

E.M. FORSTER: "ONLY CONNECT"

A Thesis By

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B.A., Sterling College, 1981

M.A., Wichita State University, 2006

Submitted to the Department of English
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2007

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to all those
who have fought the “good fight”.

ABSTRACT

E.M. Forster's fiction, conservative in form, is in the English tradition of the novel of manners. He explores the emotional and sensual deficiencies of the English middle class, developing his themes by means of irony, wit, and symbolism. *A Passage to India* (1924) treats the relations between a group of British colonials and native Indians and considers the difficulty of forming human relationships, of “connecting”. In 1971, *Maurice*, a novel Forster had written in 1913–14, was published posthumously. A homosexual, Forster had refrained from publishing it during his lifetime because of the work's sympathetic treatment of homosexuality. The story of a young man's self-awakening, *Maurice* treats a familiar Forster theme, the difficulty of human connection. This thesis examines Forster's life and the two major novels, *A Passage to India* and *Maurice*, and shows how Forster “connected” to others while helping to revitalize and perpetuate the nearly dead form of the novel of manners, a form of the novel that continued throughout the 20th century alongside the more institutionally celebrated traditions of modernism and post-modernism.

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Introduction

In the online article, Who Is E.M. Forster?, *Opentopia Encyclopedia* states that Forster's views as a secular humanist are at the heart of his work, work which often features characters attempting to "connect" with each other, in the words of Forster's famous epigraph, across social barriers. His secular humanist views are expressed in the non-fictional essay *What I Believe* and explored through his fiction.

Forster's two most noted works, *A Passage to India* and *Howards End*, examine the irreconcilable nature of class differences in the England of his time. Although considered by some to have less serious literary weight, *A Room with a View* addresses the way propriety and manners associated with class can limit connection. The novel is his most widely read and accessible work, remaining popular for a century after its original publication. His 1914 novel *Maurice*, published posthumously in 1971, explores the possibility of reconciling class differences as part of a homosexual relationship (*Opentopia*).

Sexuality is another key theme in Forster's works and it has been argued that Forster's writing can be characterized as moving from heterosexual to homosexual love. The foreword to *Maurice* expresses his struggle with his own homosexuality, while similar themes were explored in several volumes of homosexual-themed short stories. Forster's explicitly homosexual writings, the novel *Maurice* and the short-story collection, *The Life to Come*, were published only after his death at the author's request (*Opentopia*).

Forster uses symbols as a technique in his novels, and has been criticized (as by his friend Roger Fry) for being attached to mysticism. An example of his symbolism is

the Wych Elm tree in *Howards End*; the characters of Mrs. Wilcox in that novel and Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India* have a mystical link with the past and are able somehow to connect with people from beyond their own circles (*Opentopia*).

This thesis examines Forster's life and his most revelatory novels, *A Passage to India* and *Maurice*, and with brief explorations of his other writings and historical and literary records, and will attempt to show how he "connected" to others and helped to revitalize and perpetuate a nearly dead form of literary tradition that continued throughout the 20th century and into a new one, alongside the more institutionally celebrated traditions of modernism and post-modernism.

E.M. Forster

E. M. Forster's long life – he died in 1970 at the age of ninety-one – witnessed social and cultural changes on an unprecedented scale. When he was born in 1879, eminent Victorians such as Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, George Eliot and Trollop were still at work, and he came of age while Victoria was still Queen of England. He lived through two world wars; he saw the advent of the nuclear age, the post-1945 transformation of British society, and the granting of independence to India (of whose late imperial period he has given readers one of the best known pictures); and he gave evidence at the “*Lady Chatterley* trial” of 1960, which may be taken as both a symptom and a cause of the new moral climate of the sixties.

A reader might expect Forster's work to reflect the transformations and upheavals of two or three troubled generations, but such is not the case. Unlike some other long-lived writers such as Tennyson, Hardy and Yeats, his longevity is not matched by a lengthy and continuous period of creativity. He told an interviewer in 1953, “My regret is that I haven't written a bit more – that the body, the corpus, isn't bigger” (Furbank and Haskell, *Art*, p. 40), and the number of his major works is, in fact, quite small. Moreover, the six novels that constitute his main claim to fame were all written by the time he was forty-five; indeed, four of them had appeared by the time he was thirty-one, and can be accurately described as “Edwardian.” The shape of his career, then, is both curious and unusual. But quality and influence cannot, of course, be estimated by counting titles or pages, and in some respects Forster's impact on the 20th century went far beyond what his modest output might lead one to expect.

Edward Morgan Forster (always known to his friends as Morgan) was born in London on January 1, 1879. His father, also Edward Morgan, was an architect who died of consumption when the child was still a baby. His mother, Alice Clara (usually known as Lily), was to outlive her husband by some sixty-five years, and Forster remained devoted to her to the very end. The fatherless boy was brought up in a family dominated by women: apart from his mother, his wealthy great-aunt Marianne Thornton, whose biography he later wrote, and his maternal grandmother Louisa Whichelo were of particular importance. Forster was later to say that he had spent his childhood within “a haze of elderly ladies” (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, p. 28).

Soon after his fourth birthday, Forster and his mother moved to Rooksnest, a pleasant house near Stevenage in Hertfordshire, north of London. At that time, Stevenage was a small market town surrounded by fields and farms, and in these peaceful, rural surroundings Forster seems to have spent a happy and secure childhood. (The house itself was later to be portrayed in *Howards End*.) Like many only children whose companions are mainly adults, he was a precocious boy: not only was he composing long stories at the age of five, but, as Furbank, his biographer writes “at the age of six he took the maids’ education in hand”, having “developed a passion for instructing others” (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, p. 22). It was a passion that never left him. He and his mother were very close; and, because she was in no hurry to send him to school, from about the age of eight, he was taught at home by a visiting tutor. At about the same time his great-aunt Marianne Thornton died, leaving eight thousand pounds in trust for him – in those days, a substantial sum. The income from this capital paid for his education and, as Forster later said, “made my career as a writer possible”.

By the time he was eleven, the question of his schooling could no longer be postponed, and he was sent to a preparatory school at Eastbourne, where he was unhappy and homesick. In a letter written to his mother towards the end of the first term, he already shows a remarkable capacity for self-analysis and self-expression:

I have never been like it [depressed] before, but it is not at all nice. It is very much like despondency; I am afraid I shall miss the train in the morning, afraid you will not meet me, afraid I shall lose my tickets; these are instances of the kind of state of mind I am in; ... The worst of school is that you have nothing and nobody to love. (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, p. 34).

Given the circumstances of the boy's first eleven years, with servants to minister to his needs and a loving mother to bestow on him her almost undivided attention, it is not surprising that the rough and tumble, compulsory games and relatively Spartan conditions of boarding school life proved uncongenial. Lily, like most mothers of her generation, had made no attempt to teach him about sex, and (however odd this may seem given the conditions of most British schools) he seems to have become only imperfectly informed on the subject during his schooldays. At any rate he said later in his life that "it was not till he was thirty, by which time he had published three novels, that he altogether understood how copulation took place" (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, p. 37). The presentation of women, love, marriage, and sexual relationships in his novels needs to be viewed in the context of his early experiences or lack thereof.

When he was fourteen, it was time for Forster to proceed to a public school – an almost inevitable step for someone of his class and period – and his mother made the decision to leave Rooksnest and to move to Tonbridge in Kent, so that he could become a "day-boy" or day student so that he could live at home instead of boarding at Tonbridge School. Lily no doubt believed that, by having him live at home, she could keep an eye

on his health and happiness, and she must have been anxious to do so for her own sake as well. But as a day-boy in what was primarily boarding school, Forster found himself in an equivocal and uncomfortable position, and his early years at Tonbridge, until he attained a measure of independence as a senior member of the school, were very unhappy. His depiction of the school as “Sawston” in *The Longest Journey* is unsympathetic, and he acquired a profound and permanent skepticism concerning the values implanted in the English governing class by the public school system. As he later wrote in his essay “Notes on the English Character” (1920):

Solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency. Lack of imagination, hypocrisy. These qualities characterize the middle class in every country, but in England they are national characteristics also, because only in England have the middle classes been in power for one hundred and fifty years.... For it is not that the Englishman can't feel – it is that he is afraid to feel. He has been taught at his public school that feeling is bad form.... When an Englishman has been led into a course of wrong action, he has nearly always begun by muddling himself. A public-school education does not make for mental clearness, and he possesses to a very high degree the power of confusing his own mind (Forster, *Harvest* p. 3).

The same essay, included in *Abinger Harvest*, declares that the products of the public schools go forth into the world “with well developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts”; and, as has often been pointed out, the theme of the “undeveloped heart” is central to Forster’s fiction.

In his early novels, English conventionality is often held up for contrast with Mediterranean freedom, and Forster’s first taste of continental travel came when he was sixteen, when he and his mother toured Normandy looking at churches during the Easter holidays. But the real turning point came in 1897, when he went up to King’s College, Cambridge, to read classics (later changing to history). The physical beauty of Cambridge, the freedom and independence of undergraduate life, and the sense that here

was a society intent upon the disinterested pursuit of truth, all made a deep and lasting impression. Above all, he found that Cambridge was a community in which personal relationships mattered. For the rest of his life, friendship was to count more than anything else for Forster. Half a century later, one of his closest friends, Joe Ackerley, noted that when arrangements were being made for a birthday dinner to celebrate Morgan's seventieth birthday, he was very upset ("too put out over it") when he learned that among the guests on this special occasion would be one who was not in his inner circle of friends. Ackerley commented in his diary:

...as we all know, Morgan has a deep feeling about such matters, an almost mystical feeling, different and more emotional than anything that any of us feel. (Ackerley, *Diaries*, King, (ed.), p. 45).

The religious term "mystical" is significant, since the cult of friendship first developed at Cambridge had helped to fill the vacuum caused by Forster's loss of the Christian faith in which he had been raised.

At King's College, friendships were cultivated not only between one undergraduate and another, but between undergraduates and dons. Three men were of particular importance in Forster's development. Oscar Browning, who taught Forster history, was eccentric and snobbish, even absurd; but he cared passionately and sincerely about friendship, and his enthusiasm and energy were infectious. As P. N. Furbank writes, "He was not a scholar or thinker; his strength was that, in his sanguine way, he diffused a vision of glory." (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, p. 54). A different kind of influence was exerted by Nathaniel Wedd, Forster's classics tutor, who was what today would be called "left-wing" or "anti-establishment". As John Colmer writes, Wedd "undoubtedly helped to form Forster's political and social attitudes, especially his distrust

of authority, his sympathy for the outsider, particularly of a lower class, and his hostility to notions of good form” (Colmer, *Forster*, p. 7). A third influence was that of Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, whose biographer Forster later became. Liberal and agnostic, Dickinson was a tireless writer on political subjects and, like Wedd, an ardent advocate of Greek thought, which many at the time believed was a code phrase for “homosexual”.

Forster graduated in 1900 with a Bachelor of Arts in Classics and stayed an additional year to read for a degree in History. In his fourth and last year at King’s College, Forster was elected to the exclusive discussion club known as “the Apostles.” The Apostles had been founded in the 19th century (Tennyson was one of the earliest members), and met weekly to hear and discuss papers on a variety of topics; its function had been defined by one of its distinguished members, Henry Sidgwick, as “the pursuit of truth with absolute devotion and unreserved by a group of intimate friends,” and the keywords in this statement – truth, devotion, unreserved, friends – are all relevant to Forster’s own lifelong commitments.

Sidgwick also tells us that “Absolute candour was the only duty that the tradition of the society enforced,” and that “there was no proposition so well established that an Apostle had not the right to deny or question, if he did so sincerely and not from mere love of paradox.” Lest this sound excessively solemn and earnest for young men of twenty, it is well to bear in mind Sidgwick’s observation on the prevailing tone of the meetings, that “suggestion and instruction may be derived from what is in form a jest – even in dealing with gravest matters.” (Page, *Forster*, p. 5). As Colmer points out, this tone is reflected in Forster’s own writing, with its “characteristic blend of gravity and

humour.” (Colmer, *Forster*, p. 7). Forster reveals his own remembrance of the Apostles in the opening chapter of the *The Longest Journey* which is a fictionalized account of a typical meeting of the Apostles.

When Forster left Cambridge in 1901, he decided to postpone taking up a career. Having read, classics and history, he probably could have found employment either in the civil service or in a museum or library, but he already had some thoughts of becoming a writer and his small private income meant that he did not need to start earning a living. Instead, he decided to see something more of Europe; and a few months after coming down from Cambridge he set off, accompanied by his mother, on a year of travel, mainly in Italy. Forster seems to have seen his main business as becoming acquainted at first hand with the glories of Italian art: as his mother rather grimly recorded in a letter home, “We go to churches, pictures and museums daily.” (Page, *Forster*, p. 6). They traveled fairly extensively, going as far south as Sicily; but in a sense it was, as Forster later said, “a very timid outing”, for they stayed in pensions or small boardinghouses and met mainly middle-class English tourists like themselves. They made no Italian friends and never entered an Italian home.

And yet, for all the narrowness and gentility of this “timid” tour, Forster was genuinely excited by Italy, and it was there that he received authentic inspiration to write his first short story, and hence to begin his career as a writer. Forster describes the origin of this work, which was titled “The Story of a Panic,” in the introduction to his *Collected Short Stories*:

After I came down from Cambridge.... I travelled abroad for a year, and I think it was in the May of 1902 that I took a walk near Ravello. I sat down in a valley, a few miles above the town, and suddenly the first chapter of the story rushed into my mind as if it had waited for me there. I

received it as an entity and wrote it out as soon as I returned to the hotel
(Forster, *Short Stories*, pp.5-7).

“As if it had waited for me there” is a striking phrase: it is as though, rather than spinning the fiction out of his own mind or experiences, Forster “found” the story in a particular, ordinary, but also very special place (in the same passage he speaks of “sitting down on the theme as if it were an anthill”). Places were always to be important to Forster, and his Italian travels provided some of the material for two of his first three novels.

Back in England (1903), he embarked on a little part-time teaching at the Working Men’s College in Bloomsbury, a connection that was to last for some twenty years. This experience as an instructor of adult education classes, in which he was called upon to explain fairly complex issues in clear and simple language, seems to have had an effect on the style and manner of his writings, especially his essays. But he was still not ready to settle on a career. From 1903 on, he published articles and stories in a new progressive monthly, the *Independent Review*, founded and edited by some of his Cambridge friends. He still spent a good deal of time in Cambridge: as early as October 1901, he had written to a friend from Milan, “I suppose you are now in Cambridge. How I wish – in many ways – that I was too. It’s the one place where I seem able to get to know people and to get on with them without effort” (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, p. 7). He also remained close to Hugh Meredith, a fellow Apostle and the most important of the friends of his undergraduate years. It may have been during the winter of 1902-3 that Forster and Meredith became lovers. As Furbank writes, for Forster the experience was

...immense and epoch-making; it was, he felt, as if all the “greatness” of the world had been opened up to him. He counted this as the second grand “discovery” of his youth – his emancipation from Christianity being the first – and for the moment it seemed to him as though all the rest of his

existence would not be too long to work out the consequences. (*Forster*, vol. 1, p. 98)

This, the first of Forster's homosexual love affairs, was probably very limited as far as physical expression was concerned, but its effect on him was none the less profound and permanent.

The Greek view of life (the phrase is the title of one of Lowes Dickinson's most popular books), which endorsed male friendships as expounded in Plato's *Symposium*, had many advocates in the strictly masculine society of King's College, and exerted a strong influence upon Forster. His first sight of Greece came during the Easter vacation of 1903 and there his Italian experience repeated itself, for he again came upon a story – one of his best, "*The Road from Colonus*," which he found hanging "ready for him in a hollow tree." As with the exuberant outdoor life of Italy, Forster found in Greece a contrast with, and an escape from, the middle-class, puritan, philistine, inhibited life of England, or at least of that part of English society to which he belonged.

In 1904 his mother, who had moved to Tunbridge Wells in 1898, exchanged one genteel small town for another by moving to Weybridge, where she and Forster were to spend the next twenty years. At this time his creative energies were expanding, and he was at work on early versions of what were later to become three novels. Yet it was in other respects a very sheltered life, offering a severely restricted view of human existence, and Forster was aware that a sheer lack of knowledge about how people live was a serious handicap to him as an aspiring novelist. The novel is, as D.H. Lawrence was to put it, "the book of life," and it is hardly possible to write a novel – certainly not one in the realistic tradition that Forster practiced – without a good deal of information and understanding concerning the way in which people of different kinds live their lives.

His New Year resolutions for 1905 included, revealingly, “get a less superficial idea of women” (more easily said than done, as he no doubt realized) and “don’t be so afraid of going into strange places or company...,” and in 1908 he wrote in a letter to a friend, “It is the great defect of my position that I only see people in their leisure moments” (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, pp. 122, 138). Never having known a father or brothers and sisters, he had only a partial knowledge of family life; never having pursued a career, he had no detailed knowledge of any form of employment or of relationships with colleagues or clients; as a homosexual, his knowledge of, and indeed his interest in, half the human race was limited to his mother and other middle-class ladies a generation or two older than himself. Nevertheless, none of this stopped him writing fiction; although these factors inevitably influenced both what he wrote and what he did not write.

In March 1905, Forster spent a few months in Germany as tutor to the children of a Prussian landowner who had married an Englishwoman; and it was later in the same year that his first novel was published. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* was favorably reviewed, and he had no reason not to feel encouraged in writing fiction. Two other novels followed fairly quickly, at intervals of about eighteen months: *The Longest Journey*, his Cambridge novel, in 1907, and *A Room with a View*, his second Italian novel, in 1908. Two years after the latter came *Howards End*. Its reception was, as Philip Gardner has written, a “solid vote of confidence in Forster’s talents.” Although only thirty-one, he found himself now an established novelist with his reputation “consolidated and given clearer definition than before.” (Gardner, (ed.), *Critical*, pp. 12, 14). That the epithet “Forsterian” was used this early in his career is a clear indication that he had become identified with a recognizable point of view: liberal, humane,

skeptical, unconventional, relentlessly moral without being ponderous, and even, by the standards of his day, daring; for his mother had been deeply shocked when she read

Howards End in proof. The appearance of the novel marked, as Furbank writes,

...a turning-point in his career, as it did in his life. For the moment he was a celebrity: friends flattered him, newspapers interviewed him and letters and invitations poured in. (*Forster*, vol. 1, p. 190)

The effect on Forster, however, was to unsettle and disturb him: he disliked popularity, felt curiously guilty and superstitious about his success, and began to fear that his creative talents would dry up. This last was a fear that was to haunt him, not without reason, for many years.

At about this time (circa 1910) he seems to have undergone a personal crisis. A few years earlier a second person had entered his life, when he met and fell in love with Syed Ross Masood, a young and handsome Indian whom he coached in Latin in preparation for his Oxford entrance requirements. But the precipitating factor in this crisis was his relationship with his mother, who was now well into her fifties and was often depressed and irritable. Summing up the year 1911 in his diary, he described it as a “Terrible year on the whole” and noted that “pleasure of home life has gone.... Am only happy away from home” (Furbank, *Forster*, vol.1, p. 204). Knowing that, for the sake of his own happiness, he ought to make more of an independent life for himself, he was tormented by guilt at the thought that his mother would have to be more and more excluded from such a life. But his chance to get away, and to have the stimulation of new scenes, was taken in October 1912, when he embarked for India, even though, his mother traveled with him as far as Naples. This was the first of three visits to that country: the second was in 1921, when he went for a short period as private secretary to a Maharajah,

and the third in 1945 when, elderly and famous, he attended a writer's conference. In India he found the material for his last, and in the opinion of many judges his finest, novel, *A Passage to India*, not completed until much later and published in 1924.

Forster's first four novels had been written quite rapidly, but the record of the years 1912-14 is one of uncertainty and loss of self-confidence. By his own account, he began *A Passage to India* in 1912, but soon put it aside. Between September 1913 and July 1914 he produced a version of *Maurice*; the first draft took him only about three months to complete; and before setting to work to revise it, he seems to have begun yet another novel, the quickly abandoned *Arctic Summer*, which survives only as a fragment and written in the spring of 1914 (Page. *Forster*, p. 118). *Maurice*, though finished, was not published and indeed was not publishable, since its treatment of a homosexual theme would have been unacceptable at that time. During the next fifty years Forster took it up again from time to time; some of his friends read it, and as late as 1960 he made further substantial revisions and added a "terminal note" describing its origins and stating that it was now, in the enlightened post-*Chatterley* era, publishable at last. But it did not appear until 1971, a short time after his death.

Maurice was sparked by a visit to Edward Carpenter, who has been called "the first modern writer on sex in England" (Hynes, *Mind*, p. 150). Carpenter's own voluminous writings are now virtually forgotten, but his influence on various writers, including Forster and D.H. Lawrence, was by no means negligible. Forster acknowledged that he was "much influenced" by him and, in an essay written after Carpenter's death, referred to his "cult of friendship" and his "mingling of the infinite

and the whimsical” (Beith, (ed.), *Carpenter*, pp. 76, 80) – phrases that can readily be applied to Forster himself.

When war broke out in August 1914, Forster worked for a time cataloguing paintings in the National Gallery, then went to Egypt, where he spent three years working as a volunteer for the Red Cross. When the war ended, once again back in England, he was active as a journalist – in the years 1919-20 he published the impressive total of 88 essays and reviews – and was for a time literary editor of a left-wing newspaper, the *Daily Herald*. Then came his second visit to India and on his return in 1922 he resumed work on the half-written Indian novel that had been begun some ten years earlier. Work continued throughout 1923, and *A Passage to India* was at last published in June 1924. It was hailed as a masterpiece, and assured Forster a prominent place among living English novelists, although no one could have foreseen that he would not publish another novel in his lifetime. He was then forty-five, or almost exactly halfway through his long life.

Soon after *A Passage to India*’s publication Forster returned to Cambridge for a time as a fellow of his old college, and in 1927 he delivered a series of lectures on the novel, published as *Aspects of the Novel*. Though informal in tone, these lectures were to have a wide influence during a period when the theory and criticism of fiction was relatively unsophisticated, and they increased Forster’s reputation as a man of letters.

During the following years, Forster was not idle: he wrote a good deal of journalism, began to broadcast in 1928 – the BBC having received its charter only in the preceding year – and was active in public life, especially in relation to such issues as censorship and the freedom of the individual. In 1934, for instance, he became the first president of the National Council for Civil Liberties. These activities, in conjunction

with his reputation as a writer, established him as a public figure whose low-keyed but strongly felt utterances were listened to with respect. He had a wide circle of friends, but still spent most of his time at his mother's home in Surrey. However, he published no more fiction. Indeed, as it turned out, he had permanently abandoned the novel (Page, *Forster*, p. 11).

Readers are bound to wonder why Forster wrote no novel after *A Passage to India*; and, although the question cannot be answered conclusively, it is worth asking, since some of the reasons that may be considered, in a necessarily speculative way, serve to suggest the nature of his strengths and his limitations as a novelist. The phenomenon is not unique: Thomas Hardy, for instance, abandoned the novel after *Jude the Obscure* when he was at the height of his powers and was still in his fifties. But then Hardy had always been a novelist in spite of himself: having secured financial independence as well as fame, he returned to poetry, his first and truest love, and was active as a poet up to his death. With Forster, on the other hand, one feels that the creative pulse became weak: as Frederick C. Crews wrote in his study of Forster, *The Perils of Humanism*, in 1962, "Forster's literary activity since 1924 can strike us only as a series of footnotes, however brilliant, to a career whose real centre lies in the first decade of the twentieth century" (p. 3).

As has been shown, Forster's troubles began much earlier than 1924: soon after the publication of *Howards End*, when he was little more than thirty, he was already worried about artistic sterility. Furbank, who knew him well in his later years, suggests that, while he was thought a rationalist, Forster was a deeply superstitious man, and that

the success of *Howards End* caused him to be “afflicted and inhibited by superstitious fears”:

...having been especially and royally favoured as a child, he had magical feelings about his own life.... We can easily imagine such a man experiencing irrational fears at the realization of very deep wishes.
(*Forster*, vol. 2, p. 131)

It was, according to Furbank’s reading of the situation, as if bad luck or punishment must follow success. This presentiment is borne out by a curious remark that Forster made to T.E. Lawrence after the great success of *Aspects of the Novel*: “A sort of nervousness – glancing at my stomach for beginnings of cancer – seems to gather in me.” (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 2, p. 132).

But there were other and more obvious reasons for Forster’s disinclination to pursue a career that many of his readers must have felt had only just got into its stride by 1924. When D.H. Lawrence read *Howards End* in 1915, he wrote to Forster: “It’s a beautiful book, but now you must go further”; but to “go further” was difficult for one whose experience of the world was, as has already been suggested, fairly narrow. Of all literary forms, the novel demands that a writer be *knowledgeable* – be well-informed about, for instance, different kinds of social institutions and different human types. Forster’s range in his novels is relatively narrow, he often repeats himself in the creation of situation and character, and there is a sense in which he simply ran out of things to say; or, perhaps, what he had to say was no longer relevant to a world transformed by the upheavals of World War I. Another consideration is that, by 1924, the novel in England had undergone a transformation that made Forster’s kind of novel seem in some respects distinctly old-fashioned: the early works of Joyce, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and others were helping, in Ezra Pound’s famous phrase, to “make it new.” As Furbank indicates,

Forster was not by temperament or talent an innovator on the grand scale: his novels are closer to Jane Austen and George Eliot than to the Modernists. Very early in his career, he had staked out a fictional territory, distinctively individual, in some respects idiosyncratic, but limited in extent, and he never really went beyond it so that the experiments with and the revolution in the art of fiction left him behind. Both as a writer and as a man, he “matured” very early – or, to put it more accurately, he reached a level of maturity that he did not subsequently proceed very far beyond. As a result, we can hardly talk of “development,” or “apprentice work,” “early,” “middle” and “late” periods, in connection with Forster as we can with, Dickens, Conrad or Lawrence.

For this author, a final reason for Forster’s abandonment of the novel must be added, and that is a growing impatience on Forster’s part with the kind of novel he was expected to write and had shown the ability to write successfully, and a bitter sense of disparity between the novels he had written and the ones he really wanted to write and publish. Forster’s novels, up to and including *Howards End*, belong to a tradition of fiction in which the relationships between men and women, and the rituals of love, courtship and marriage, are of central importance; but his awareness of his own sexual nature made him increasingly indifferent to “the marriage novel.” The other side of the coin, as Furbank reminds us, is that having written a homosexual novel, *Maurice*, he was unable to publish it, and his frustration must have contributed to his disinclination to write fiction.

However, he did not stop writing and the list of his publications during the last forty or fifty years of his life, mainly non-fictional, is a long one. Among them are three travel books, two sparked by his sojourn in Egypt (*Alexandria: A History and A Guide*,

published in 1922 and *Pharso and Pharillon* in 1923) and one about India (*The Hill of Devi*, published in 1953); two biographies, one of G.L. Dickinson (1934) and one of Marianne Thornton (1956); and numerous articles and broadcasts, some of which are collected in two volumes, *Abinger Harvest* (1936) and *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), but many of which remain uncollected. He was much in demand as a reviewer and lecturer: for instance, he gave the Rede Lecture at Cambridge in 1941, published as *Virginia Woolf* (1942), and the W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture at Glasgow in 1944, published as *The Development of English Prose between 1918 and 1939* (1945); both are reprinted in *Two Cheers for Democracy*. In *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, Forster demonstrates not only his versatility, but his knowledge as well when he writes of Cleopatra:

The girl who came to the throne as Cleopatra VI Philopater was only seventeen. Her brother and husband Ptolemy XIV was ten; her younger brother eight, her sister fifteen. The Palace at Alexandria became a nursery, where four clever children watched the duel that was proceeding between Pompey and Caesar beyond the seas. Pompey was their guardian, but they had no illusions, either about him or one another. All they cared for was life and power. Cleopatra failed in her first intrigue, which was directed against her husband. He expelled her, and in her absence the duel was concluded. Pompey, defeated by Caesar, drifted to Egypt, threw himself on the mercy of his wards, and was murdered by their agents as he disembarked. (Forster, *Alexandria*, p. 25)

Though these constitute, as Crews notes, only “footnotes” to Forster’s main achievement as a novelist, they deserve attention, since he had the knack of bringing his personal style and his vision to bear upon every task he undertook, even the reviewing of a third-rate book. In 1925, he reviewed Sir Sidney Lee’s biography of Edward VII, a pious and flat-footed official life. Forster begins uncompromisingly, “This book is dead,” and goes on to demonstrate the author’s “incredible pomposity” by drawing attention to the turgid

style. Forster's deflation of pretentiousness by means of an image, semi-comic but deadly in its appropriateness, is characteristic: quoting a particularly overblown sentence of Lee's, he comments "Such a sentence pops when trodden upon, like seaweed." Finally, although the book is clearly not worth much attention, Forster moves beyond it in this short review to offer reflections on the function of royalty in the modern world and on the nature of responsible biography. The life of the late king, he declares, quietly but devastatingly, is not "of importance to the universe or even to Europe" because he lacked "distinction of spirit." Characteristic, again, is this movement from the specific and the banal to fundamental moral issues, and his unshakable confidence in his possession of the truth. Even in such a brief occasional piece, much of the essential Forster is to be found and it is not too much to say that no one but Forster could have written it in quite that tone and those terms.

Forster's later years were outwardly uneventful, as indeed his earlier years had been, and an account of them can be given quite summarily. When his mother died in 1945, at the age of ninety, he was crushed by the blow, but he remained active and kept his many friendships in good working order, partly by means of a voluminous correspondence. He never employed an agent and instead, dealt with all his own business correspondence, along with his fan-mail, which in his later years was enormous. He was a letter writer on the scale of the great Victorians.

Forster traveled quite widely, revisiting India in 1945, America in 1947 and 1949, and the Continent for holidays even in the last decade of his life. From 1946, having lost his home with his mother's death, he resided at King's College, Cambridge, where, half a century and more after his own undergraduate years, he befriended undergraduates and

became a familiar figure. He was much sought out by visitors to Cambridge, and was, in V.S. Pritchett's phrase, "a kind of wayward holy man" (Pritchett, *Voice*, p. 64) and, as Furbank notes, "an object of pilgrimage, particularly for visiting Indians" (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 2, p. 277). Forster himself wryly noted that "Being an important person is a full time job" (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 2, p. 279), but his fame went beyond that of a writer whose books had become classics in his lifetime. Not only was he, on account of his great age, a survivor from a vanished late-Victorian and Edwardian period that people were beginning to take more and more seriously, but he was venerated as a sage or guru whose convictions, tirelessly enunciated over a long lifetime, were seen as acutely relevant to the nuclear age. When, for example, in a 1957 interview he told the novelist Angus Wilson that the world was divided into sheep and goats, and that the goats were marked by a "failure to live" (Wilson, *Conversation*, 53), this was no more than he had been saying in one way or another for more than half a century, but it was also recognized as relevant to a world of embattled superpowers. Not just fame but wisdom and even a kind of "holiness" (Furbank, *Forster*, p. 309) were part of the Forstering charisma. Furbank sums up the matter well when he writes that the last twenty years of Forster's life were "a period of idolization." And "He had come to be honored for personal goodness and sanctity, to an extent that perhaps few writers have known" (Furbank, *Forster*, p. 309).

More superficial kinds of honor were not absent. Forster declined a knighthood, but accepted the award of higher distinctions, that of a Companion of Honour in 1953 and in 1969 the Order of Merit. Quite late in his life he found a new outlet for his literary activities and a way of putting his writing to the service of his lifelong love of music. In

1951, along with the collaboration of Eric Crozier, he produced a libretto for Benjamin Britten's opera *Billy Budd*, based on Melville's story (Drabble and Stringer, *Forster*). A less public type of literary activity was a return to the short story, with which he had begun his career as a writer so long ago: "The Other Boat," perhaps the finest short story he ever wrote, was written in 1957-8, when he was nearly eighty, although it was not published until it appeared, along with other stories unpublished during his lifetime, in a posthumous volume *The Life to Come* (1972). As has already been discussed, he also took up *Maurice* and did some rewriting at about this time.

Forster died on June 7, 1970, in Coventry at the home of long-time, close friends. Friends had always been of central importance in his life: for him, friendship was not one of the minor amenities of civilized existence but something to be taken with the utmost seriousness, worked at, kept in good repair, and valued intensely and passionately. For Forster, the agnostic bachelor, his friends had the kind of importance that for many men belongs to their wives, their children, or their God. Though he was only a peripheral member of the Bloomsbury Group – he told K.W. Grandsden that he did not regard himself "as belonging or having belonged to Bloomsbury" – he shared their cult of personal relationships, and it is an attitude that permeates almost everything he wrote, fiction and non-fiction alike. Bloomsbury was, of course, very much a product of Cambridge, and it was at King's College in around 1900 that Forster had been converted, once and for all, to a belief in friendship that J.R. Ackerley, in the passage that has been previously quoted, describes as "almost mystical."

In his biography of his Cambridge mentor G.L. Dickinson, Forster describes Dickinson's reactions to his visits to America and China. In the United States, Dickinson

found “So much cordiality, so little intimacy, such gleaming teeth, so little tenderness, so little fusion!” whereas in China, “They understood personal relationships in the sense in which he and Cambridge understood them and America has failed to understand them” (Forster, *Dickinson*, pp. 132, 147). Whether these observations are just as important as the light they throw on Dickinson’s attitudes and his influence on Forster: societies are tested by their capacity for “intimacy” and “tenderness” and their understanding of “personal relationships.” Forster develops the point in one of his best known essays, “What I Believe,” included in *Two Cheers for Democracy*. This personal creed begins, as one might have guessed, with “personal relationships,” of which he writes that they

...are despised today. They are regarded as bourgeois luxuries, as products of a time of fair weather which is now past, and we are urged to get rid of them, and to dedicate ourselves to some movement or cause instead. I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friends, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.

The date of the essay is 1939, which perhaps gives meaning to the reference of dedication “to some movement or cause” given what was about to happen in Europe. The 1930s in England having been dominated by the dazzling talent of W.H. Auden, a fully, indeed diversely, “committed” writer, it also brings home the courageous unconventionality of the second sentence quoted.

Subsequently, however, and subsequent to Forster’s death, the reference to “betraying my country” as the possible price of loyalty to an inner circle of friends has acquired an ominous and quite unforeseen significance in the light of what we now know about the Cambridge educated spies of the interwar generation. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Forster’s reputation as a sage has been on the decline since his death. It is, though, a perfectly familiar phenomenon for a writer who has enjoyed a great following

in his lifetime to suffer a posthumous decline in esteem; and it is probably too early to judge whether the trend will in due course be reversed, as has so often happened in other cases. In any case, a critic ought to distinguish between Forster's status as a public figure or "guru" – that is, the veneration and trust that were felt for him as a guide to thinking on ethical, social and political issues – and his permanent status as a writer. His major books do much to enhance his status as a major writer of the 20th century.

As one can see in *The Longest Journey* and the "Apostles;" *Howards End* and his childhood home at "Rooksnest;" or *A Room With a View* and his travels in Italy, Forster was skillful in using the places and events of his past to develop storylines of unrivalled depth and feeling.

Of his total oeuvre two novels best represent, at least in the mind of this author, Forster's inward reflection and introspection on his own beliefs, values, sexual identity, and his sociological expression of contrasted cultural relations, which are the culmination of his life, theories, art, and personal convictions.

A Passage to India

“Finished *A Passage to India* and mark the fact with Mohammed’s pencil.”

Forster wrote in his diary on January 21, 1924, which was the only entry for that day. A Muslim Egyptian, Mohammed el Adl, was Forster’s biggest influence when he began the last stage of writing the novel in 1922 – and it was also at the time that, unfortunately, Forster’s young friend was dying from tuberculosis (Doll).

Before he had ever met el Adl, Forster had begun working on *Passage* almost a full decade earlier. At the invitation of Forster’s his friend, Syed Ross Masood, an Indian he had known for six years in England, and who he was also in love with. During that trip Forster finally realized that Masood did not share his feelings, and the theme of the novel he began after returning is the difficulty of friendship across racial and cultural divides. It is believed by many Forster scholars that he began this novel as a way of coping with the realization that Masood did not share, and return, the feelings that Forster had for Masood. It was soon, however, that he shelved the embryonic Indian novel to work on a story in which he imagined the kind of homosexual success he had not achieved in life – that novel was *Maurice* (Doll). It was not long after starting *Maurice* that WWI and Forster’s affair with Mohammed el Adl occurred.

When Forster began work again on *A Passage to India* in 1922 he had considerable new experiences to draw on, including a second trip to India in 1921-22. By the time the novel was finished, it was the result of a complex interweaving of Forster’s experiences on his two trips to India, and the transformative years in Alexandria that had come in between. In addition, what contributed to Forster’s final portrayal of a central Indian character were the various literary influences operating throughout the period – the

books he was reading and reviewing. As Leonard Woolf wrote in his June 1924 review of the novel, Aziz was “the only living Indian whom I have met in a book.” (Doll).

In 1915 during World War I, when Forster first arrived in Alexandria, his perceptions about the city and its inhabitants were negative, an attitude that continued well into his second year there. He wrote to Masood (29 Dec. 1915) not long after his arrival:

...I do not like Egypt much – or rather, I do not see it, for Alexandria is cosmopolitan. But what I have seen seems vastly inferior to India, for which I am always longing in the most persistent way, and where I still hope to die. It is only at sunset that Egypt surpasses India—at all other hours it is flat, unromantic, unmysterious, and godless—the soil is mud, the inhabitants are of mud moving, and exasperating in the extreme: I feel as instinctively not at home among them as I feel instinctively at home among Indians. (Lago & Furbank, *Letters*, #152).

Used in his 1915 letter to Masood to disparage Egyptians, and which appears later in *A Passage to India* where it is applied by Forster to the Indian inhabitants of Chandrapore, the image of “mud moving” and its association with Indians actually predates Forster’s stay in Egypt, appearing in the 1913 manuscript drafts. In reality, the image of “mud moving” is employed differently in the manuscripts and the novel; in the novel it is neither disparaging nor is it merely visually descriptive, on the contrary, it implies a cosmic continuity between the earth and the inhabitants on it – a literal figuring of the “for dust thou are, and unto dust shalt thou return” of Genesis or the “earth to earth, ...dust to dust” of the Book of Common Prayer (Doll). The image that Forster applies to Egyptians early in his stay in Egypt as “mud moving” is done so to describe their skin color, and also to indicate – with no empyrean implications – that they are “dirty” (Doll):

Natives, especially of the lower city class, are dirty in body and mind, incapable of fineness, and only out for what they can get. That is the theory to which, after some reluctance, I had fully subscribed, and like all theories it has broken down. (Lago & Furbank, *Letters*, #174).

Forster's attitude towards Alexandria and Egypt changed as his friendship with el Adl began to blossom. He had made a second trip to India by the time he was finishing *A Passage to India*, but most importantly, he had known Mohammed el Adl, who had emerged from the Nile mud as a presence in his life – just as the Punkah Wallah in the courtroom scene stands out as a god among the people who are the moving mud of Chandrapore (Doll). As he wrote in “Shakespeare and Egypt,” an essay he published while he was in Alexandria: “Yet perhaps this mud of Egypt was working in his mind, and but for Egypt would not have been in it.” (Forster, “Shakespeare”).

The process of the writing of *A Passage to India* was well documented; manuscripts exist and have been analyzed and published. It was these two trips to India that provided the foundation for the book, Forster went through the Suez Canal; Egypt was part of his literal passage to India, and it was also to be a part of his philosophical, emotional and his artistic passage. He arrived in India, literally and figuratively, via Egypt (Doll).

We know that Masood's friend, Abu Saeed Mirza provided many details for scenes and settings involving Aziz. It is also clear that Forster originally modeled the main character in *Passage* on Masood, to whom the book is dedicated: and, although he was frustrated in his love for Masood, the friendship opened to Forster a much wider experience of the world, and Masood and his Indian friends were a major inspiration and source for the novel (Doll).

The earlier version of Aziz that was written prior to World War I is clearly based on Masood, who excelled in tennis and was fond of reading French poetry. This Aziz is an educated, middle-class Indian who had been at medical school in Germany, where he enjoyed fencing and riding, and he recites poetry in German. He has also visited England and corresponds with English friends. However, in the final version of *Passage* Aziz is portrayed as poorer and less-Westernized, living in conditions comparable to el Adl's in Egypt, and having many personal qualities drawn from el Adl (Doll).

The central character, the hero, of *A Passage to India*, is Aziz as critics today generally agree. It is made clear that the principal force and theme for the book was Forster's emotional involvement with, first Masood, and later with el Adl as borne-out by the emergence of biographical information after his death, and by the publication of Forster's other homosexual works, *Maurice* and *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (Doll).

However, a strong tradition in Forster studies construes the novel as the story of two English women who confront the "real" India and are profoundly changed; while another English person, Fielding, is often worked into the center, but Aziz always remains in a supporting role. But with the emergence in recent decades of cultural, subordinate, and queer studies, with the insights provided by the critiques of orientalism and colonialism, have all helped many modern readers to realize that the novel is about an Indian whose life is profoundly influenced by his interaction with English colonizers or visitors to his country (Doll).

Unfortunately, it was the former – the story of two English women who confront the "real" India and are profoundly changed – that was told in Director David Lean's

film, *A Passage to India*, and is now perhaps the most widely known version of the work. Ignoring Forster's maxim that "The end is of supreme importance in a book" ("Pessimism in Literature"), Lean discarded the novel's beautifully crafted closing, as well as its extraordinary opening chapter, in order to place Adela Quested's experience at the center of the work. This is aesthetically unfortunate, not to mention that it was a butchering of Forster's meaning, in that both beginning and end are spatial and visual in ways that could have been translated superbly in the film with the resources Lean had available to him (Doll).

A Passage to India was published on 4 June 1924: Forster was forty-five years old and fourteen years had elapsed since the appearance of his previous novel. It was a popular and a critical success: Philip Gardner notes that "It was reviewed more extensively than any of its predecessors, and hardly a dissonant voice marred the equally extensive acclamation" (Gardner, (ed.), *Critical*, p. 21). Five days after publication, Forster reported that "The sales have begun well," and by the end of the year he recorded that it was doing extremely well in America, with sales of "about 30,000 and still going strong" (Page, *Forster*, p. 95). Some whose knowledge of India was more intimate than Forster's were quick to point out inaccuracies: it appears, for instance, that his use of the term "Burra Sahib" is not authentic and, more seriously, that the climactic courtroom scene is flawed by his ignorance of the correct legal procedures.

No doubt the topicality of the novel contributed to its success: the novelist and critic, Rebecca West (1892-1983), significantly described it in a review as a "study of a certain problem of the British Empire" (Page, *Forster*, p. 96). It was not only topical but controversial, and in one of his letters (23 December 1924) Forster refers to the

possibility that it might be banned by the British government as the short-lived Labour government had been replaced by the Conservatives in the previous month (Page, *Forster*, p. 96). In the closing years of the 19th century Kipling had opened up the subcontinent as rich fictional territory hitherto virtually unexplored and unexploited: his immensely popular stories and poems depicting the lives of Anglo-Indians were at once romantic and disturbing, and opened the eyes of readers who had never seen India or to the complexity of its problems. A generation later, the problems had become more rather than less acute: though independence was still twenty years away, political agitation and even rioting indicated the strength of the demand until at last, three years after Forster's novel appeared, the Simon Commission was set up to advise on the need for change.

The British government appointed the commission under Sir John Simon in November 1927. The commission, which had no Indian members, was being sent to investigate India's constitutional problems and make recommendations to the government on the future constitution of India because The Government of India Act of 1919 was essentially transitional in character. Under Section 84 of the Act, a statutory commission was to be appointed at the end of ten years, to determine the next stage in the realization of self-rule in India. The Indian National Congress decided to boycott the Simon Commission and challenged Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, to produce a constitution acceptable to the various elements in India (Archbold, *Outlines*, p.206).

There was a significant split in the Muslim League. Sir Muhammad Shafi, who wanted to cooperate with the commission, decided to convene a Muslim League session in Lahore in December 1927. The other faction led by Jinnah stood for the boycott of the commission. The Jinnah faction held a Muslim League session at Calcutta, and decided

to form a subcommittee to confer with the working committee of the Indian National Congress and other organizations, with a view to draft a constitution for India (Archbold, *Outlines*, p.207).

An important point here is that the situation had already changed significantly in the years between Forster's two visits. Most notably, riots in the Punjab in 1919 had come to a head in the Amritsar massacre, when troops, who had opened fire on an unarmed crowd, killed 379 Indians and wounded over a thousand. It has been argued that the tone of the novel reflects the less troubled India of Forster's first visit rather than the graver situation that had emerged even before the book was completed, and that its treatment of the political and racial situation was, therefore, already dated on the day of publication. Any answer to this criticism must involve an insistence that the novel is not merely, or even mainly, a study of contemporary India that stands or falls by its historical authenticity. Its topicality, like that of some earlier classic novels such as Dickens's *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, is combined with a vision of human life and human nature that transcends specific periods and places. As Forster later pointed out;

...the book is not really about politics, though it is the political aspect of it that caught the general public and made it sell. It's about something wider than politics, about the search of the human race for a more lasting home, about the universe as embodied in the Indian earth and the horror lurking in the Marabar Caves and the release symbolized by the birth of Krishna. (Colmer, *Forster*, p. 156)

Forster goes on to explain that the intention of the novel was "philosophic and poetic" and that for this reason he borrowed his title from a poem by Walt Whitman, the American writer whose major themes include political, spiritual and sexual freedom.

With the possible exception of *The Longest Journey*, no previous novel by Forster could be described as predominantly "philosophic and poetic," and so his claim may

suggest a bold confrontation with new problems and even an attempt to write an entirely different kind of novel – something more closely related to the work of such European masters as Dostoevski and Kafka, or the experimental fiction of André Gide, whom Forster discusses in *Aspects of the Novel*, rather than to the English tradition of sociological and topographical realism. It is as well, therefore, to draw attention to the continuity of Forster's last novel with the rest of his fiction. In turning to India as a setting, he was certainly doing something new, but to a large extent the themes of *Passage* are those of the earlier books. Personal relationships are still his overriding concern, though the arena is now not London or Cambridge or the Home Counties but a teeming subcontinent. Its scope and ambitiousness is suggested by the fact that whereas he had previously presented the conflict between temperaments and systems of values within a single culture – for the contrasts between English and Italians, or the philistines and the enlightened, or the upper-middle and lower-middle classes, all function within a European and mainly an Anglo-Saxon context – he now depicted different races, cultures and creeds existing in a land that is remote from Europe not only in distance but in landscape, architecture and climate. Granted, this canvas is a larger and more complex setting; however, it should be recognized that Forster is still exploring familiar themes.

Structurally, again, *Passage* bears a marked resemblance to some of its predecessors. The three-part division of *The Longest Journey* is used once more, and as in that novel each part is named after a place and each place associated not only with a group of characters but with a way of life and set of values. But here too, the *scale* on which Forster is now operating is much larger. Whereas, for instance, the differences between Cambridge and Sawston are differences within a narrow social and geographical

segment of English society – for, despite their sharply opposed value-systems, the representatives of Cambridge and Sawston are all English, white, protestant and middle class – the contrasts are now among those of different races and religions. In the three parts of *Passage*, “Mosque” emphasizes the Moslem world of Aziz and his friends, “Caves” the British or Anglo-Indian element, and “Temple” the Hindu. These are, of course, only emphases, and the real preoccupation of the book is with the collision among rather than the separate identity of races and religions, but the division draws attention at once to the diversity and complexity of India and its problems.

It is natural to ask how successfully Forster rises to the demands of such a theme, the most ambitious he had ever undertaken. When one turns to the first page of the novel, there is found no loftiness of language, no suggestion that he is striving for a high seriousness which, until this time, had been absent from his art: on the contrary, there is an element of deflation, of playing down any possible glamour and picturesqueness that might seem to belong to the fictitious town of Chandrapore. From the first sentence onwards, “nothing extraordinary,” negatives cluster in the opening paragraph: it is almost as though Forster were reversing, and hence exposing the hollowness of, the too-enthusiastic style of guide-books or passing tourists: “The streets are mean, the temples ineffective...” (Forster, *Passage*, p. 7). There is a characteristic use of the barbed colloquialism in the observation that “the Ganges happens not to be holy here” (Forster, *Passage*, p. 7). And yet it should not be overlooked that this opening is quite different from those of the earlier novels. Forster’s habitual way of beginning is to depict, with minimal preliminaries, a *social* scene often quite trivial or commonplace in itself (the station platform in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the undergraduate discussion in *The*

Longest Journey) but which touches unobtrusively on some of the themes, and introduces some of the characters, of the story. What is exceptional in *Passage* is that mankind is almost absent from the opening chapter, a chapter which concerns itself with the visible scene.

The structure of the short opening chapter of *A Passage to India* has a symmetry that suggests a concern on Forster's part with form and pattern – or, to employ the term he used shortly afterwards in *Aspects of the Novel*, with “rhythm.” Of the chapter's four paragraphs, the first two describe the earth, the last two the sky. (The words “earth” and “sky” are to recur, not accidentally, in the final paragraph of the novel as well.) Between the first two paragraphs there is a further contrast: while the native part of the city, straggling along the rubbish-strewn banks of the river, seems ready to sink into the primeval mud from which it originally emerged (“The very wood seems made of mud, the inhabitants of mud moving...” [p. 7]), the homes of the Eurasians and the civil station occupied by the British stand on higher ground. It is, in other words, a city of sharp geographical divisions that correspond to racial differences. But above them all, as Forster tells us at the end of the second paragraph – and the phrase, thus prominently placed, introduces the contrasting second half of the chapter – is “the overarching sky” (p. 8). In these closing paragraphs Forster's style undergoes a marked change: the somewhat dry, detached, even colloquial tone of the opening gives way to a more poetic use of language (“the stars hang like lamps from the immense vault” [p. 9]); the “rubbish,” “filth” and “mud” of the townscape are replaced by brilliant colors (orange, purple, blue); negatives are replaced by positive assertions (“The sky settles everything....” [p. 9]). Finally, the symmetry of the chapter is completed by its last word,

“caves”, which echoes the first noun of the opening sentence as the caves themselves are later to send forth echoes.

Already Forster has done a good deal, sounding the themes of separation and difference, of the possibility of unity (the “overarching sky” embracing all, like the symbolic rainbow of D.H. Lawrence’s novel only nine years earlier, and recalling the “only connect” of *Howards End*), and stressing, unobtrusively but surely, the presence of the caves that are to be so important in both the action and the symbolic pattern of the novel. If this opening chapter looks at first glance like a “description” or “setting the scene,” this can be only a very superficial impression: it is that, but a great deal more besides, and even apparently casual details form part of a subtle design. For example, the references to the roads in the civil station intersecting “at right angles,” the native quarter of Chandrapore following the course of the river, the “curve” of the earth and the “vault” and “dome” of the sky. Forster is not giving the reader “background” but something much more like the overture to an opera, in which themes and motifs to be developed later are hinted at within a structure that has its own formal design and unity.

In comparison with the openings of Forster’s earlier novels, that of *Passage* has an exceptional seriousness and deliberation: the casualness, almost offhandedness, and the comedy have yielded to an ambitious, even portentous poetic treatment; the characters are no longer confined to the English bourgeoisie but are races, humanity in the mass, and even the earth and the sky; the field of reference is no longer merely social but cosmic. For a parallel one may turn to Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, and like that novel *Passage* moves in its second chapter to the world of human action; but, as with Hardy, the formal and aesthetic point has been made – this is to be a novel in which

structure, pattern and rhythm will count for a good deal. One simple but striking piece of evidence of this concern with shape and form – fictional qualities that were, again, to receive attention in Forster’s 1927 lecture, where, for example, he compares the shape of one of Anatole France’s novels to that of an hourglass – is the placing of the Marabar Caves incident exactly in the middle of the book. The center point of a text traditionally enjoyed special and almost magical status (Crusoe’s discovery of the footprint in the sand in Defoe’s novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, is a famous case in point), and it can hardly be coincidental that Forster has placed this episode, so crucial to theme and plot, in that position. What follows from this emphasis on form and pattern is that the reader must be sensitive to repetitions and parallels – echoes, one might say – and agile in making connections between different parts of the novel, sometimes on the basis of tiny clues. (Furbank & Haskell, “Fiction”, *Paris Review*, p. 40).

If we pause at this point to consider what *kind* of novel Forster has produced in the first part (slightly more than one-third of the whole), it may seem to be little more than a familiar mixture. His characters are almost exclusively middle-class (civil servants, doctors, teachers, ladies of leisure). As for his mode of storytelling, he proceeds by a series of encounters on a variety of social occasions largely narrated through dramatic dialogue: Mrs. Moore meets Aziz, Ronny argues with Adela and his mother, Fielding talks to Aziz, and so forth. The possibilities of different combinations and contrasts are considerable, but the actual number of characters is in fact quite small – no more than half a dozen or so major characters, with a further handful of minor figures. The larger scenes, such as the bridge party in Chapter 5 and Fielding’s tea party in Chapter 7, recall the balls and dinners of a Jane Austen novel; indeed the technique of

Passage seems to have much in common with that of Forster's earlier novels and of a strong tradition in 19th century realistic fiction.

To suggest this, and to argue that Forster is after all doing nothing very new, is, however, to overlook some important elements. One is the scale and complexity of the novel's fictional world. Jane Austen had in a famous phrase recommended "three or four families in a country village" as sufficient material for the novelist, and George Eliot in her finest novel, *Middlemarch*, had limited her attention to a single Midlands town, but Forster's character groups straddle continents, races and religions. The collisions, misunderstandings and struggles for friendship and love are now not, or not only, between classes and temperaments but between larger and even more radically divided societies whose members have different customs and values, enjoy different political status, and literally speak different languages.

There is an unobtrusive but significant exchange in Chapter 7 when, responding to Adela's announcement that she hates mysteries, Mrs. Moore tells her that she herself likes mysteries but dislikes muddles. Adela's blithe and typically shallow insistence that they are the same thing does not carry conviction. "Muddle" is one of Forster's favorite words, and his plots and incidents often turn upon "muddles." But with a few isolated exceptions – Gino bathing the baby in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, some passages (especially those concerned with Stephen) in *The Longest Journey*, the description of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in *Howards End* – there is not a great deal of "mystery" in Forster's previous novels. The short stories are another matter, though the "mystery" there is often of a decidedly arch and factitious kind and is allied with the supernatural and the mythological.

In *Passage*, “mystery” occupies the heart of the novel, and Forster’s assurance that he understands and can explain both what people do and what they ought to do deserts him at crucial moments. India may be, as he says, “a muddle” and this is depicted in his familiar ironic manner, but it is also a *mystery*, and the presence of something transcending social relationships is signaled by the short but potent first and tenth chapters. In a limited sense, it is true; *Passage* is, like *Howards End* or *Pride and Prejudice*, a “marriage novel,” and the question whether Adela will after all marry Ronny is part of the plot interest; but such issues pale into significance beneath the overarching sky and the burning sun of whose presence the reader is made aware. *Passage* is a novel about love, but ultimately the kind of love that finds fulfillment in the institution of marriage is seen to be trivial in relation to the possibility of a deep and abiding relationship between the members of different races, and of love – or the absence of it – as a guiding principle of the universe. The only marriage of true minds that really interests Forster in this novel is the one that is seen as possible, though it remains unfulfilled at the end, between Aziz and Fielding.

Not surprisingly, part of Forster’s reaction to India had been a social reaction: with such a keen observer it could hardly have been otherwise, and his notations began before he ever set foot there, for in a letter written on his way out in October 1912 he is already registering his reaction to Anglo-Indians in terms crude and undeveloped in themselves but not fundamentally different from those of the novel: “The women are pretty rotten, & vile on the native question: their husbands better” (Lago and Furbank, *Letters I*, p. 140). But when he came to write the novel he placed the analysis and criticism of a society within a larger framework that it is not unduly pretentious to

describe as philosophical or metaphysical. Without quitting the English tradition of realism and even of social satire and domestic comedy, Forster moves in his last novel beyond that tradition to examine, as Dostoevski and Kafka do, the nature of man and of the universe.

In stressing the novel's larger scope, however, we ought not to play down the complexity and effectiveness of its social aspects. Forster depicts and develops an unprecedentedly wide range of relationships in which the variables are race, color, political status and religion as well as class, sex, occupation, marital status, temperament and values. The most important contrasting groups, British and Indian, quickly subdivide: the British include Anglo-Indians or those who have made their lives and careers in the country (Heaslop, Fielding, Callender), and those who, like Mrs. Moore, see it as outsiders and Adela, is a member of the second category who must decide whether she wants to join the first. The Indians include Muslims (Aziz and his friends) and Hindus (Godbole). But the most significant members of the groups are those who wish to cross the lines of division, especially the central quartet of Adela, Mrs. Moore, Fielding and Aziz. These make their not always consistent efforts to break down barriers against a background of those, both British and Indian, who believe that the two races can never come together in friendship. As the novel proceeds, the real possibility of contact comes to be restricted to the relationship between Aziz and Fielding – a symptom, perhaps, of Forster's limited capacity to deal at all adequately with women characters, and indeed his lack of interest in attempting to do so.

Maurice

“...[not] *until my death or England’s.*”

– E.M. Forster, June, 1914

A Passage to India, plus the four other novels (*Howards End*, *A Room With a View*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *The Longest Journey*), which have briefly been discussed, constitute the main body of Forster’s achievement but by no means the whole of it. To these central texts, which have long enjoyed classic status, must be added a sixth novel, a number of short stories and a considerable quantity of non-fictional writing in both longer and shorter forms, including biographies, travel books, a volume of criticism, an opera libretto, and a mass of journalism and occasional pieces – essays, broadcasts, reviews, lectures and the like – some of which is collected in two posthumous volumes but much remains uncollected. Considerations of “major” and “minor” inevitably arise; some readers, indeed, would wish to divide the five novels into two groups, with *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* as “major” works and the others as “minor” or “lesser.” There is certainly a sense in which Forster’s “condition of England” novel and his exploration, both realistic and symbolic, of interracial relationships are more ambitious novels than their predecessors, though it goes without saying that the scale and program of a work are not necessarily related to its artistic success.

It is one of Forster’s characteristics that in the course of even some quite trivial, small scale piece – a review of a bad book or a popular radio broadcast – his tone can suddenly deepen and some of his most passionately held principles be invoked. Like the Christian belief that judges every act, however commonplace, in the light of eternity, Forster’s humanism constantly refers small issues to his basic moral and ethical

convictions, though strictly speaking there are no such things as small issues. His practice constantly exemplifies the general truth enunciated by the great Victorian humanist, George Eliot, when she wrote in *Middlemarch* that it is by “these acts called trivialities” that human destinies are determined (Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 462).

It follows then, from this deep well where even trivial things could invoke Forster’s passionately held convictions, that the distinction between major and minor writings is a somewhat artificial one, since a piece of journalism may touch on issues as momentous as a full-length novel: Forster’s ideas and ideals do not go off duty when the literary occasion is a relatively unimportant one. But artistic success is, of course, another matter, and here discriminations are in order.

Forster’s novel *Maurice* appeared in October 1971, sixteen months after his death, but its origins go back some sixty years. After the publication and notable success of *Howards End* in 1910, Forster seems to have experienced great difficulty in writing another novel and to have made more than one false start. (The fragmentary *Arctic Summer*, for instance, belongs to the spring of 1914.) But in a three-month period in late 1913, he wrote the first draft of the short novel that became *Maurice*.

In June, 1914 Forster told his friend, Florence Barger, that he had completed the novel, though it could not be published “until my death or England’s.” (Furbank, *Forster*, vol. 1, p. 259). He revised it during the first half of the following year, and returned to his manuscript intermittently over the next half-century. Substantial revisions seem to have been made as late as 1960, at which time Forster wrote on the cover the words “Publishable – but worth it?” (Page, *Forster*, p. 118). Long before this date, the book had been read by various friends, but it became “publishable” only towards the end of

Forster's lifetime, after the recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee (1957) led to reforms in the laws relating to homosexual behavior, thus both reflecting and promoting a changed climate of opinion, and the Obscene Publications Act (1959) liberalized what had effectively been a situation of unofficial censorship that extended to serious works of literature. It is important to remember that *Maurice* was written, and restricted to private circulation for several decades, in a context of social and legal intolerance of the homosexual relationships that are its subject.

When it did appear, many readers were disappointed and typical critical verdicts were "ill-written," "deeply embarrassing" and "deeply flawed." On October 7, 1971, literary critic for London's *Daily Telegraph*, Walter Allen, shrewdly commented that it suffers from "over-concentration on a single issue." (Gardner, (ed.), *Heritage*, p. 438). Related to this vague reference is the marked contrast in texture with Forster's other fiction: whereas his other novels are by turns wittily ironic and socially observant, richly symbolic and even (especially in *The Longest Journey*) romantic to the point of lushness, some have said that *Maurice* is spare, restrained, laconic, somewhat dry and even banal in places. It is a short novel, but contains a large number (46) of mainly very short chapters, some of them of less than a page; it works through brief episodes and the dialogue is at times almost telegraphic. Lytton Strachey, who read the manuscript and commented perceptively on it in a letter to Forster, dated 12 March, 1915, described one passage as "staccato" in style. (Gardner, (ed.), *Heritage*, p. 430). The number of major characters is restricted to three, of whom one does not appear until two-thirds of the way through the book. Surprisingly and most uncharacteristically, it is without humor.

In the view of this author, *Maurice* is more touching and sympathetic in that it deals with issues that Forster would have had to deal with himself; because of his own homosexuality and while it may not be in the strictest sense of the term, “autobiographical,” it is certainly a “window” into the mind and feelings of the one who wrote it and into the times in which he lived as a young man.

Maurice is the work of an experienced novelist and we are left with the choice of regarding it as an experiment that misfired or of supposing that Forster knew exactly what he was about: that the flatness, the avoidance of eloquence and color, proceeds from a deliberate attempt to play down the sensationalism inherent in the theme, to presenting the situation as if it were ordinary; to show ordinary people in ordinary lives who wanted ordinary things – to let it speak for itself. If the alternative was rhetoric, sentimentality and overt propagandizing, the decision may after all have been a wise one; but there may, of course, have been other alternatives that Forster lacked the vision or the courage to contemplate.

Forster set himself a difficult problem at the outset by presenting a hero who is, as the reader learns on the first page, “not in any way remarkable.” Maurice Hall is uniformly commonplace: athletic, handsome, inarticulate, a successful businessman, he seems at first to belong, like Gerald in *The Longest Journey*, to the large tribe of insensitive middle-class English philistines. What makes him interesting is his homosexuality, and Forster seems to have tried to avoid the charge of special pleading by creating a protagonist as different from himself as possible in all respects save one. From his public school, where it is necessary to be “cruel and rude” in order to survive (qualities that Forster must have observed and suffered from though hardly emulated, at

Tonbridge), Maurice proceeds to Cambridge and there comes under the influence of Greek culture and thought, with its ideals of tolerance and sexual freedom, and is introduced to Plato's *Symposium* by a new friend, Clive Durham, who falls in love with him and persuades him to abandon the religious beliefs, conventional rather than fervent, in which he has been brought up.

In his "Terminal Note," dated September 1960 and of great interest for its account of the creative origins of this novel, Forster says that "Clive is Cambridge." (Page, *Forster*, p. 120). Clearly, too, there are elements of self-portraiture in this character and it is notable that these elements have been displaced from the central character, where one might more naturally expect to find them, to a secondary figure.

Clive's love, however, is romantic and idealistic in nature; it is the taller, stronger and more athletic Maurice who desires physical fulfillment. As the narrator puts such desires in Chapter 15: "he was too young to detect the triviality of contact for contact's sake," and the "love scene" in the following chapter is spiritual rather than physical. In a novel intended to strike a blow for the legitimacy of homosexual relationships, this renunciation of the flesh seems curiously self-denying and perhaps represents a failure of nerve on Forster's part, or it may truly represent what Forster idealized in a homosexual relationship.

Part Two repeats some of the earlier narrative, this time from the point of view of Clive. Guilt-ridden by his sexual desires, he is liberated by reading Plato, but derives from the *Phaedrus* not a license to *act* spontaneously but a freedom to idealize homosexual love. After leaving Cambridge, the two friends enjoy an "affectionate and consistent" relationship (Chapter 18) for a time, but by the end of Part Two, in an unusual

form of the “conversion” motif favored by Forster, Clive has turned to heterosexuality and later marries. It is now Maurice’s turn to discover his own nature – a slow process – and one that takes him in a different direction from Clive, since Maurice’s nature is physical rather than idealistic. His upbringing, of course, has conditioned him to be ashamed of “lust,” and the last third of the book traces the re-education of his heart – another favorite Forsterian theme, and a traditionally dominant one in the English novel – “the flesh educating the spirit.” This is brought about by his love for Alec Scudder, a gamekeeper. Alec’s occupation associates him with the outdoors and the natural world, and he provides a liberating contrast to the indoor world of Maurice’s friends and his own social class: when he first sees Alec, Maurice is leaning out of a window and finds himself “star [ing] straight into the bright brown eyes of a young man” (Forster, *Maurice*, p.179) standing outside; in the next Chapter (37), Maurice meets Alec twice in a garden, and the episodes contain many un-insistent and effective symbolic touches and details at once realistic and suggestive. For example, Maurice’s formal dress, Alec’s corduroys; the pollen of evening primroses that powders Maurice’s hair and leads a fellow guest to describe him, with unconscious accuracy, as “bacchanalian” (Forster, *Maurice*, p.188).

The class difference between Maurice and Alec is, strictly speaking, irrelevant but interestingly people like Forster and Auden found working class lovers more congenial. If Maurice’s task is to find himself through a full recognition of his own nature and a wholly satisfying relationship, no reason exists why this should not be accomplished through a man of his own class. But for Forster, as for more outspoken campaigners of his generation such as Edward Carpenter, the sexual and the socio-political issues are closely related. (Carpenter, who has been referred to before, was a socialist intellectual

who lived with a young man of the working class; his influence on Forster, who stated on one occasion that Carpenter “preferred the working classes to his own” (Ould (ed.), *Expression*, p. 13), was considerable.) The two kinds of emancipation, while not necessarily interdependent, have the effect of reinforcing each other and strengthen the defiance of conventional prejudices. Also, perhaps, Forster found it easier to shed the bonds that tied him to the manners and outlook of his own class with someone from a different class – or at least to imagine doing so – in that, early and late in life, his own intense relationships tended to be with those who were outside his own class, or foreigners, or both.

Yet another factor is involved, moreover, for Alec is not only a member of the lower class, he also represents a pre-industrial and anti-urban way of life. Again, there seems to be no necessary connection, in a philosophical sense, between these elements; Maurice’s friend might plausibly have been a factory worker. But Forster seems intent upon linking ideas that do not inevitably exist in conjunction with each other: the homosexual’s search for a permanent relationship and a way of life; the flight from contemporary society, the mechanized world and the city where Maurice turns to the “greenwood” and exchanges stock brokering for manual labor; and the breaking down of class barriers. Lytton Strachey told Forster that “the Class question” was in his view “rather a red herring” (Gardner, (ed.), *Heritage*, p. 430), and the present day reader may well be troubled by similar doubts.

Maurice has two endings. The original one affords a glimpse into the future and depicts a chance meeting in Yorkshire between a minor character and two woodsmen, with the implication of an enduring relationship. This may have seemed to Forster, on

later reflection, sentimental and facile; at any rate he substituted an ending which does not look to the future and promises no permanence in the relationship between Maurice and Alec, but allows Maurice to speak with unprecedented eloquence to Clive, who is shown as trapped in a dull marriage, about his love for Alec, and to bid farewell to the life he is quitting. Like much else in the novel, this ending divided Forster's critics; again it has to be said that the case has been weakened by those who look more closely at the story. Clive's marriage, for example, can hardly be taken as an indictment of all marriages – a marriage in all but the most literal sense that is in question between Maurice and Alec.

Maurice is an Edwardian novel published in the late twentieth century, and inevitably the “period” quality makes itself felt in the social world inhabited by the character: Maurice's Cambridge, to take an obvious example, is very much the Cambridge of Forster's own undergraduate years, and the young men speak a class dialect that sometimes has a flavor as archaic as that of 19th century English when compared to the English of today. Nor is the boldness of theme matched by a boldness of language: Forster ventures upon no linguistic experiments of the kind that made that other novel about an escape to the greenwood, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, notorious but observes a scrupulous decorum and uses no word that might bring a blush to the cheek of an Edwardian housemaster (masturbation, for example, is coyly referred to as “the practices he had abandoned as a boy” and “acts [bringing] more fatigue than pleasure”). Sexual acts remain shadowy and unconvincing; and Forster must be judged as having failed to devise a language appropriate to his subject matter. This failure is symptomatic of the novel as a whole, which is more courageous in conception

than in execution. *Maurice* is inevitably of great interest to the student of Forster but only a limited success as a work of fiction simply because, when Forster wrote *Maurice*, there really were no models from which he could learn. Hence, he had to proceed totally on his own.

Conclusion

Forster's contribution to the tradition of the novel was not that of a great innovator or experimentalist: his most ambitious novel, *A Passage to India*, belongs to the same decade as *Women in Love*, *Ulysses* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, but is more traditional than any of these. In many respects he is closer to the great 19th century novelists than to the most historically significant of his own contemporaries, although he was certainly not unaware or unappreciative of what the latter were doing. He was, for instance, one of Lawrence's earliest defenders. It should not be supposed, however, that he merely galvanized a nearly dead form into temporarily renewed activity: the tradition that he helped to revitalize and perpetuate is one that continued throughout the 20th century alongside the more institutionally celebrated traditions of modernism and post-modernism, and later novelists such as Christopher Isherwood and Angus Wilson have made no secret of their debt to Forster.

Forster said that he learned from Jane Austen "the possibilities of domestic humour" (Furbank and Haskell, *Art*, p. 39), but important though this confession is, it acknowledges only a part of the legacy he inherited from his 19th century predecessors. In his exploration of limited social and personal themes and settings as paradigms to suggest universal moral and ethical problems, and in his unblushing use of the narrator as preacher and mentor, he is closer to George Eliot than to such contemporaries as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Like Eliot, he is not concerned only with the novel as aesthetic object, game or technical problem, but regards it as his Evangelical forbears might have regarded a sermon or a serious essay, as a way of making the world a better place.

At the same time, he was a born novelist in his fascination with individuality, with the quirks and oddities, whether lovable or deplorable, or simply viewed as objects of anthropological curiosity, of human beings regarded not in the mass but one at a time. This characteristic is an interest in “message” rather than “medium” and his contribution to the technique of the novel was not of first-rate importance. His experiments with symbolism and narrative method, for example, though they are important elements in any reading of his work, are not on the scale of such contemporaries as Conrad or Ford Madox Ford. He is, however, a writer remarkable for the distinctiveness and power of his vision and voice; without cultivating (except occasionally, and sometimes disastrously) a willful eccentricity of style, he wrote a prose that is unmistakable even in small quantities: he is one of those writers whom, as one reads them, one can nearly always *hear* – a living voice, flexible, responsive and considering, behind the rigidities of the printed text.

When most Edwardian fiction is virtually unreadable and deservedly forgotten, his novels retain a remarkable freshness even after many re-readings, and new generations of readers, for whom the social world of which he wrote is almost as remote as that of the Victorians or even the Augustans, respond with pleasure to his wit and irony. In his alliance of comedy and satire with the realistic tradition and with consistent moral seriousness, Forster stands almost alone among the major novelists of the 20th century.

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