the self. To him love is not romance but ritual, not self-expression but self-effacement, not desire but service.

While the festival is deploying its esemplastic power, we return to the unbelievers, the active characters, Aziz and Fielding, still muddled and suffering. Aziz has come to Mau to escape the English and is now doctor to the Ruler. He has ceased to open Fielding's letters since he received one beginning " 'I am to marry someone whom you know'," and read no further, assuming this to be Miss Quested. But Fielding arrives at Mau on a visit—Godbole knew, but had said nothing, just as he had known

the identity of Fielding's wife and said nothing. She is Stella, Mrs Moore's daughter; and with Fielding now is Ralph Moore, who brings Aziz and Fielding together for the last time, and to whom Aziz says:

'Can you always tell when a stranger is your friend?'
'Yes.'
'Then you are an Oriental.'[21]

The words of the mosque are repeated, the cycle is closed. Despite his suffering, Aziz, understanding now and forgiving, cannot resist a fresh act of love, towards the old woman who has in some strange way stolen his heart and who has now sent her son to speak for her once more. The final message of India and the final message of Mrs Moore are the same: God is love, God si love; mosque, cave, temple, romantic, appalling, or divine, it all amounts to the same, for in all the heart and the spirit speak, not the mind.

The book ends with a last ride together by Aziz and Fielding. The festival is over, "the divisions of daily life are returning." Religion has brought Fielding and Aziz together again: not theirs, but India's, Godbole's, Mrs Moore's; but with the withdrawal of its beneficent influence facts and differences assert themselves again.

'Why can't we be friends now? . . . It's what I want. It's what you want.'

But the horses didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath; they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices: 'No, not yet,' and the sky said: 'No, not there.'

With these words the novel ends, under the same hostile sky which had looked down on Chandrapore and

the Marabar at the beginning. What had been unified by the spirit of Hinduism, in whose vocabulary "nothing" and "everything" are interchangeable and God is praised without attributes, suffers fragmentation again. What seems to be proposed in this beautiful, meticulously contrived pattern, is an endless process of sundering and reconciliation; the eternal need of the practical, the romantic, the individual, to submit itself to the collective, the inclusive, the self-transcending. And fragmentation, collapse, may destroy the one, but the fragments of that one can in some mystical way be reassembled; Mrs Moore's collapse at the caves, her vision of the hollowness of things, was something she personally could not survive; yet her influence survives the collapse, her perception of the collapse is accompanied by a realisation that collapse does not exclude renewal: in Hinduism the creator and the destroyer are two aspects of the divine.

A Passage to India seems to say the last word (not technically as Joyce seemed to) but spiritually, emotionally, morally: it drained a whole tradition to the dregs, and we are left with the choice between contemplating an empty cup or refilling it again from the past. The novel poses infinite speculations. How far is Forster offering—and not just within the Indian framework of the story—the vague mysticism of Hinduism as a possible general corrective to the limitations of individualism, an all-inclusive salvation for a world doomed to fragmentation by its own ignorance and selfishness? How far is his final message a despairing judgment on the thrust and assertiveness of Western man since the Renaissance? The terrifying insights of the caves, the joyous ones of the temple, seem to be put forward as not only morally better but as more sensible than the constantly failing simplifications, the crude techniques of the will to power.

It is as if Forster finally assumes the role of one of his own guardians—Emerson, Ruth, Mrs Moore, Godbole—all of them elderly, their *mana* remaining though their

vitality is spent, all of them slipping away from the struggle. Forster had written four of his five novels in about six years, an extraordinary concentration of creative energy in a time of hope, the swimmer on the crest of the wave. Suddenly the swimmer, who had seemed to have everything—style, poise, staying-power, knowledge of the currents and love of the sea—found himself out of his depths, and turned to the shore. He was not the only one. "When the crash comes nothing is any good. After it—if there is any after—the task of civilisation will be carried on by people whose training has been different from my own."[22] These words were written at the end of the nineteen-thirties, but might be as true of the nineteen-twenties, when the world Forster had interpreted and criticised with such sympathy had already crashed. He tried other novels but set them aside; I quoted from one earlier in this chapter, and part of another, *Arctic Summer*, was read by the author at the Aldeborough Festival of 1951. Of this fragment, which has never been printed, Forster has said:

> I got my antithesis all right, the antithesis between the civilised man who hopes for an arctic summer in which there is time to get things done, and the heroic man. But I had not settled what is going to happen. . . .[23]

Forster's novels have all been contrived, constructed: the moralist has always put down the required antithesis and then summoned the narrative artist to give them life. It was not the moralist in Forster who failed, but the narrative artist, without whom the creative processes could not take place. The artist retired, the moralist went on alone, the player became a commentator. The novelist may have been worried and pessimistic about making further sense of life, but the critic by definition remains an optimist and goes on searching for order however chaotic and unintelligible things have become outside.

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CHAPTER VII

AFTERWARDS

Most writers today begin their careers with literary journalism and later, if they are able, squeeze out a novel or book of poems. Even those who do first come before the public with a piece of creative writing are immediately swept into competitive literary journalism, too much of which is likely to supervene before they produce a second creative work. But Forster's career followed the directly opposite path: he began with his novels and stories, and afterwards turned to essays, biography and reviewing. In these directions his work during the years 1925-1955 has been considerable in quantity, if somewhat desultory.

In the twenties he was for a time literary editor of the *Daily Herald*, and subsequently contributed to almost every journal of his day, especially in later years *The Listener*, of which his friend J. R. Ackerley was literary editor from 1935 to 1959. Many of Forster's reviews, essays and broadcasts have been collected in the two volumes *Abinger Harvest* and *Two Cheers for Democracy* (the latter is the more rewarding); and there is certainly material for a third volume. The Clark lectures given at Cambridge in 1927 on *Aspects of the Novel* form a separate book. I have already touched briefly on the biographies of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and Marianne Thornton; and must here for completeness put in the two books on Alexandria, where Forster was stationed as a Red Cross volunteer during the First World War. *Pharos and Pharillon* is a collection of literary, historical and topographical sketches, charming but not memorable; there is also a *History and Guide*: the guide has long since

gone out of date and become part of the history, but the work remains valuable as a labour of love, an evocation of a city whose cosmopolitan charm, unique situation, and incomparable climate have survived all changes of time and political fortune. The opening paragraphs of these two books, describing the geographical origin of Alexandria, are almost identical.

A glance through the two miscellaneous collections will give some idea of the variety of Forster's output as a literary journalist and of the nimbleness and adaptability of his mind: Roger Fry, Mickey Mouse, Forrest Reid, Proust, liberty, Nazism, music, tolerance, Crabbe, Cavafy, Iqbal, the London Library, America. Some of the descriptive journalism is gay and brilliant: the account of the 1937 Paris Exhibition ("The Last Parade") is a good example. It is not only lively and amusing; it also ends prophetically:

> Meanwhile, and all the while, the Earth revolves in her alcove, veiled in wool. She has sent samples of her hopes and lusts to Paris; that they will again be collected there, or anywhere, is unlikely, but she herself will look much the same as soon as one stands back a little in space. Even if the Mediterranean empties into the Sahara it will not make much difference. It is our clouds and our snows that show.[1]

The first sentence in that closing paragraph refers back to an earlier description of an astronomical working model. It is typical of Forster to pick it up again and use it symbolically to link the particular with the general, the ephemeral with the eternal. The prose style here is characteristic "later Forster": refined vernacular, precise, flexible, elegant.

The majority of Forster's essays, apart from such *jeux d'esprit*, can be divided into those on purely literary subjects and those dealing with wider issues of politics and society: many of the latter were written during the Second

World War, and on them rests—and rests firmly—Forster's claim to have continued to speak out on behalf of the values of liberal humanism, of reason and love, which "in the general mess of imprecision of feeling," and despite the efforts of the world to discredit them, he still upholds.

Politically and economically, Forster realised that the liberalism he was brought up with must yield to socialism—"we must manage to combine the new economy with the old morality";[2] yet he admits that the collapse of liberalism at one time left him "ashamed",[3] and spiritually he remains in the "fag-end" of the old tradition, not in the vanguard of the new; he has not found in the aridities of state planning much to stimulate the imagination, and has probably shared with other radically-orientated artists some disappointment that socialism has not done more to help the artist. (It has more often spoken of helping "the arts.") Morally, he proclaims the liberal humanist's distrust of dogmatic authoritarians, those whom he calls fishers of men: "my lawgivers are Erasmus and Montaigne, not Moses and St. Paul"[4]—the tolerant and the sceptical, as against the stern and uncompromising. By a curious paradox in the English temperament (Orwell is another case in point) some of this has the *laissez-faire* "amateur" flavour of Toryism, though when he puts friendship above patriotism Forster sharply reminds us that, more than any other writer of comparable eminence, he has refused to be cajoled into lending his name to narrow political causes. It is clear from his essays that he has remained temperamentally loyal to the traditions in which he grew up; despite their limitations they remain for him unsuperseded as a guide to life, even if no longer useful as pegs for art.

What has happened is that the liberal has had to come to terms—as honestly and as unsentimentally as possible—with an increasingly non-liberal society: even tolerance is a "makeshift," a better substitute for love than hate

would be, but still a substitute: "love the beloved republic . . . feeds upon freedom and lives,"[5] but as the supply of freedom in the world diminishes day by day, love must also diminish and the virtues of liberal individualism become more and more negative and back-to-the-wall (*i.e.*, one must try *not* to be greedy, violent, materialistic): this Forster admits—"I have lost all faith in positive militant ideals"—and in a remarkable and little-known essay "They Hold their Tongues" he makes savage fun of state censorship in a way which almost anticipates the pessimistic rearguard individualism of Orwell.

Thus his response to the years since 1939 has been a matter of muddling through, empirically, tackling what came along, not so much in the spirit of Tennyson's "faintly trust the larger hope" as in the spirit of D. H. Lawrence:

> Don't be sucked in by the su-superior,
> don't swallow the culture-bait,
> don't drink, don't drink and get beerier and beerier,
> don't swallow the culture-bait.
>
> Do hold yourself together, and fight
> with a hit-hit here and a hit-hit there,
> and a comfortable feeling at night
> that you've let in a little air.[6]

I think Forster would agree with this: certainly "don't swallow the culture-bait" is one of the principal themes of his creative work. Indeed, in his criticism, with its frequent deprecating references to "cultural stuff," he even seems to sidle up to us in the odd disguise of the plain man (always an odd disguise for intellectuals, but one they often like to assume), speaking confidentially of "us outsiders," adopting a facetious tone and playing for laughs, as in the essay "Does Culture Matter?" At other times—and this makes these occasional lapses all the more disconcerting—he speaks out as the uncompromising intellectual he really is.

Professor Trilling finds Forster's criticism disappointing and unsatisfactory, because it is too relaxed, too much "thrown away," not strict enough and not properly worked out. By the standard of the major critics this is undeniable. The truth is that Forster despises criticism: he says so in his essay on "The Raison d'Etre of Criticism in the Arts." To the creative artist, he maintains, criticism is unimportant and irrelevant; consequently he is on the defensive about it, refuses to take it seriously and does not wish us to; he never allows us to forget that he comes before us as an accredited creative artist. Indeed he holds like a guildsman to the mystery of his craft and is reluctant to give away any secrets or to admit that criticism can reveal any; he quotes with enthusiasm some Delphic lines of Claudel on the creative state:

> Je restitue une parole intelligible,
> Et l'ayant dite, je sais ce que j'ai dit.[7]

Forster's essays, therefore, are extremely personal; sometimes deeply serious, sometimes more like parlour games —for instance, the over-contrived and whimsical literary-historical essays on Gibbon and Coleridge. Occasionally, no doubt—though not, I fear, in those essays—his tongue is in his cheek; occasionally, as in his remarks on Joyce, he lets the whole side down with a deliberate bump. His judgments, like those of many creative people, are sometimes awry, but sometimes—almost, it seems, despite himself—they offer valuable insights which a non-creative critic might never have managed. When he sympathises deeply with a writer (*e.g.*, Skelton, Cavafy), he makes us want to read him, or, if we have read him, makes us feel we have read him inadequately. But it is no use expecting him to stimulate us on writers like Joyce and Orwell, on whom other critics have been willing to spend time and thought with an objectivity and patience Forster wholly lacks. He will not compete—partly out of a genuine modesty about his equipment for such tasks,

but partly also (and the paradox is not as odd as it sounds) out of a kind of intellectual arrogance. He is seldom prepared to submerge his own strong personality when discussing another's. His aim is to stimulate; and even his most exciting comments are often misleading: Professor Trilling cites[8] his remarks on Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs* as an example, and Isherwood long ago called this account "thrilling, suggestive, misleading,"[9] but it made him read the novel.

What Forster offers, then, as a critic, is often a "tea-tabling" of art where once there had been a "tea-tabling" of life, a sceptical disallowing—part deliberate snub, part temperamental aversion—of the discoveries, the illuminations, the reorientations, the sustained insights of major criticism. Instead, we get glimpses, often tantalisingly brief, into Forster's mind, in which books and ideas are refracted momentarily before vanishing again.

Yet time and again he comes out strongly and unequivocally with things that needed saying, and needed courage, disinterestedness and penetration before they could be said. To give one instance, those who think the claims made for science are nowadays pitched rather too high will be impressed by the following (from an essay written in 1946 on "The Challenge of Our Time"):

> . . . the intellectual, to my mind, is more in touch with humanity than is the confident scientist, who patronises the past, over-simplifies the present, and envisages a future where his leadership will be accepted. Owing to the political needs of the moment, the scientist occupies an abnormal position, which he tends to forget. He is subsidised by the terrified governments who need his aid, pampered and sheltered as long as he is obedient, and prosecuted under Official Secrets Acts when he has been naughty. All this separates him from ordinary men and women and makes him unfit to

> enter into their feelings. It is high time he came out of his ivory laboratory. We want him to plan for our bodies. We do not want him to plan for our minds, and we cannot accept, so far, his assurance that he will not.[10]

On the whole, Forster is far more urgent and passionate, more eloquent and engaged, with moral issues than with purely literary ones: when it becomes a matter of belief or principle—even if the belief is in unbelief and the principle is against all principles—he drops his reserve, he ceases to feint with his theme and with the reader. But he still regards literary subjects as largely matters of taste or opinion, and they rarely engage him fully. His best essays are those written during the Second World War (under the title "The Second Darkness," they form the opening group of *Two Cheers for Democracy*). Other writers besides Forster (one could name more surprising names) were driven by this crisis into giving on behalf of humanity the best of which they were capable, and these essays of Forster's can in a real sense be regarded as a war-effort, to be placed somewhere between Sir Winston Churchill's speeches and Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* prefaces: it is still a private voice which speaks, but it could not help speaking for many. The old tricks are still in use —the withdrawals *pour mieux sauter*, the fluidity, the refusal to be impressed by abstractions—but are here deployed with the utmost seriousness, so that when he says "I do not want to exaggerate the claims of freedom" it is not a joke which is coming but a careful examination of man's previous record leading to an exactly formulated conclusion: at least, where there is freedom, "there is a chance of the general level of civilisation rising."[11]

As a literary critic Forster's nearest approach to a sustained theme is his lectures, reprinted as a book, on *Aspects of the Novel*. And even here he comes before us shufflingly, apologising—half-seriously, half in jest—for his "ramshackly course" (the *implication* throughout is

that other courses are pedantic, pseudo-scholarship). Yet the course *is* "ramshackly": he touches on a novel in one section, and instead of dealing with it in a single sustained critical effort he keeps returning to it like a dog to a half-buried bone. This is partly the result of the scheme of the book—it is divided into sections on story, plot, people, fantasy, prophecy, pattern and rhythm: such a scheme suits Forster but is not conducive to the satisfactory examination of any single novel as a whole, *i.e.* as a *novel*: instead, many novels are glanced at, and many penetrating remarks made, but every examination is partial, it is slanted so as to highlight "plot" or "character," and in consequence the criticism, though often entertaining, reads artificially and even frivolously.

Yet there are good things in it: especially on Jane Austen, whom Forster discusses in, for him, considerable detail, showing how her mind worked and analysing her verbal effects. He is historically interesting on Meredith, that fallen giant of his own youth, whose plot-techniques and comic sense influenced him when he began to write. He is valuable, as far as he goes, on Dostoevsky; ultimately and unexpectedly disappointing on James's *Ambassadors*, on which he starts off promisingly: he truly says of it that it is "the symmetry created which endures," but proceeds to value this insufficiently. He spends too much time on second-rate writers like Anatole France. He calls *Ulysses* "essentially fantastic" and lumps it into a chapter which also includes *The Magic Flute*, *Zuleika Dobson*, and a novel called *Flecker's Magic*, which had just come out when the lectures were given.

On the whole, the verdict on the book must be unfavourable. Too often, after a few sentences full of interest, the chance of clinching an argument is muffed, the deductions which ask to be drawn are ignored. It is as if he was saying "I propose to tell you what I feel, what has struck my fancy; take it or leave it." He spends too much time wooing his audience, and the result is wayward and

undynamic, as may be seen by comparing it for a moment with Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, which had appeared a few years earlier. This does not mean there is no passion in it; there is: but it is not passion for this book or that interpretation; it is rather an underlying, secretive passion for the mystery of novel-writing. As a novelist Forster believes that the novel can make—and sustain—immense claims for itself. It can do all the drama does, and more subtly; it can also comment on the action; it can accommodate poetry; it can aspire to the condition of music. Nowhere does Forster use his own novels as examples: yet they are unseen presences more important than all the novels from which he does quote, only—as it were—to cast them aside. Even the divisions of the book—especially the inclusion of prophecy, and of pattern and rhythm—are reminders of his own novels and perhaps underline that touch of the schematic in their construction which makes them so very unlike any other fiction we have.

It should be added that Forster has always regarded his own fictional characters in a special and, I think, unusual way. He feels that, once in print, they become independent of him and have a life of their own, over which he continues to watch with tutelary interest, sometimes transferring them from one novel to another (Vyse, for example, crops up again casually in *Howards End*), sometimes adding fresh details: thus, in 1934 he published a review of a book of school reminiscences in the form of a conversation between Herbert and Agnes Pembroke;[12] in 1958, in an essay called "A View without a Room," he told what had happened to George and Lucy in the fifty years since they first appeared; in a conversation with Angus Wilson published in 1957, he says of Agnes "I saw through her," and of Beebe, "Yes, he was disappointing, wasn't he?"[13] His characters interest him now just as much as they did when he first created them, and I think this special feeling he has towards them as old friends (or

enemies) may be partly due to his having outlived their *début* by so unusually long a time, so that he has been able to go on thinking and talking about them.

In the spiritual desolation which has followed the second darkness, some anti-humanists have expressed baffled resentment at Forster's achievement and reputation—or, at least, have tried to isolate his last novel and use it to prove the ultimate failure of that tradition in which his work as a whole must be placed. This, however, is not the view of Dr Leavis, who, towards the end of an essay on Forster in which some severe judgments are given, observes "it seems to me plain that this tradition really is, for all its weakness, the indispensable transmitter of something humanity cannot afford to lose."[14] With those who have been brought up to value any part of this tradition Forster's books have established an intimacy which I believe to be unique in modern English fiction (only Jane Austen offers a parallel). Indeed, their very unforbiddingness has probably been a stumbling-block to their complete evaluation, for the English have always taken their pleasures sadly and consider an element of the strenuous and the Michelangelesque to be essential to all good art.

Yet Forster's influence permeates English letters, through the nineteen-thirties and beyond—the poems of Auden and Spender, the prose of Isherwood, Plomer, and Connolly, the novels of Elizabeth Bowen, Angus Wilson, and Iris Murdoch. Though his early didacticism approaches Lawrence's, it became ever more tentative, while Lawrence's became ever more emphatic. It is as if Forster has indicated those areas of the human heart where he thinks further research should be done. He is a pioneer, and not the less one because he has never greatly cared to give spectacular lectures about his discoveries; but he has pushed back the frontier of darkness along those sectors where the English spirit has since the nineteenth century been specially bogged down and be-

nighted. He has upheld the ethical and the aesthetic good though fashion has derided them; and for those who believe that all we have are our hearts and brains and imagination, that we must "behave as if we were immortal and as if civilisation were eternal" though "both statements are false,"[15] and that art can explore and enrich life but not replace it, his work remains exemplary and indispensable.

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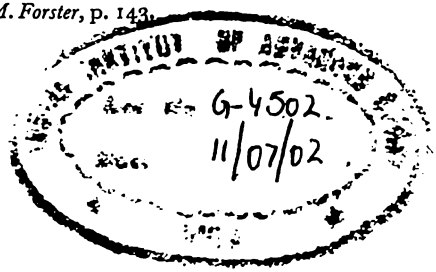

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