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"ALL VISTAS CLOSE IN THE UNSEEN"
A STUDY OF THE TRANSCENDENT IN THE FICTION OF
E. M. FORSTER

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To Alice

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A NOTE ON PRESENTATION

In quoting from Forster's works I have, wherever possible, used both the Abinger and the latest Pengiun editions. The Abinger Edition of E.M.Forster, edited by Oliver Stallybrass and Elizabeth Heine, is generally regarded as the standard text; the Penguin edition (often reset and reprinted from the Abinger edition) is the most readily accessible. In cases where I have not done so the work is either not available in one or both of these editions, or I have not been able to obtain a copy of it in South Africa. In providing page references in the text, the abbreviations A. and P. have been used for Abinger and Penguin respectively.

In matters of presentation I have in general adopted the conventions prescribed in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (New York: Modern Language Association, 1979).

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

It has become something of a commonplace among critics to remark Forster's relative lack of success in offering an alternative to the world which he satirises with such wit and humour.[1] His comic treatment of the suburban absurdities of the Edwardian Englishman is, on the whole, far more compelling and memorable than the often vague, symbolic gestures by means of which he implies the possibility of something better. With the exception of his last and greatest novel, A Passage to India, his "alternatives" are largely factitious and contrived. Worse, the reader senses a fundamental uncertainty on the part of the author: his characteristic ambivalence — in itself an indication of a perceptive and discriminating mind — all too often suggests lack of conviction rather than an intelligent awareness of the infinitude of human possibilities.

In dealing with Forster's "alternative world" many critics have tended to emphasise his humanism. In the first major critical study, one which had the effect of awakening public and academic interest in Forster as a serious writer, Lionel Trilling said of him that he "is content with the human possibility and content with its limitations".[2] Himself a renowned liberal humanist, Trilling had recognised in Forster a writer in the same tradition, one who believed in and portrayed the human values of individualism, freedom and love.

Valid though Trilling's generalisation is with regard to one aspect of Forster's vision, it ignores that element in his writing which his Bloomsbury friends had immediately perceived and generally condemned: what we might somewhat crudely call his "mysticism".

Quentin Bell, in his study, Bloomsbury, places Forster on the outer fringes of the group, and suggests that, however much he might have shared its ethical beliefs, he differed from most of its members in his awareness of "the dark, irrational side of life". Bell writes:

> Where Forster differs from his friends and is not, to my mind, altogether Bloomsbury, is in his essentially reverent and optimistic attitude. His reverence is, to be sure,

> evasive and half veiled. But is is there all right, in the woods of Hertfordshire or the caves of Marabar; there is something that escapes his reasoning and I can just imagine him buying a rather small dim candle to burn before the altar of some rather unpopular saint — something that Lytton Strachey, for instance, could never have done.[3]

While Bell's analysis of Forster's optimism might need some qualification, he is clearly correct in seeing him in such semi-religious terms.

It is this aspect of Forster that other critics have noted. Thus Frederick Crews calls Forster an agnostic, but adds that "his agnosticism is complicated by romantic evasions, by what we might call a thwarted fascination with the Absolute".[4] Forster, he says, "has a theological preoccupation without a theology to satisfy it".[5]

Malcolm Bradbury takes the idea up again, showing the complication in a rather more positive light. In his Introduction to a collection of essays on Forster he makes an important qualification to the kind of view held by Trilling. He writes:

> When we call him a liberal humanist, then, we must be aware of his impulse to mysticism, on the one hand, and his sense of the difficulties of liberalism and openness of view on the other. He is prepared to assert a reconciling, enlarging, invisible quality in the "unseen", and thus to challenge his classical rationalism....[6]

In the same collection of essays, H.A. Smith distinguishes between the "two voices" Forster uses to oppose the language and values of Sawston:

> At the risk of some simplification, the one voice may be summed up in the terms applied to Mrs Wilcox, "instinctive wisdom", and the other in terms used to describe Fielding's attitude: "good will plus culture and intelligence".[7]

Waggoner takes such insights to a point where he can claim for Forster "an essentially religious view of life". His novels "suggest the seed of perspectives that will carry us beyond convention, beyond personal and individual instincts, desires and ideas, beyond worldliness and subjectivity". Such a world view Waggoner defines as Forster's "mystical naturalism" and says of it that it "emerges only as a totality of meaning, — complex, concrete, incapable of simple abstract statement. It emerges from the exercises in perspective that dominate the novels".[8]

Such critical generalisations — and one might without much difficulty cite many other examples — find some confirmation in the author's

own comments. Forster, as a commentator on his own work, is notoriously elusive: two letters to his friend, Malcolm Darling, in India, do, however, provide us with an insight both into the difficulty of his attempt to create an alternative system in his novels, and also into that ambivalence on which the critics mentioned above have remarked. In one dated 12 December 1908, he responds to what was apparently Darling's appreciation of A Room with a View. Forster writes:

> I am so glad that you see I'm not a cynical beast. Not that you've suggested I was, but information to the contrary is extraordinarily difficult for me to convey. I can't write down 'I care about love, beauty, liberty, affection, and truth' though I should like to.[9]

A later letter (10 February 1910) is remarkable for its hint of the conflict in Forster's mind over the rival claims of humanism and a transcendent mysticism. In a previous letter Darling had evidently provided an account of a yogi he had encountered in India. Forster responds with the question he asks in The Longest Journey and Howards End, but at the same time anticipating something of the metaphysical dilemma that pervades A Passage to India:

> The yogi must have been wonderful. I expect that to you two such an attitude seems steadily beautiful. Or do you have your moments of repulsion and think 'What shall it profit a man to gain his own soul, if he lose the whole world?' It is curious how one's little feelings are connected with the immense past, for I am sure that the repulsion of which I speak is our heritage from Graeco-Roman civilisation. Logically, the yogi must be right. Wealth, success, friendship, love, are all one illusion, and reality, (whatever it may be) is obscured by them. But in practice one shrinks from this conclusion. The Western world, and in particular the Latin races, have too vivid a sense of surface-values.[10]

The letter, with its evidence of such contradictory impulses, also points to a stage in Forster's development as man and novelist. It is this development, as far as it affects the mystical element in his writing, that I wish to examine now.

Forster remained an agnostic to the end,[11] having, according to Norman Pittenger, "all the Christian virtues excepting faith".[12] In the years from the publication of his last novel in 1924 until his death in 1970, he continued to assert, albeit with decreasing vigour,[13] his belief in personal relations and in the value of art to humanity trapped in an alien, godless universe. Yet, as we have noted, there is in his fictional writing an element that eludes this commonsense, humanist approach: that

hint of mysticism, a suggestion of an "unseen" world attendant on the "seen" phenomena of daily life; an attempt to find a supernatural order and meaning in an otherwise chaotic universe. It is a tendency expressed with increasing urgency as Forster's career as novelist progressed, culminating in the profound longing for the Absolute which pervades A Passage to India. That this ongoing search reflects Forster's own development seems evident from the close relationship that usually existed between his personal experiences and his fiction. As David Shusterman maintains, "Forster was using his fiction, at least in part, as a means of self-discovery, of self-formulation".[14] In the case of A Passage to India this is especially apparent, the years 1910-1924 having been a period of profound, often traumatic transition in his life — as indeed they were for Western civilisation generally.

The influences acting upon the young Forster, prompting him to adopt his "mystical" view of life are difficult to determine with any exactitude. Several shaping forces do, however, stand out, suggesting the way in which his unique vision was formulated and expanded.

Samuel Hynes in The Edwardian Turn of Mind has shown how a religious or pseudo-religious preoccupation was typical of many Edwardian writers. Their works, he maintains,

> may be taken, in their various ways, as expressions of religious instincts detached from the forms and dogma of established religion. After the social realism of the Victorians, from Dickens to George Moore, Edwardian novelists (some of them, at any rate) turned toward the mysterious and the unseen, just as the psychic researchers turned from the natural sciences to spiritualism: what William James called 'the will to believe' was very much in the air.[15]

Richard Ellmann echoes this view when he writes:

> The Edwardian writer granted that the world was secular, but saw no reason to add that it was irrational or meaningless. A kind of inner belief pervades their writings, that the transcendent is immanent in the earthly, that to go down far enough is to go up.[16]

It was within this milieu of interest in a secularised spirituality — one which is deftly suggested in the Schlegel sisters' somewhat sceptical interests in theosophy[17] — that Forster was writing.

One of his more specific influences is suggested in another comment by Ellmann. He writes:

> The Edwardians were looking for ways to express their conviction that we can be religious about life itself, and they naturally adopted metaphors offered by the religion they knew best.[18]

— that religion being, of course, Christianity. The Edwardian intellectual had on the whole rejected traditional Christian teaching yet, Ellmann suggests, felt at liberty to employ it as a source of religious metaphor.

Biblical diction and imagery permeate Forster's writing, providing him with both metaphors and a point of departure for the expression of his own spiritual vision.[19] Even though he personally renounced his adherence to the faith while an undergraduate at Cambridge, Christianity clearly played an important role in the formulation of Forster's thinking. As Cavaliero remarks:

> Common to all his fiction is the theme of revelation, calling, judgement, salvation: although himself an unbeliever, Forster still worked in the psychological framework of the Christian myth.[20]

In this respect Forster's heritage as a descendant of the Thornton members of the early nineteenth century Clapham Sect is relevant.[21] His moral earnestness, his tendency to divide his characters into the saved and the damned,[22] his ability to invest incidents with spiritual significance — all these suggest the debt that Forster must owe to the piety of his Thornton ancestors, in spite of his comments on the Laodicean quality of his own religious education.[23]

One of Forster's borrowings from Christianity deserves particular attention: the concept of salvation. In an address given to the Cambridge Humanists in 1959, Forster looked back on an ideal that by then no longer interested him much. On the subject of salvation he said:

> I used to be very keen on this and it figures in most of my early short stories, and a little in my novels up to _A Passage to India_, from which it has almost disappeared. It has now disappeared from my thoughts, like other absolutes. I no longer wish to save or be saved, and here is another barrier that has interposed between myself and revealed religion whether Christian or Pagan. Nor do I wish to escape; how can one escape from a universe that is said to expand?[24]

Certainly, the idea of salvation figures in Forster's fiction, perhaps more largely and with greater urgency than he admits here. Forster's "saved" are an elect who live an authentic life, free from the sham and convention of Sawston, that symbolic home of the English middle-

classes and their undeveloped hearts. This, at least, is clearly the case in the earlier novels where salvation can only be gained by those who, either through experience or character, manage to escape their Sawstonian existence and recognise the superiority of Forster's alternative world, where "telegrams and anger" give way to personal relations, the life of the spirit and freedom. In Howards End and A Passage to India, however, Forster attempts, ostensibly at least, to envisage salvation by inclusion rather than by exclusion, through an acknowledgement of the claims of the previously unredeemed. Yet there remains in all his writing the sense of a spiritual aristocracy, such as he later speaks of in "What I believe".[25]

But such terminology did not only reach Forster through Christianity. In his semi-autobiographical novel, The Longest Journey, the main character, Rickie Elliot, says to his fellow undergraduate, Ansell, "I'm certain one ought to be polite, even to people who aren't saved". The narrator then remarks in parenthesis that this "was a phrase they applied just then to those whom they did not like nor intimately know" (The Longest Journey,P.21). Despite this somewhat dismissive tone, the allusion is a slyly nostalgic attempt on Forster's part to recapture a particular intellectual milieu to which he had himself once belonged. The Cambridge of Rickie Ansell is in essence the university that Forster had known as an undergraduate at King's College. There, as a member of the Apostles, he had experienced the same sense of friendship and intimacy that he depicts in the novel. The language employed by the Apostles was of the same kind as Rickie's, with its witty use of metaphysics. As Furbank explains:

> In its own jargon, borrowed from Kant and the German metaphysicians, 'reality' existed solely within the Society, the rest of mankind being merely 'phenomena' living in 'the world of appearances'.[26]

Although Forster himself would have never consciously subscribed to the kind of preciosity that this suggests, it is known that he, like his character, Rickie, had experienced a feeling of release on entering the "spacious halls of youth" of Cambridge (The Longest Journey, P.10). The sense of a privileged, elite group, united by the bonds of affection and sensitivity, that it gave him, was one that remained. It permeates his fiction, where he gives it the same metaphysical dimensions of salvation and reality as the Apostles applied to themselves.

Cambridge, in fact, would have generally contributed to giving Forster a peculiarly mystic slant to any feelings he might entertain.

Crews, referring to the discrepancies between Forster's empiricist scepticism and those affirmations in his writing "that are virtually religious",[27] points to the intellectual climate of Cambridge in those years as a formative influence on Forster. He writes of "the Cambridge of Dickinson and Moore, with its own vital contradictions between idealism and empiricism, collectivism and individualism, religiosity and common sense".[28]

Forster has himself acknowledged his debt to "the general spirit of questioning that is associated with the name of G.E. Moore".[29] He never read Principia Ethica, that handbook of Bloomsbury ethics, but it "came to me at a remove, through those who knew the Master".[30] And clearly, Moore's idealist philosophy with its platonic pursuit of the good, the true and the beautiful, is one that left its mark on Forster's thinking, as more obviously did his advocacy of personal relations and the contemplation of beautiful objects as the means of achieving the good.

The influence of Dickinson is more easily discernible, if only through the biography that Forster wrote of his friend and one-time mentor.[31] In his own autobiography, Dickinson comments on the change that took place within himself during the late 1880s:

> The principal change that was taking place in me was that I was shifting the centre of interest from a supposed perfect and mystic world behind Appearance (that is, behind the world we really know) to a possible perfection in this world, in a temporal future. But this shift took place slowly and confusedly.[32]

Of this change Forster later commented in Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson that "indeed this period in his life may be labelled 'from mysticism to politics', though such labels are rather misleading, for his mysticism always remained in his heart, folded up like a flower before the heat and brightness of a new day".[33]

The opposition suggested here is, in fact, one that might equally apply to Forster himself; and many critics have pointed to the way in which Dickinson's romantic, somewhat effete mysticism had its effect on the younger man. As Wilfred Stone comments, "Dickinson's religion was essentially an attempt to join body and soul in idea, but to avoid anything but the most exquisite contact in reality".[34] A similar fastidious drawing back from confrontation with the material world characterises Forster — even when he seems to be at closest grips with it.

Forster himself seemed to believe that he learnt little from

Dickinson's mystic tendencies, however much he echoed his sentiments on personal relations and the love of humanity. In Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson he mentions Dickinson's love for Shelley, Plato and Goethe, adding that they were writers with whom he personally had little sympathy.[35] Yet, as J.B. Beer has observed, Forster's writing often has strong platonic overtones and there are frequent references to Shelley in it.[36] Both suggest a dimension to Forster that differentiates him from the rationality and scepticism of his Bloomsbury peers: that ability to entertain the mysterious and the supernatural — as Dickinson was able to. Stone, commenting on the two main kinds of influence acting on Forster, says in conclusion:

> Forster is just as serious as Dickinson; he shares most of his ideas and ideals, but he brings to Dickinson's program a different style, one touched with gaiety, astringency and irony. The style belongs to Bloomsbury, the ideas and ideals to pre-Bloomsbury, and Forster mediates between the two.[37]

It is perhaps appropriate that another factor influencing Forster's mystic tendencies should be mentioned at this stage, as an addendum to the part played by Dickinson. Forster, like Dickinson, was homosexual and in both men's cases it is not difficult to guess that they turned to mysticism as a subconscious compensation for the frustrations they suffered in a society unsympathetic to their sexual needs. Norman Pittenger has suggested that Forster's rejection of Christianity was in part due to its uncompromising stand on homosexuality.[38] Since his rejection of Christian teaching and his acceptance of his homosexuality were the two grand discoveries of his youth,[39] such a connection seems plausible. Yet it seems equally likely that the difficulties in his position as a sexual outcast should have prompted a corresponding desire for a preternatural, transcending reality that overrides the limitations of human prejudice.[40]

But whatever the influences acting upon Forster, directing him towards his particular vision of an unseen world lying beyond the seen, that vision clearly answered — or rather attempted to — a pressing need. This was Forster's sense of the essentially arbitrary nature of the universe, its chaotic and meaningless appearance. His mysticism — a vision of an ordered, meaningful, coherent universe — provided a response to what he, with characteristic understatement, called "muddle".

In later years Forster turned increasingly to art to find that order. Art is "the one orderly product which our muddling race has

produced", he says in an address given in 1949.[41] In arriving at this conclusion he suggests that there are only two possibilities for finding order in the universe. The first is "the divine order, the mystic harmony, which according to all religions is available for those who contemplate it". The existence of such a divine order, he says, "though it cannot be tested, has never been disproved". Forster then turns to his second possibility, "the order which an artist can create in his own work".[42]

Of this, Shusterman comments:

> The mystical unification of man with the divine order Forster drops as soon as he mentions it; he does not dismiss it entirely, but shrugs it off with the implication that this is not the way for himself; as we shall see, Forster has little inclination for personal mysticism. His inclination is directed strongly however, toward the order created by the artist.[43]

Shusterman's analysis is clearly true of Forster's inclinations at this later stage of his life; yet, in his fiction, especially the earlier works, one is more likely to be aware of the abuses of art than of its value as a vehicle for meaning and order. Order of such a kind has, in fact, little value attached to it in the early fiction. Here, paradoxically, Forster's way of dealing with muddle is to celebrate it, investing the uncertainty of life with the aura of Romance; he implies that to live rightly is to live passionately and intensely, revelling in life's mysterious, unpredictable quality. To introduce stasis — such as is found in art — would be to invite sterility. In these works the unseen — that divine order to which he referred in the passage just quoted from "Art for Art's Sake" — is presented as immanent in the seen world, within the glorious muddle. Man _is_ the measure of all things in that he contains the seeds of the divine within himself. Forster's mysticism here takes the form of a kind of pantheism, one which finds its antecedents in Greek paganism and in Romanticism.

Yet in the later novels — notably _Howards End_ and _A Passage to India_ — one senses an increasing need for certainty and permanence: the vision of the earlier works no longer provides an answer to Forster's growing awareness of change, and more particularly, of the forces of evil. He moves towards a transcendence of human mutability and flux, seeking the order of which he speaks in "Art for Art's Sake". In these last two novels the scope of his interest broadens considerably; and his perspective — partly expressed through the point of view of major characters — similarly alters to become more distanced and detached. He focuses on humanity from

a god-like angle, setting it in a cosmic perspective, before which it dwindles into insignificance. Man is no longer the measure: he has been dwarfed by the vastness of his universe. The unseen is simultaneously subjected to greater and more urgent scrutiny; there is a search for an ultimate reality, far beyond the bounds which had previously limited its scope, and within which Forster had earlier been content to remain. His mysticism, in short, acquires an increasingly transcendent quality. The unseen is no longer presented as immanent in the world of the seen; rather it appears divorced from it, only to be apprehended in the briefest of glimpses. Man becomes an alienated creature, cut off from the earth, from his fellow creatures and from God. This world becomes increasingly unreal, reality only to be found in that transcendent realm on which Forster's gaze now rests.

Forster's last novel, A Passage to India, illustrates within itself this movement from the earthly to the transcedent. In it Forster movingly depicts man's failure to find spiritual meaning in his world and shows his inability to establish authentic relations with other human beings or with nature. Despairing at the condition of mankind, the narrator turns to investigate the possibility of a reality lying beyond such division, one that will transcend and unite:

> All invitations must proceed from heaven perhaps; perhaps it is futile for men to initiate their own unity, they do but widen the gulfs between them by the attempt. (A Passage to India, A.32/P.58)

In the course of the novel various religious possibilities are examined; most however, fail, limited by their earthly expectations and perceptions. Only Hinduism approaches Forster's ideal through its ability to get beyond human logic. A vision of a transcendent, abstract, all-encompassing reality haunts the novel; and Forster examines it from two possible angles. It might, in fact, be no more than the Void, as symbolised by a Marabar Cave, which reduces all human aspirations and ideals to the meaninglessness of an echo. Or it may be the divine Absolute of Professor Godbole's faith, before which all human activity is equally insignificant but in which mankind might nevertheless be united in a mystical bond of salvation and love. Or it might incorporate both these possibilities. Forster presents all alternatives, never entirely committing himself to any. At times, in fact, his humanistic impulse asserts itself, protesting against the reduction of humanity that such visions (or anti-visions) entail. The question, ultimately, is left in the balance; yet at the same time there can be no doubt as to the distance

Forster has travelled from the confident humanism of the early works.

But Forster's development towards such a transcendent vision is by no means as straightforward as this. Even in the earlier works, where the emphasis is very much on the reality to be found within the human norm, there are hints of the direction that his mystic vision will ultimately take. The tendencies which become dominant in Howards End and explicit in A Passage to India are implicit in Forster's writing and thinking from the very outset, suggesting the true focus of his interest. They form, in fact, a sub-text running contrary to the explicit thematic patterns, a subconscious counter-current to the writer's conscious intentions. Professor Godbole, as a symbolic representative of the unseen, is not, from Forster's point of view, a radical departure: the Hindu's uninvolved aloofness and distance from humanity amount to a fully realised articulation of previously suppressed tendencies.

A brief examination of Forster's mysticism in the novels preceding A Passage to India may make this point clearer.

The vision of these novels is best characterised by the "instinctive wisdom" which Smith sees as one of Forster's voices.[44] It is a kind of romantic primitivism, a Wordsworthian veneration of Nature and the natural man.[45] He presents the simple people of Italy, Greece and rural England as living in harmony with the natural world and with their past. They embody the ideal of connection so lacking in the lives of the vitiated inhabitants of English suburbia. They are able to connect heart and head, soul and body, instinct and intelligence. They represent the Classical ideal, such as Dickinson (whose influence on Forster has already been noted) described in The Greek View of Life.[46] In people such as these Forster saw reality as it could not be found in the stuffy conventions of Sawston, nor in the posturings of the aesthete. A poem which he wrote in 1908 suggests something of this conviction. Its inspiration was a young labourer whom he had seen in the street, after visiting Henry James at Lamb House. The sight of the man provided a refreshing contrast to the preciosity of the scene he had just left.

> I saw you or I thought of you
> I know not which, but in the dark
> Piercing the known and the untrue
> It gleamed - a cigarette's faint spark.
> It gleamed - and when I left the room
> Where culture unto culture knelt
> Something just darker than the gloom
> Waited - it might be you I felt.
> It was not you; you pace no night
> No youthful flesh weighs down your youth.

> You are eternal, infinite,
>   You are the unknown, and the truth.
> Yet each must seek reality:
>   For those within the room, high talk,
> Subtle experience - for me
>   The spark, the darkness, on the walk.[47]

The young labourer is, in fact, the type of the athletic heroes through whom Forster represents the virtues of this world. Gennaro, Gino Carella, Stephen Wonham, Alec Scudder — are all young men who embody the virility of their communities. They are also the potential fathers of the next generation. A theme which pervades these novels is that of continuity, what I.A. Richards describes as a "special preoccupation, almost an obsession, with the continuance of life".[48] In the later novels the athletic hero is supplanted by the earth-mother figures of Mrs Eliot, Mrs Wilcox and Mrs Moore. The transition is itself an indication of the direction that Forster's mysticism is taking: a movement from the overt physicality of the young men to the instinctive wisdom of the old women. Both types nonetheless, are endowed with a strange mystical quality which gives them meaning beyond their individual personalities. They stand as symbols for the world of which they are instinctively a part, and for its continuation.

The personalities and individual characteristics of these redemptive figures — for that is what they become to the protagonists of the novels — are, in fact, subordinated to this mystic glow. It irradiates their being and transforms them from commonplace, even limited people, into archetypal figures. They are sometimes perhaps better described as embodiments of the spirit of place than as characters. As such, they are, on the whole, remarkably lacking in self-consciousness. Existence is, for them, all that matters: not any rationalisation or justification of it. Forster shows them to be people who are so immersed in life as to be unaware of their individual role in it. It is from this, in part, that they derive their spiritual quality — a quality of which they are not themselves aware, but which the narrator, through his protagonist's point of view, perceives in them. Denis Godfrey comments of Forster's vision here that:

> Not an extension but a lowering, a dulling of consciousness is thus being upheld for us. Not an advance into the modern world created by the intellect, but a withdrawal from it into the primeval spirituality of the ancestral past.[49]

The condition is aptly captured by Forster in his description of Harold in "The Point of It": "he was approaching the mystic state that is the

athlete's true though unacknowledged goal: he was beginning to be" (Collected Short Stories, P.148).

For people such as these, living in harmony with themselves and their surroundings, the unseen is an aspect of the seen world, contained in and illuminating it with its spirit. As I have said, Forster's mysticism in these earlier works is a pantheistic vision of the divine irradiating the earthly, part of it, not disjunct from it: religion as it had been for the Greeks. Dickinson in The Greek View of Life comments that

> the Greeks were brought by their religion into harmony with the world. Neither the perplexities of the intellect nor the scruples of the conscience intervened to hamper their free activity. Their life was simple, straightforward and clear; and their consciousness directed outward upon the world, not perplexedly absorbed in the contemplation of itself.[50]

This is the spiritual vision that Forster presents in his depiction of Greek and Italian peasants, or of the English yeoman class. Their humanistic impulses — expressed in brotherhood, love, a sensuous enjoyment of the world, freedom — is in no way checked by their experience of the unseen world. The human and the divine complement and complete each other.

Such ideal harmony is, however, denied to the protagonists in Forster's novels. Self-conscious, alienated, sexually repressed, these young men and women from the English middle class provide a perfect foil to Forster's ideal. Their careers typically follow a pattern: they travel[51] from their homes in English suburbia to a place — the home of the ideal — where the changed environment enables them to discover a new realm of experience. The discovery is often heralded by a moment of vision, an "eternal moment" akin to divine revelation. After a period of traumatic adjustment they come to realise the superiority of the newly encountered world to that which they had left behind. In realising this, they achieve "salvation".

This, in crude outline, is the pattern which Forster seems to intend to present. In effect however, the pattern is far more complex. Although the protagonists perceive the superiority, or even the vital necessity of the "alternative world", none, with the exception of Lucy Honeychurch in A Room with a View, actually succeeds in becoming a part of it. Their salvation is achieved either on a purely symbolic level — a mode at variance with the realistic presentation of their search — or more significantly, they retreat

to a position of detached abstraction, contemplating the world they have discovered, rather than participating in it. Since one of the hallmarks of Forster's pagan-pantheistic ideal is its passionate engagement with lived reality, the discrepancy between aim and achievement is all the more marked. The reader is apt to call the "salvation" of the protagonists into question. Yet it seems that Forster would have us believe that they are in fact redeemed.

When one considers in addition that most of the protagonists seem in some way to be fictional projections of Forster himself,[52] the fundamental lack of coherence between his ostensibly thematic argument and his presentation of it through these characters acquires a further dimension. He seems unable — or unwilling — to accept the logical conclusions of the situations in which he has placed his fictional self. The novels (except for A Room with a View) always end on a note of retreat, a stepping back from reality, both on the part of the characters and of the author.

In conclusion, it may be argued that the mystical tone of Forster's humanism points, in itself, to a refusal to accept fully its cruder aspects, to a fastidious aestheticising of reality,[53] such as he condemns in his own characters. That he should further isolate his characters, making them contemplators rather than actors, amounts to an intensification of that tendency. Forster's true interest lies in a transcendent view of humanity, not in the passionate involvement in it that he claims to advocate. Thus, of Margaret Schlegel's desire "to see life steadily and see it whole", an ability which might be said to characterise all Forster's protagonists at their moment of salvation, J.S. Martin comments:

> It is a power to which Forster was obviously attracted, for many of his key characters - Rickie, Margaret, Mrs Moore, Godbole, for example - try to achieve it. But it is a difficult power to reconcile with Forster's humanism, with his commitment to individuals and personal relationships, and none of his characters convincingly reconciles the two contraries.[54]

In the light of such a reading of the novels preceding A Passage to India, it becomes clear that the last novel, with its vision of the futility of all human effort in the face of a transcendent reality, is not entirely the departure it might seem to be. Rather, Forster has in it fully articulated what had long lain dormant. The transcendent visions of Professor Godbole and Mrs Moore, although by no means wholly that of Forster, are the culmination of tendencies previously exhibited by such characters as Philip Herriton and Margaret Schlegel.[55]

In elaborating this thesis of Forster's attraction to a transcendent mysticism my views have been both endorsed and influenced by many critics. Two in particular deserve brief attention here. James McConkey in The Novels of E.M. Forster posits the existence of the "Forsterian voice" which focuses upon the characters from the perspective of a midpoint between the earthly and the divine. The "unique effect of Forster, in fact, comes from his mediation as voice, detached, perhaps painfully, from the physical and transcendent worlds, aware of the incompleteness of his people and the completeness beyond them".[56] To suggest the relationship between the two realms, McConkey says, Forster uses symbolism.

Having shown how both The Longest Journey and Howards End, which were Forster's most ambitious novels before A Passage to India, fail in their attempt to effect, through the Forsterian voice, some kind of reconciliation between the human and the transcendental — the implication of a oneness being made through the use of rhythmic imagery [57] — McConkey makes the general comment that

> in spite of its attempt at mediation, the Forsterian voice has always been in at least partial opposition to the Forsterian thematic suggestion that man, through earth and place, can obtain a harmonious relation with other men and with the rest of the physical world. For whenever his characters have gained the experience and intuitive power necessary for such a harmonious relation, they begin to mount to that solitary and detached position which is also their author's.[58]

Only in A Passage to India does Forster fully realise the incompatibility between his voice and the world of human relations. Here "Forster has finally come to terms with himself and his universe".[59] A Passage to India, McConkey suggests, "marks the perfection of technique and a philosophy, the perfect union of rhythm and voice".[60] McConkey later notes of the novels generally:

> Once we have discovered Forster's attitudes in A Passage to India, we can perceive the thematic progression to be found in his novels, for it is a progression from a complete trust in physical reality to the denial of it in a Marabar cave, that cave, in its lack of attributes, representing the "nothingness" of the metaphysical absolute itself.[61]

A critic already mentioned in this chapter, Barbara Rosecrance, seems to have been influenced by McConkey in her reading of Forster, although she does not acknowledge him specifically. In her study, Forster's Narrative Vision, she speaks of a tension in Forster's "search

for wholeness", which is manifest throughout his fiction "as a conflict between the hopeful idea of personal relations and a deep impulse to withdrawal from worldly concerns". She argues that,

> except for the triumph of Lucy Honeychurch, the fates of Forster's protagonists reveal the opposite of what the novels claim to demonstrate. Only in A Passage to India does the relationship between withdrawal and the possibility of wholeness become fully and finally explicit.[62]

Like McConkey, Rosecrance lays emphasis on Forster's voice, which in the earlier works is at odds with the thematic assertions. Only in the last novel is it "finally at one with the implications of his vision, and a contradiction no longer exists between ideology and presentation".[63]

Again like McConkey, she sees the change as progressive; as such she finds Howards End and A Passage to India closer in mood than is usually assumed. In the former she notes a tendency towards a transcendence of human interests and norms, which looks forward to the final novel. She comments:

> The movement of Forster's narrative voice in Howards End from a celebration of personality to a near detachment from worldly concerns, a progression mirrored in the course of his central character, may be seen as the expression of exhaustion and defeat. But it also represents the impulse to a larger unity that has been present, though in less complex forms, from the first novel.[64]

Of A Passage to India she says:

> Forster does not suggest that, armed with the Hindu vision, man will be more capable of vanquishing it [evil] in the future than he was in the past. Withdrawal, nevertheless, provides the only avenue to vision, and Forster's narrative voice embodies this insight that represents the paradoxical culmination of his metaphysical quest.[65]

"The possibility of this conclusion", she emphasises, "was implicit from the beginning in [Philip Herriton's] young world-weariness, and in Forster's use of a voice that, however engaging, remained consistently separate from his characters".[66]

In his final novel then, Rosecrance believes, Forster has achieved the vision to which he had unconsciously been straining. In it he has resolved the contradictory impulses that had prevented its full articulation: "The possibility of a man-centred universe has disappeared. In its place is the religious vision that Forster sought earlier to

embody in a humanistic framework".[67]

Both these critics point, with different emphases, to the same tendency in Forster's writing, the sub-text to his ostensible themes, that I have outlined above. The seeds of a transcendent vision were contained in his earliest writings, although it only came to full flowering in the last. Forster's passage to India, it might be said, was begun many years before in Greece and Italy.

In the chapters which follow I shall examine Forster's individual works in some detail, and attempt to flesh out the generalisations which have been made in this introductory chapter.

Notes

[1]See, for example, H.J. Oliver, The Art of E.M. Forster (Melbourne: Melbourne Univ. Press, 1960),p.28; and M. Belgion, "The Diabolism of Mr E.M. Forster", The Criterion, 14 (October 1934),54-73.

[2]Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster (London: The Hogarth Press, 1944),p.21.

[3]Quentin Bell, Bloomsbury (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968),pp.105-6.

[4]Frederick C. Crews, E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962),p.7.

[5]Crews, E.M. Forster,p.14

[6]Malcolm Bradbury, Introduction, Forster: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. M. Bradbury (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966),p.4.

[7]H.A. Smith, "Forster's Humanism and the Nineteenth Century" in Bradbury, Critical Essays,p.107.

[8]H.H. Waggoner, "Notes on the Uses of Coincidence in the Novels of E.M. Forster" in Bradbury, Critical Essays,p.81.

[9]Quoted by Oliver Stallybrass, Editor's Introduction, A Room with a View, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol.3 (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp.x-xi; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978,pp.10-11.

[10]"To Malcolm Darling", 10 February 1910, Letter 79, Selected Letters of E.M. Forster, I,ed. Mary Lago and P.N. Furbank (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1983),104.

[11]See, for example, Forster's letter "On Remaining an Agnostic", The Listener, 31 Oct. 1957. See also an entry in his Commonplace Book (London: The Scolar Press, 1978) some years later: "Since at 85 I may have to die soon, I I[sic] should like to emphasise that I am still not Christian and dont [sic] want even a memorial service in our friendly chapel".

[12]Norman Pittenger, "E.M. Forster, Homosexuality and Christian Morality", The Christian Century, 15 Dec. 1971,p.1469.

[13]Compare Richard Martin's thesis in The Love that Failed: Ideal and Reality in the Writings of E.M. Forster (The Hague: Mouton, 1974).

[14]David Shusterman, The Quest for Certitude in E.M. Forster's Fiction (1965; rpt. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1973),p.5. Compare also Forster's biographer, P.N. Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life (London: Secker and Warburg, 1979), I,198. Furbank comments of Forster's feelings after publication of Howards End that "writing, for him, had up to now gone hand-in-hand with self-cultivation. Before attempting a new work, he always felt he needed to reappraise his own life, to have had a fresh vision of existence".

[15]Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968),p.147

[16]Richard Ellmann, "Two Faces of Edward", in Edwardians and Late Victorians, ed. R. Ellmann (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960),pp.197-98.

[17]See, for example, the comic discussion between Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox on auras and astral planes in Howards End, A.150-51/P.158-59.

[18]Ellmann,p.196.

[19]In A Passage to India, for example, Forster employs Christian imagery to bridge the gap between Western perceptions and the unfamiliarity of the Hindu ceremonies. In other cases he deliberately uses familiar phrases of the Christian myth in order to suggest the inadequacy of its theology: the paraphrases of Mark viii: 36 ("For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?") in both The Longest Journey (P.230) and Howards End (A.125/P.134) being an obvious case in point.

[20]Glen Cavaliero, A Reading of E.M. Forster (London: Macmillan, 1979)p.24.

[21]For Forster's own account of the Clapham Sect, see his biography, Marianne Thornton (London: Edward Arnold, 1956).

[22]See Belgion on this issue. He, however, crudely simplifies what is really a far more subtle division.

[23]See, for example, E.M. Forster, "How I lost my faith", Humanist, Sept. 1963,pp.262-66.

[24]"How I lost my faith",p.266.

[25]"What I believe", Two Cheers for Democracy, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol.II (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), pp.65-73; ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1976),81-90.

[26]Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life, I,75-6.

[27]Crews, E.M. Forster, p.39.

[28]Crews, E.M. Forster, p.49.

[29]"How I lost my faith", p.263.

[30]"How I lost my faith", p.263.

[31]Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (London: Edward Arnold, 1934).

[32]G.L. Dickinson, The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson and Other Unpublished Writings, ed. D. Proctor (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1973),pp.140-41.

[33]Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson,p.84.

[34]Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain: A study of E.M. Forster (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford Univ. Press, and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966),p.84.

[35]Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson,p.34.

[36]J.B. Beer, The Achievement of E.M. Forster (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962),p.36.

[37]Stone,p.98.

[38]Pittenger,p.1471.

[39]See Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life, I.98. Compare also Maurice, where Maurice's loss of faith is a prelude to his recognition and acceptance of his homosexuality.

[40]Compare Barbara Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982),p.14.

[41]"Art for Art's Sake", Two Cheers for Democracy A.90/P.106.

[42]Two Cheers for Democracy, A.89-90/P.105.

[43]Shusterman, The Quest for Certitude in E.M. Forster's Fiction,p.18.

[44]See above p.2.

[45]A letter to his Indian friend, Masood, suggests something of Forster's attitude to Nature in the earlier works. He writes: "It isn't bad being alone in the country — the nearest approach we Anglo-Saxons can make to your saints. There's such a thing as healthy mysticism, and our race is capable of developing it, I think". 18 August 1910, Letter 85, Selected Letters, I,113.

[46]G.L. Dickinson, The Greek View of Life, 7th ed. (1896; rev. London: Methuen, 1909).

[47]Printed in Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life, I,165.

[48]I.A. Richards, "A Passage to Forster: Reflections on a Novelist" in Bradbury, Critical Essays,p.18.

[49]Denis Godfrey, E.M. Forster's Other Kingdom (London and Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968),p.211.

[50]Dickinson, The Greek View of Life,pp.64-5.

[51]Compare J.S. Martin, E.M. Forster: The Endless Journey (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976). In this study Martin emphasises the importance in Forster's fiction of travel yielding new experiences.

[52]See, for example, Forster's comments in the interview conducted by P.N. Furbank and F.J.H. Haskell in Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, ed. M. Cowley (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958),pp.23-33.

[53]For such an interpretation of Forster's mysticism, see, for example, C.B. Cox, The Free Spirit (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963).

[54]J.S. Martin,p.23.

[55]It is interesting to note a comment in Forster's Commonplace Book: "Sympathy with the human race means detachment from it" (pp.171-72). The numerous doubts that have been expressed about the true extent of his oft-repeated belief in personal relations are also worth noting here. See, for example, remarks by James McConkey, "Writer's Panel", in E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations, ed. Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin (London: Macmillan, 1982),p.300; and P.N. Furbank, "The Personality of E.M. Forster", Encounter, Nov. 1970,p.61. The relative lack of importance which Forster attaches to people as individuals may also partly explain the often off-hand presentation of the many deaths in his fiction. See Stone,p.110.

[56]James McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster (Ithaca,N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1957),p.5.

[57]For Forster's use of rhythmic imagery to imply a supernatural order, see also E.K. Brown, Rhythm in the Novel (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1950).

[58]McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,pp.9-10.

[59]McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.11.

[60]McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.13.

[61]McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,pp.91-92.

[62]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,pp.13-14.

[63]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.16.

[64]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.142.

[65]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.240.

[66]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.240.

[67]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.242.

CHAPTER 2

Collected Short Stories and the Italian novels

Collected Short Stories

The short stories brought together in 1947 as Collected Short Stories[1] were originally published separately at various times during the first two decades of the century. They were also previously collected in two volumes: The Celestial Omnibus (1911) and The Eternal Moment (1928). Others, written at the same time as these were collected posthumously in The Life to Come and Other Stories.[2] It is, however, on the Collected Short Stories that I wish to focus.

In his introduction to the 1947 edition, Forster describes the stories as "fantasies" and mentions that they were all written prior to the First World War. They are, in fact, as K.W. Gransden shows, typically Edwardian, as much a response to the contemporary vogue for fantastic naturalism as they are an early expression of Forster's interest in the world of the unseen.[3] Their similarities in form and treatment make it convenient for them to be dealt with together in this chapter, although many were written later than the novels.

The stories are, as Lionel Trilling suggests, a "statement of themes".[4] Issues on which Forster focuses in the novels are found here in simpler, cruder forms. The opposition between good and evil, the saved and the damned is stated baldly and uncompromisingly, without that subtle awareness of good-and-evil which characterises the longer works. They thus provide the reader with a useful introduction to Forster's fiction.

A typically Forsterian pattern soon becomes apparent as one reads the stories. The protagonist, dissatisfied with the constraints of polite society, is introduced to another, more spontaneous, more natural mode of life. There follows a conflict of values in which he is torn between the two realms of his experience. Sometimes the story ends with him crossing over into the new world; sometimes the old proves too strong, and if not entirely destroyed by it, he must submit to its authority again.

The new world is essentially a fantastic one. In Aspects of the Novel, Forster invokes on behalf of fantasy "all beings who inhabit the lower air, the shallow water and the smaller hills, all Fauns and Dryads and slips of the memory, all verbal coincidences, Pans and puns, all that is medieval this side of the grave".[5] This invocation perfectly suggests the atmosphere of the short stories. The worlds that they present are ideal pastoral realms set in a romantically distant Golden Age of rural England, Italy or Greece.

The supernatural, predictably, predominates in the fantasy, often in the form of figures from Classical mythology. It appears as a deliberate contrast to the mundane mediocrity of suburban life, serving to shock the characters into a new awareness of the possibilities of human existence. Pan disrupts a party of English tourists; a Faun appears at a genteel picnic; an Italian fisherman discusses a Siren with another English tourist; a young girl turns into a tree within view of her fiancé's mansion. The fantastic continually impinges on the mundane until the line between reality and fantasy blurs, or disappears altogether. Sometimes the two exchange places completely.

According to Forster's use of the supernatural, one may tentatively classify the stories into three groups, bearing always in mind that these divisions are not absolute and that some of the stories straddle two or all of them.

The first group consists of those stories set entirely within the realm of fantasy. They amount, in fact, to allegory. The setting and action are metaphorical, the vehicles for a humanist point. "Mr Andrews" and "The Other Side of the Hedge" are in this category, although the latter suffers from an unfortunate mixing of allegory and realism in its details.

The second, more typical group, is one in which the worlds of fantasy and everyday reality are juxtaposed, sometimes uneasily. "Co-ordination", "The Other Kingdom", "The Curate's Friend", "The Celestial Omnibus" and "The Point of It" are to be numbered in this group. Here the supernatural is of the most fantastic kind. The mood is light-hearted and whimsical. Far from intending to make a serious point about the nature of the unseen, Forster uses the supernatural — as in the case of the stories in the first group — to express his humanist theme.

The third group, consisting of the remaining stories ("The Machine

Stops", "The Story of the Siren", "The Eternal Moment", "The Road from Colonus" and "The Story of a Panic"), differs from this in that the supernatural is usually treated with more seriousness. Once again the worlds of everyday reality and the supernatural are juxtaposed; but here there is a more bracing tension between the two. The unseen develops naturally and convincingly from the protagonist's experience of the seen world, and thus credibly shares its claim to reality. A complete suspension of disbelief is not required of the reader here: the possibility that anything may happen is not so easily entertained. The protagonist's experience of the supernatural is of a far more profound nature, verging on a visionary mysticism. To suggest that the stories in this group are the more successful in the collection is not to imply a correlation between literary worth and realism. Rather, it is that in these stories Forster's imagination has "worked harder" in dealing with the issues at stake: he has not merely depended on a mythological symbol to carry the weight of his argument.

As already noted, there is a degree of overlap between the divisions I have suggested. For instance, "The Story of a Panic" involves the visitation of the god Pan on a group of English tourists in Italy and "The Story of the Siren" indirectly recounts a Siren's bewitchment of an Italian peasant. Yet the presentation of the mythological figures and their effect on the characters in these stories is of a somewhat different kind from the light-hearted depiction of the Faun in "The Curate's Friend". The oblique presentation of both lends them a degree of credibility, even in realistic terms. Their effect on the protagonists is far-reaching and profound. Equally, "The Point of It", while combining rather awkwardly the hero's life on earth and then in a mythological Hell, also contains elements of a more "realistic", less metaphorical supernaturalism in its first section.

It is in the stories of the third group that one finds the most explicit examples of the transcendent mysticism which reappears — often subconsciously — in the novels and finds its ultimate expression in the last, A Passage to India. In all of these, characters experience what can only be described as mystic visions which enable them, while still part of the world of everyday reality, to glimpse a greater reality beyond it.

At the same time, it is clear that, as far as Forster is concerned, the form of the stories is in itself an expression of that transcendence in a somewhat immature form. While claiming to deal with human issues, his employment of fantasy to resolve them amounts to — again perhaps unconsciously — an avoidance of them.[6] He maintains an aesthetic and ironic

distance from the life which the stories suggest should be lived passionately and fully, involving the body as well as the spirit. In this respect the recurring motif of escape is especially significant. The protagonists in many of the stories, having achieved "salvation", are not required to bring it into line with their everyday existence. Rather, they are allowed to escape into that "other kingdóm", the world of fantasy where the problems of life no longer exist. The faults of this world remain unresolved, and the salvation amounts to an abdication of responsibility rather than a solution. As Alan Wilde comments of the stories:

> ...they simulate a victory which is no victory at all... they evade the problem that has been posed and so sacrifice artistic integrity to wishful thinking. The forces are massed, but the battle is never joined; fantasy simply runs off the field, announcing, with more enthusiasm than reason, that it has won the day.[7]

But for those characters denied the escape into fantasy there remains another escape route: death. Or it may be — as Wilde goes on to suggest — that both escapes amount to the same thing. Of "The Point of It" Wilde writes:

> The symbolism is clear: Harold, passing through the redemptive waters, joins Evelyn, Eustace, and the others in Other Kingdom, which finally receives its proper name - the kingdom of death. He escapes, not like the others from the burdensome weight of society, but from the suffocating requirements of life itself.[8]

This is the salvation which Mr Lucas in "The Road from Colonus" is denied; it is the only possible end for Vashti and Kuno in "The Machine Stops"; and in "The Eternal Moment" Miss Raby, having been granted her "eternal moment", can foresee nothing greater than old age and a final release from an anti-climactic life.

The stories, for all their light-heartedness and apparent optimism, are essentially pessimistic. This world is clearly irredeemable. Escape is the only solution. Even the curate (in "The Curate's Friend"), who manages to retain both worlds, must do so secretly. As will be the case in the novels, hope is something reserved for the future. Forster maintains a serene detachment from the problems confronting his characters. The earthly life, which the supernatural is supposedly meant to transform and inform, remains the same; the author's real interest lies in the static assurance that fantasy provides.

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of individual stories in

the collection. The generalisations that I have made are, however, in terms of the concerns of this study, sufficient to illustrate the part which most of them play in the development of Forster's transcendent vision. These remarks may also serve as an introduction to the two Italian novels, Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with a View. In atmosphere, themes and technique, these two works have much in common with the short stories; and it is to an examination of them that I wish now to turn.

A Room with a View

Although in order of publication the third of Forster's completed novels, A Room with a View[9] is the first in conception. He began work on a "Lucy" novel during his first visit to Italy in 1901-2, subsequently laying it aside to write Where Angels Fear to Tread and The Longest Journey. A new start was then made and the novel was completed in 1908.[10] It is this extended genesis which "helps explain its peculiar location in the Forster canon, as a third novel whose outlook and preoccupations appear to designate it an earlier work".[11] For that reason it will be the first to be examined in this chapter.

The mood of the novel is, initially at least, closer to the light-hearted fantasy of the early short stories than to the sombre moral ambivalence which often characterises the first two novels. A Room with a View is, in fact, the most optimistic of Forster's novels. The ideals articulated by Mr Emerson and expressed in the spirit of Italy are realised within the world of the novel: the story ends on a note of fulfilment. Passion, beauty, personal relations, love and truth are shown to be capable of translation into the action of everyday living, and the hero and heroine are left firmly in possession of the "salvation" to which they have aspired.

The Pension Bertolini, in which the story begins, takes the reader back to the world of the British tourist in the short stories. We are introduced to the by now familiar gathering of spinsters, clergymen, intellectuals, chaperones, and — most important of all — the protagonist, a discontented young person. In A Room with a View this role is filled by one of Forster's most endearing and successful characters, Lucy Honeychurch. It is in her sexual awakening and development from childhood to

a liberated and liberating adulthood that the main interest of the novel lies.

The novel follows a pattern similar to those of the short stories. Lucy feels stifled by the restrictions of pension society, glimpses an alternative way of life and is instinctively drawn to it. This alternative is presented through the Emersons, father and son, whose forthright language and action provoke the censure of the genteel pension guests, and through the mysterious power of the "real Italy". It is a vision which, although religious in tone, confines its interest to "the kingdom of this world" (A.39/P.60). It is humanist in impulse and optimistic in mood. Incorporating such elements as passion, beauty, truth, reality, equality, and nature, it expresses the typically Forsterian ideal of classical hedonism that he opposes to what he saw as the asceticism and medievalism of Christianity and middle-class suburbia. It is a light-filled philosophy, described by Mr Emerson as the "transitory Yes" to the "everlasting Why" of life (A.27/P.48). For Lucy, however, salvation revolves around one particular aspect of this alternative world: a recognition of physical passion and sexuality, and the ability to face up to it truthfully, to acknowledge "the holiness of direct desire" (A.204/P.225).

As for all Forster's protagonists, Lucy's knowledge of the reality of this world comes in a series of "eternal moments", experiences of intense perception influenced by the genius of place, in which everyday reality fades in the face of another, eternal reality. Lucy's salvation is not, however, immediate: her problem is to overcome the constraints of guilt and repression which her social background has imposed on her.

When the novel opens, Lucy is presented as an impressionable young girl who, having left behind an idyllic childhood, has reached a point of crisis during her visit to Italy in the company of her older cousin, Charlotte Bartlett. She is perceptive enough to be disappointed by the "home from home" which they find in the pension; and when old Mr Emerson offers them rooms with a view in exchange for theirs, only to be rebuffed by Charlotte, she obscurely senses that there is more to the situation than meets the eye. Like George Emerson she is perplexed,

> but she saw that they were in for what is known as 'quite a scene', and she had an odd feeling that whenever these ill-bred tourists spoke the contest widened and deepened till it dealt, not with rooms and views, but with - well, with something quite different, whose existence she had not realized before. (A.4/P.25)

It is her first intimation that life is not the straightforward matter that her childhood in Summer Street had led her to believe.

Later, nervously torn between the values of the pension guests — who have accepted her and snubbed the unconventional Emersons — and her instinctive liking for the two men, she turns to give "the two outsiders a nervous little bow" (A.6/P.27). When George smiles in acknowledgement, he seems to her "to be smiling across something" (A.6/P.27). It is a feeling which Lucy has repeatedly throughout the novel, suggesting the burden that meaningless social convention places on human relationships and personal intercourse. But Italy sets Lucy on the way to the breaking down of that barrier.

Generally a commonplace, if charming, young woman, Lucy possesses one distinguishing feature, which Mr Beebe, the kindly clergyman, recognises as the "illogical element in Miss Honeychurch" (A.30/P.51). It is her ability to enter "a more solid world when she opened the piano" (A.29/P.50). For her the world of music is more real than is the chaos of daily life. It provides her — unconsciously — with a vision of unity and meaning not usually possible in life. The narrator generalises on this phenomenon:

> The commonplace person begins to play, and shoots into the empyrean without effort, whilst we look up, marvelling how he has escaped us, and thinking how we could worship him and love him, would he but translate his visions into human words, and his experience into human actions. Perhaps he cannot; certainly he does not, or does so very seldom. Lucy had done so never. (A.29/P.50)

Mr Beebe's thoughts run on similar lines as he listens to Lucy playing Beethoven in the pension drawing-room. When she finishes he tells her: "If Miss Honeychurch ever takes to live as she plays, it will be very exciting — both for us and for her" (A.31/P.52). Lucy's performance of Beethoven is, in fact, an expression of her subconscious impulses. Her conscious behaviour — both in life and in her approach to other forms of art — is muddled and conventional. She characteristically suppresses her own instinctive reactions to follow the moral and aesthetic lead of the pension. But music has the effect of making her know her desires more clearly, and now, even as she re-enters daily life, the need for "something big" (A.39/P.60) remains.

It is in pursuit of this that Lucy buys photographs of paintings which feature the nude — paintings such as Miss Bartlett would not approve. But in spite of this gesture of defiance "the gates of liberty seemed still unopened" (A.40/P.61). It remains for Italy to open them for her.

Earlier the narrator has commented on how " the traveller who has gone to Italy to study the tactile values of Giotto, or the corruption of the Papacy, may return remembering nothing but the blue sky and the men and women who live under it" (A.14-15/P.35-6). It is this Italy, the Italy of the Italians as opposed to the storehouse of culture, that now confronts Lucy.

The mention of nudity in the photographs anticipates the strongly sexual symbolism in the first of her "eternal moments", her meeting with the vitality of Italy in the Piazza Signoria. Occurring at "the hour of unreality... when unfamiliar things are real" [ellipsis mine] (A.41/P.61-2), the combination of classical deities, the phallic imagery of the tower which "seemed no longer a tower, no longer supported by earth but some unattainable treasure throbbing in the tranquil sky" (A.41/P.62), the sudden murder, and Lucy's discovery of herself in the arms of George Emerson who looks at her "but not across anything" (A.41/P.62), all suggest the unique mixture of sexual passion, violence and mystery that Italy represented to Forster. Lucy later contemplates the effect that the country has had on her perception:

> The well-known world had broken up, and there emerged Florence, a magic city where people thought and did the most extraordinary things. Murder, accusations of murder, a lady clinging to one man and being rude to another - were these the daily incidents of her streets? Was there more in her frank beauty than met the eye - the power, perhaps, to evoke passions, good and bad, and to bring them speedily to a fulfilment? (A.55/P.76)

At the time however, she is too bewildered by the rush of events to think as clearly as this. She is nevertheless aware of some profound change: "The whole world seemed pale and void of its original meaning" (A.42/P.63) She realises that she has "crossed some spiritual boundary" (A.43/P.64).

But the "important message" that the dying man seemed about to deliver to her — clearly that she should live passionately and vividly — is one that Lucy is not yet ready to receive. She reacts with fear and guilt at what Rosecrance has called her "symbolic loss of virginity".[12] The change for which she had longed has proved too much. George Emerson, also at a crisis stage in his development to adulthood, is, on the other hand, determined to come to terms with his experience. "For something tremendous has happened; I must face it without getting muddled. It isn't exactly that a man has died" (A.43/P.64). His action in throwing away the photographs is symbolically resonant. Covered with blood — static art in which Lucy tried to find relief has come into contact with dynamic life — they trouble him with their reminder of what he has witnessed, and he throws them

into the Arno, to be borne away to the sea. In that symbolic gesture the half-truth that they represent is surrendered up to the flux and flow of life, as Lucy, for all her feeling of transgression, senses:

> Leaning her elbows on the parapet, she contemplated the River Arno, whose roar was suggesting some unexpected melody to her ears. (A.45/P.66)

Already her experiences of music and of life are beginning to coalesce.

Even though her experience in the Piazza has a marked effect upon her, providing her with a new test by which the people and ideas she had previously accepted are tried and found wanting, Lucy prefers to retreat into the safety of convention and childhood. She feels confused and muddled, and does all she can to avoid another meeting with George. The intimacy which their shared experience created, and her fear that he has understood what she cannot, combine to arouse the feelings of fear and guilt. Unconsciously she is resisting the process of sexual maturation.

But vaster powers than individual wills are involved in this story,[13] and once again the spirit of Italy intervenes in Lucy's life. Her initiation in the Piazza becomes a preparation for the consummation near Fiesole. When the pension party drive there to see the view of Florence, the narrator, in a manner reminiscent of the whimsy of the short stories, deifies the driver and his mistress as Phaethon and Persephone. Together symbolising light and spring, they personify the revitalising forces of Italy, "the eternal league of Italy with youth" (A.51/P.72). Lucy, in spite of her repressions, feels envy at their "misbehaviour" and their freedom to enjoy themselves without social restraint. And when the priggish Mr Eager discovers their amour, it is to her that they appeal, pointing to George in the other carriage at the same time. In the mysterious way of Italy, they have divined the nature of what has occurred between the two young English tourists. Later it is Phaethon in whose company Lucy, fretting against the pettiness of Miss Bartlett and Miss Lavish, feels the world to be "beautiful and direct" (A.67/P.88). Under his influence she feels the mood of spring. And it is as an emissary of the spring that he leads her to the violet-covered terrace from which there is a view of the surrounding countryside:

> From her feet the ground sloped sharply into the view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the

> primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth. (A.67-8/P.89)

The imagery used here is part of the water motif which runs throughout the novel, symbolising the life-force which Forster celebrates in it. Earlier the Arno provided that symbolic resonance; now among the violets Lucy meets George again, and he, having learnt the lesson of the Piazza, kisses her. It is her second eternal moment.

But again the forces of life are defeated by the repressions of convention, this time directly in the person of Miss Bartlett who, with symbolic appropriateness, stands "brown against the view" (A.68/P.89), calling to Lucy. She proceeds to take advantage of the girl's emotional confusion to press home her philosophy of precaution and prudence. Lucy, whose first desire at this crisis moment is to try to understand what is happening to her, to find and to tell the absolute truth, is soon deflected from the path of intellectual honesty by her cousin. She is presented that evening with

> the complete picture of a cheerless, loveless world in which the young rush to destruction until they learn better - a shamefaced world of precautions and barriers which may avert evil, but which do not seem to bring good, if we may judge from those who have used them most. (A.78-9/P.99-100)

Against the better judgement of her instinct, Lucy has submitted to the restrictive values of Charlotte and all that she represents. The truth and reality which she had eagerly, if uncertainly, sought, give way to the conventionalised half-truths and deceptions by which Charlotte and her kind live. She passes from the spontaneity and faith of childhood to the cynical wariness of adulthood: "Never again did she expose herself without due consideration and precaution against rebuff" (A.79/P.100).

Except for the ending, the rest of the novel is set in England, most of it at Windy Corner, the Honeychurch home. Here we witness the working out of Lucy's rejection of the message of Italy. She has entered a state of muddledom, of spiritual unreality, which increases as the novel progresses and as circumstances prompt her to deny more and more emphatically the truth of her experiences in Italy.

Lucy's spiritual degeneration is suggested by her engagement to Cecil Vyse. Described by the narrator as "medieval" and superbly characterised by Freddy Honeychurch as "the kind of fellow who would never wear another fellow's cap" (A.85/P.104), Cecil is a typical Forsterian aesthete, the antithesis of the classical human spirit that Lucy had encoun-

tered in Italy. He too has spent time in that country; but for him it remains a rarefied aesthetic experience, awakening in him a fastidious preciosity rather than the humane tolerance that it has taught Lucy. He is, as George Emerson later tells Lucy, one of "the sort who are all right as long as they keep to things — books, pictures — but kill when they come to people" (A.166/P.186). This is a judgement borne out by Cecil's relations with Lucy. He treats her as a feminine work of art, something to be protected, moulded and patronised. From his point of view she amounts to little more than an extension of his own personality, a mirror to reflect his egoism. Characteristics such as these confirm his place as one of Forster's damned, those who resist the forces of life and sexuality, and against whom Lucy must fight.

Forster employs the motif of the "view" to emphasise Lucy's and Cecil's incompatibility, and the extent to which Lucy is departing from the spirit of Italy. There a view had been at the centre of her experience of its revitalising power. Windy Corner, set in a community which, for all its faults, is inhabited by people living in harmony with their surroundings and among whom Lucy has spent a happy and natural childhood, is also a house with a view. But with Cecil, the man with whom she plans to spend her maturity, there are no such associations. She connects him rather with a room "with no view" (A.106/P.125).

Italy had seemed to embody a supernatural force capable of changing people's lives. Now, as Lucy attempts to escape the effects of that force, the unseen begins to assume other guises, all conspiring to engineer her salvation. In the whimsical form of the Comic Muse — ably assisted by Cecil — it contrives to bring the Emersons to a vacant house in Summer Street, to Lucy's confusion and discomfiture. Having rejected the lessons in clarity and truth which Italy had offered her, she lives in a state of muddled half-truth, repeatedly repressing her love for George, persuading herself and others that he is of no consequence to her, and that it is Cecil whom she truly loves. Her "armour of falsehood" (A.161/P.181) is, however, repeatedly pierced, until she is eventually able to free herself from muddledom. The famous bathing scene in which she encounters George, Freddy and Mr Beebe after they have been swimming in the "Sacred Lake" provides the first opportunity.

When her brother and the amiable clergyman invite George to join them in this sport, he is still suffering from the world-weary pessimism he had felt in Florence, and speaks morosely about the controlling power of Fate which allows humans to "settle nothing" (A.129/P.147).[14] But under the influence

of the immutable peace of the Sacred Lake he loses this mood of despondency. The swim — again water is used symbolically — becomes another "eternal moment", and guarantees his salvation. He confirms his desire "to live". It is, as the Italian moments were, an experience grounded in a passionate enactment of the commonplace, transitory glories of the world, but one which has a permanent, far-reaching effect:

> It had been a call to the blood and to the relaxed will, a passing benediction whose influence did not pass, a holiness, a spell, a momentary chalice for youth. (A.133/P.152)

The bathing scene, as many critics have pointed out,[15] is ultimately homosexual in its subtext, a curious counter-current to the romance of heterosexual love that ostensibly informs the structure of the novel. It is nevertheless not without its significance for Lucy and her feelings for George. She, her mother and Cecil happen upon the scene, and George, "barefoot, bare-chested, radiant and personable against the shadowy woods" (A.133/P.152), greets her joyously. The unexpected meeting has the effect of shaking the barrier of muddle and convention which she has erected against him and the sexual passion that he represents to her. Once again the two young people have met at the well-springs of life, stripped of the accessories of civilization that impede emotional and intellectual honesty.

Yet the incident is still not enough to free her from the confusion to which she has condemned herself. She continues to avoid the introspection which will reveal to her the painful but liberating truth of her own soul. It takes a more direct reminder of Italy to effect that.

When George comes to play tennis at Windy Corner her defences begin to fall again. In the hectic exertion of the game and the sense of physical freedom it allows her, she begins to rediscover something of the spirit of Italy, the same life-force she sees flowing through George in his passionate determination to win. In comparison with this direct experience of the joys of the body, Lucy feels that music (through which she has always expressed herself) is "the employment of a child" (A.156/P.175), no more than a shadow of the real thing. Her memories of the view from Fiesole begin to coalesce with the view over the Weald which she now sees; unconsciously she is returning in spirit to the experience of Italy.

Again she is interrupted by the forces of anti-life, this time in the form of Cecil and the novel he is reading. But ironically it is through him and this shoddy imitation of the life of Italy that Lucy's feelings find their fulfilment, albeit against her will. In Miss

Lavish's "draggled prose" (A.160/P.179), the past is revived in a grotesque parody of the original scene. For her it is an unwelcome reminder of the truth and passion which she avoids; but for George "who loved passionately" (A.160/P.180) it reawakens desire, and as they return to the house for tea, he kisses her a second time.

From now on the novel acquires a markedly sombre note.[16] The vast forces, the supernatural armies of light and darkness, only hinted at earlier, loom to the fore in the struggle for Lucy's soul and her liberation. And if previously she had been muddled, not knowing her own desires nor how to deal with them, she now acts with full knowledge and deliberately chooses the path she will take. Her love for George fully realised, she prepares to defeat it in the interests of convention and the world's approval:

> Love felt and returned, love which our bodies exact and our hearts have transfigured, love which is the most real thing that we shall ever meet, reappeared now as the world's enemy, and she must stifle it. (A.161/P.181)

It is a contest between the real and the pretended, and Lucy chooses pretence. She, who had once desperately longed to know the truth, now tampers with it until "she forgot that the truth had ever been" (A.161/P.181). Intellectual dishonesty is perhaps one of the worst sins in Forster's fictional world, and in taking this course Lucy has truly entered unreality, and what is worse, darkness. The significance of her action is emphasised by the repetition of the word "lying" in the titles of chapters 16-19.

She sustains the self-deception long enough to confront and dismiss George. But afterwards the natural world has its customary effect, and Lucy's confidence falters. She has an intimation of the significance of her action. It is mirrored — as has been the whole affair since its beginnings in Italy in the spring — in the changing of the seasons. Lucy, by her wilful rejection of passion and love, is becoming one with the autumn and the darkness.

The moment is sufficient for her to make one last attempt at truth. That same evening she breaks off her engagement to Cecil. Nonetheless, in continuing to practise deception — pretending to George that she does not love him, and to Cecil that she loves no one — she has persevered in her emotional and intellectual dishonesty. She has entered "the vast armies

of the benighted, who follow neither the heart nor the brain, and march to their destiny by catchwords" (A.174/P.194), sinning against both Eros and Pallas Athene. She determines never to marry — Mr Emerson regards marriage as a duty — and to forget George. Having at last found reality, she deliberately rejects it.

The autumn weather attains Wagnerian proportions as Lucy lives in increasing despondency. Backed by the forces of anti-life, Charlotte and Mr Beebe (who now begins to reveal his true colours), she resolves to join the Miss Alans in their journey to Greece, a symbolic confirmation of her rejection of the sexuality and fruition represented by George. The song she sings as she plays the piano — significantly Beethoven does not form part of her repertoire now[17] — captures the mood of renunciation. It is a song given to her by Cecil; and like him, and like Mr Beebe, she is taking on the role of a spectator of life instead of a participant in it:

> Vacant heart, and hand, and eye,
> Easy live and quiet die. (A.189/P.210)

But Lucy is destined not to remain in darkness forever. Aided, somewhat improbably, by Miss Bartlett, she meets Mr Emerson again before she leaves for Greece. Confronted with the old man's childlike directness, she is unable to practise the deceit with which she has been fooling herself and others. He soon perceives the muddle she is in, and realises that she loves his son. He reminds her of Italy, speaks of love and passion and the need to avoid muddle. Although she cannot comprehend his words entirely, "as he spoke the darkness was withdrawn, veil after veil, and she saw to the bottom of her soul" (A.202/P.224). She struggles with herself while Mr Beebe, now fully revealed as the opponent of life, stands "suddenly inhuman" like a "long black column" (A.203/P.224), and convention in the form of her mother and Charlotte calls for her; but it is through Mr Emerson that she at last finds her salvation:

> He gave her a sense of deities reconciled, a feeling that, in gaining the man she loved, she would gain something for the whole world... [ellipsis mine]. He had robbed the body of its taint, the world's taunts of their sting; he had shown her the holiness of direct desire. She 'never exactly understood,' she would say in after years, 'how he managed to strengthen her. It was as if he had made her see the whole of everything at once.' (A.204/P.225)

The mystic vision of wholeness which Lucy gains is reminiscent of the visions of the short stories. She has escaped the muddle of a divided self, and has seen herself and life clearly and entirely.

The last chapter marks the resolution of the novel, "The End of the Middle Ages". The two lovers are united and happy in Lucy's old room at the Pension Bertolini, where the romance began. The triumph of love and truth is only slightly (and it seems not forever) marred by her alienation from the Honeychurch family. As they talk of the many trials which have beset the course of their love, Lucy's words, "I remember on how little it all hangs" (A.208/P.229), point again to the forces which have worked in their favour, often in opposition to their individual and contrary actions. And it is into these cosmic forces, the flow of the spirit of life, that the lovers are themselves absorbed as the novel ends. They acquire a mythic stature[18] that transcends their personal limitations:

> Youth enwrapped them; the song of Phaethon announced passion requited, love attained. But they were conscious of a love more mysterious than this. The song died away; they heard the river, bearing down the snows of winter into the Mediterranean. (A.209/P.230)

One of the major themes of the novel has been the relationship between life and art. At times they seem to represent the opposite ends of a scale, art being among the forces opposed to life, or at best only a weak imitation of it, a vicarious substitute for the reality to be found in passionately lived experience. Thus the photographs Lucy buys at Alinari's shop are symbolically spattered with the blood of the murdered man to indicate their insufficiency as the expression of her rebellion. Equally, Cecil is numbered among the agents of anti-life because of his aesthetic approach to people and human relationships. In no other of Forster's novels are the representatives of culture and the intellect treated with such unremitting satire: Miss Lavish and Mr Eager are among the most blatant of his caricatures.

Clearly, however, the issue is not as straightforward as these extreme cases would suggest. Art is not merely the mark of the goats in the way that a recognition of the life-force is a sign of the sheep. It is in the world of music, after all, that the seeds of Lucy's salvation are to be found. What is advocated throughout the novel is the ideal of connection between the two. The fusion is demonstrated in Lucy's development. Her salvation is only possible if, in Mr Beebe's words, the "water-tight compartments in her... break down, and music and life... mingle" [ellipsis mine] (A.92/P.111). She must learn to live with the same passion that she instinctively gives to her art: the two realms of experience must connect.

The same connection is apparent in Forster's presentation of George.

The descriptions of his rugged physicality are lent a further dimension by allusions to Michelangelo's art.[19] Where this differs from Cecil's perception of Lucy as a work of art is not only in the contrast afforded between the robust muscularity of Michelangelo and the ascetic spirituality of Leonardo, but also in the attitude to art implied in it. George's individuality is transformed and elevated by the references to art: he is not trivialised and dehumanised as Lucy is by Cecil's condescending aestheticism.[20]

To live worthily, Forster implies, is not to have a Philistine disregard for the dimension of the spirit that art embodies — although even this is preferable to cold aestheticism — but to strive for a mean whereby life and art transfigure and inform one another.

The ideal of connection is presented throughout the novel, on various levels where the categories of art and life may be understood in somewhat broader terms than my discussion so far has implied. Such a balance is offered as the correct response to Italy: it is not merely an arid museum of history and art, but a land in which modern men and women live passionately in the shadow of magnificent monuments and in the memory of great events which serve to transfigure and immortalise their actions. In Phaethon and Persephone Forster suggests this fusion perfectly. Two ordinary Italians are transformed by the use of mythological allusion into archetypal lovers, gifted with mysterious insight and powers, yet at the same time remaining supremely human.

The love which Lucy and George come to share for each other adds a further dimension to the dichotomy. It is a love, as Lucy eventually realises, "which our bodies exact and our hearts have transfigured" (A.161/P.181). Mr Emerson tells her that love is "not the body, but of the body" (A.202/P.223). In other words, important though it is to acknowledge the physical aspect of love, to do so at the expense of its spiritual aspect would be as wrong as to acknowledge that only. Love is of the body and of the spirit. Physical passion is alone insufficient: it must be transfigured by the power of the imagination.

The story ends on a note suggesting that the two lovers have achieved such a fusion of experience. They have learnt the holiness of direct desire, theirs is "passion requited, love attained" (A.209/P.230). But in the transcending vision of the novel's last sentences they, like Phaethon and Persephone, are turned into something greater than their individual selves, archetypal lovers at one with the forces which have

shaped their destinies.

In A Room with a View we find the one novel in which Forster has reconciled and combined his double vision of the earthly and the transcendent. The thematic fusion of the realms of life and art, body and spirit, and their related categories, is an expression of this united vision.

Nevertheless, certain tendencies are worth noting in this novel for the light they throw on developments in the later works. It is noteworthy, for example, that Cecil, initially vilified, is let off with remarkable kindness when he is dismissed from the story. This fact, together with his culture, hints of repressed homosexuality, and Forster's own admission[21] — all suggest that Cecil and his detached, aesthetic approach to life are closer to Forster's own tendencies than the pattern of the novel would suggest.[22] It is equally noteworthy that Forster, for all the talk of "the holiness of direct desire", felt it necessary to modify that directness by placing his story within a mythic framework. The characters in whom the passions are to be embodied are, one might suggest, in fact diminished and trivialised rather than transfigured by the cosmic forces to which they are subject. Sex and passion end up being vague, somewhat mystical abstractions, articles of faith in a humanist creed rather than the everyday experiences of flesh-and-blood men and women. Forster seems, ultimately, as unwilling to confront boldly the facts of sexual desire as Lucy was in the earlier part of the narrative.

In this respect, Lucy's salvation is in itself problematic. As has already been suggested, she is, as are other characters in the novel, less a conscious actor than a passive pawn of supernatural forces. Her salvation is achieved as much through luck and favourable circumstances as through any ability or special virtue of her own.[23] Furthermore, it seems curious and unsatisfactory that she should come to acknowledge the truth of passion through the intervention of the old (and decidedly sexless) Mr Emerson, father of George. And certainly in the final chapter, she is presented less as an ardent lover than as a Madonna figure, to whom it occurs that George is "a boy, after all" (A.206/P.227).

One related issue might be noted in conclusion. For all the novel's optimism and its faith in human possibility, the darker currents of pessimism are never far away. The transitory Yes which George learns from his father is only transitory: the Why is everlasting. The best that one can hope for is to find "a place where you won't do very much harm, and stand in it for all you are worth, facing the sunshine" (A.151/P.170). Mr Emerson

himself expresses the fragility of happiness when he says:

> Oh, horrible - worst of all - worse than death, when you have made a little clearing in the wilderness, planted your little garden, let in your sunlight, and then the weeds creep in again! (A.197/P.218)

It is after all a qualified optimism, the best but by no means perfect response to an inherently muddled, uncertain, inexplicable and often hostile universe. The bad is even, Forster suggests, the inevitable complement of the good. "Views" can make life the glorious business that it is. But views imply hills, and the earth is a place "whereon there are shadows because there are hills" (A.118/P.138).

It is this inherent pessimism (such as has already been noted in the short stories) that largely accounts for Forster's tendency to retreat from life in the way I have suggested above, and it points to similar patterns elsewhere.

These discrepancies are not, as I have said, sufficient to disturb the equilibrium of the novel as a whole. They are nonetheless interesting for the light they throw on Forster's tendency to undercut his own philosophy of earthly humanism, and to tend towards a more spiritualised, ultimately detached and transcendent vision in the later works.

Where Angels Fear to Tread

In Where Angels Fear to Tread,[24] as in A Room with a View, Italy is presented as a mystic force, exerting its strange influence on visitors to it, and affecting them in ways that they could never have anticipated. When Harriet looks up the town of Monteriano in Philip's Baedeker in a desperate effort to understand the events there, her mother says with characteristic dismissiveness that the "place has nothing to do with it at all" (A.13/P.30). She could not be further from the truth: the place has, in fact, everything to do with the matter. Both the vulgar Lilia and the staid Caroline Abbott have succumbed to the magic spell of the Italian town.

But the Italy of Where Angels Fear to Tread is not the country of sunshine and violets found in the other novel: it is an Italy "terrible and mysterious" (A.43/P.60), where suffering and brutality co-exist with beauty and happiness. It is an unseen force capable of driving the English characters to extremes of unwonted passion even while in the apparent

safety of Sawston. The extent of its various qualities is revealed as the novel progresses, and the salvation of the two main characters, Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott, involves recognition and acceptance of them. The country presents the two young English people with aspects of reality denied to them in the stifling conventionality of Sawston.

At the beginning of the novel, when the Herriton family is gathered at Charing Cross to see Lilia and Miss Abbott off, Philip Herriton emerges as one of the aesthetes so common in Forster's fiction. A more humane and likeable version of Cecil Vyse, he is treated with greater sympathy than Forster usually extends to his type. As we later learn, he has "a sense of beauty and a sense of humour" (A.54/P.70). The first gift had been stimulated by his own visit to Italy where he "absorbed into one aesthetic whole olive-trees, blue sky, frescoes, country-inns, saints, peasants, mosaics, statues, beggars" (A.54/P.70). He had returned to Sawston "with the air of a prophet" (A.54/P.70), champion of the beauty he had witnessed. Finding Sawston impervious to this gospel, he had despaired: "He concluded that nothing could happen, not knowing that human love and love of truth sometimes conquer where love of beauty fails" (A.55/P.71). In self-defence he had relied on his second gift: "If he could not reform the world, he could at all events laugh at it, thus attaining at least an intellectual superiority" (A.55/P.71).

It is in this state of complacent self-assurance that he joins in the farewells to Lilia, flooding her with advice about Italy. He concludes by telling her to "love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land" (A.1/P.19).

Philip's affection for the Italian people is,however, little more than an aspect of that "aesthetic whole" which had so enchanted him before. Like his supposed bohemianism, it exists mainly in the realms of theory. He, who had given Lilia "a talking which she remembered to her dying day" (A.6/P.24) for riding and falling off a bicycle, reacts with equal conventionality when she actually takes his advice to heart. When the news of her engagement to an Italian reaches Sawston, his feelings are those of his mother and sister. "For three years he had sung the praises of the Italians, but he had never contemplated having one as a relative" (A.14/P.31).

It is a discrepancy which comes as no surprise to his mother. Mrs Herriton's cold-blooded skill at manipulation deals with Philip's enthusiasm as she deals with anything else "that may disturb domestic life" (A.5/P.23). Her memorable words to Harriet, "Let Philip say what he likes, and he will do what we like" (A.9/P.27), prove unpleasantly prophetic as he prepares to leave

for Italy in an attempt to prevent the undesirable match. He goes without any enthusiasm for the task ahead of him.

In Italy Philip's spirits do not improve. In the strange atmosphere of the country — "the hot sun, the cold air behind the heat, the endless rows of olives, regular yet mysterious" (A.16/P.34) — the certainties of Sawston no longer seem to hold, and he is left feeling bewildered and tired. Lilia's proposed marriage ceases to be the abstract insult to family pride which had so outraged Mrs Herriton, and he determines to give in if "the match was really suitable" (A.16/P.34).

But even this concession to Lilia's humanity is not enough to avert the further blow to his theoretical idealism which Caroline Abbott's description of the husband-to-be brings. Gino Carella, she admits, is the son of a dentist.

> Philip gave a cry of personal disgust and pain. He shuddered all over, and edged away from his companion. A dentist! A dentist at Monteriano! A dentist in fairyland! False teeth and laughing-gas and the tilting chair at a place which knew the Etruscan League, and the Pax Romana, and Alaric himself, and the Countess Matilda, and the Middle Ages, all fighting and holiness, and the Renaissance, all fighting and beauty! He thought of Lilia no longer. He was anxious for himself: he feared that Romance might die. (A.19-20/P.37)

Gino proves quite as undesirable as Philip fears. Vulgar, brutal and boorish, he fills the fastidious Englishman with horror and disgust. Even when he admits to himself that the Italian has the face that he had seen and loved before in Italy he cannot conquer his distaste. However attractive the man might be in theory as the archetypal Italian, his face is not "the face of a gentleman" (A.23/P.41).

Events later that evening do even less to reconcile Philip to the situation. After a stormy interview with Lilia, he confronts Gino alone and discreetly attempts to buy him off. But the Italian — who finds it all delightfully comic — admits that he and Lilia are already married, and that Philip's "rescue mission" has been in vain. Overcome with hilarity, he good-naturedly gives Philip "an aimless push, which toppled him onto the bed" (A.29/P.47). The astounded Englishman is humiliated and furious at this affront to his dignity. Once again the vibrant spirit of Italy has forced itself upon him with disconcerting results, upsetting his idealisation of it.

Philip's mission to prevent the marriage is a failure, and accompanied by the now distraught Miss Abbott, he returns to England. When, in time,

the news of Lilia's death reaches Sawston, his disillusionment with Italy is complete:

> Italy, the land of beauty, was ruined for him. She had no power to change men and things who dwelt in her. She, too, could produce avarice, brutality, stupidity - and what was worse, vulgarity. It was on her soil and through her influence that a silly woman had married a cad. He hated Gino, the betrayer of his life's ideal, and now that the sordid tragedy had come it filled him with pangs, not of sympathy, but of final disillusion. (A.55/P.71)

But his involvement with Italy is by no means at an end. As the narrator points out, even Philip's fear that the romance of Italy has been destroyed for him is of an essentially superficial kind:

> Romance only dies with life. No pair of pincers will ever pull it out of us. But there is a spurious sentiment which cannot resist the unexpected and the incongruous and the grotesque. A touch will loosen it, and the sooner it goes from us the better. It was going from Philip now, and therefore he gave a cry of pain. (A.20/P.37-8)

It is only this "spurious sentiment" that Philip has sacrificed in his encounter with Gino Carella. His effete idealism was insufficient for the true romance of Italy, and though he does not realise it, that has remained intact, to be discovered afresh and with greater insight on his third visit to the country. Before dealing with this however, it is necessary to examine briefly Forster's own conception and presentation of the romance of Italy in Where Angels Fear to Tread.

Although the contrast between Monteriano and Sawston is fundamental to the structure of the novel, even the most superficial of readings makes it clear that the matter is not as straightforward as this. While ultimately the two areas of action do indicate the dualism of the damned and the saved, it is not simply a question of wholehearted approval or disapproval on Forster's part. Crews, before defining the "moral world" of the two Italian novels as a "relatively simple and schematic one", makes an important qualification. He writes:

> The moral issue in the Italian novels is the familiar one of whether we should heed the voice of passion or that of respectability. Forster believes in passion and eventually forces his characters to bow to it, but he is also aware of its dangers; we are not asked simply to agree that the Italian heart is preferable to the English spine.[25]

He goes on to say of Monteriano:

> Birth, love and death compose the visible fabric of existence there, and the human tendencies that are most efficiently thwarted in Sawston are openly expressed: extravagance, superstition, theatricality, violence, coarse democracy among men, and ruthless subjugation of women. These are not 'virtues' for Forster, but they help to complete the limited picture of reality available at Sawston. To acknowledge their right to existence is to loosen the grip of Sawston's provinciality, and hence, in Forster's private ethics, to be 'saved'.[26]

As Crews rightly insists, Forster does not lend unqualified support to all aspects of Italian life. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the chapters detailing "the brief and inevitable tragedy of Lilia's married life" (A.31/P.49). Her attraction to Gino, in whom Forster embodies the spirit of Italy, is from the beginning, superficial and sentimental. With her "rather blowsy high spirits" (A.45/P.61) she gives no thought to the undeniable social and national differences between herself and Gino. It comes therefore as no surprise to read of her increasing unhappiness and regret. Nonetheless, there is more than an element of truth in the irony of her nostalgia for the "free, happy life" of Sawston (A.48/P.65). Nor is her analysis of Gino as "a cruel, worthless, hypocritical, dissolute upstart" (A.50/P.67) completely without basis or authorial endorsement.[27]

Yet ultimately, this negative side of Italy is subordinated to Forster's larger vision of the country's romance. While never condoned per se, it is acceptable for the passion and sincerity that characterise it. In Italy Forster depicts a society in harmony, both with the natural world and with its own past, acting out its beliefs in the certainty of a communal heritage. It is one that allows the free and open expression of the full range of the human psyche. Sawston only appears "civilized" by contrast because it habitually suppresses the more extreme emotions. Deracinated and over-cultivated, it attempts to control both the natural world and human nature.[28] In essence it is as brutal and cruel as Italy; the difference lies in its attempt to gloss over such realities. When extreme passions do assert themselves — as often in the case of Mrs Herriton — it is with the frightening violence of a pent-up volcano erupting.

It was, in fact, a recognition of the sincerity of Italy that prompted Miss Abbott, apparently a model of Sawston rectitude, to join Lilia in her defiance of convention. Back in England she explains to Philip the circumstances which prompted her rebellion. She tells him how she hated "the idleness, the stupidity, the respectability, the petty unselfishness" of Sawston:

> I had got an idea that everyone here spent their lives in making little sacrifices for objects they didn't care for,

> to please people they didn't love; that they never learned to be sincere - and, what's as bad, never learned how to enjoy themselves. That's what I thought - what I thought at Monteriano. (A.60/P.76)

Lilia, she goes on to say,

> had somehow kept the power of enjoying herself with sincerity. And Gino, I thought, was splendid, and young, and strong not only in body, and sincere as the day. (A.60/P.76)

Believing this, she had encouraged and abetted them in their plans for marriage. But since then, in view of consequent developments, she has regretted this rash foray into "real life". "I didn't see that all these things are invincible, and that if we go against them they will break us to pieces" (A.61/P.77), she tells Philip.

His reply is an indication of the detached aestheticism in which he characteristically seeks comfort, especially since the destruction of his ideal:

> 'Oh, I quite sympathize with what you say,' said Philip encouragingly; 'it isn't nonsense, and a year or two ago I should have been saying it too. But I feel differently now, and I hope that you also will change. Society is invincible - to a certain degree. But your real life is your own, and nothing can touch it. There is no power on earth that can prevent your criticizing and despising mediocrity - nothing that can stop you retreating into splendour and beauty - into the thoughts and beliefs that make the real life - the real you.' (A.61-2/P.77)

His is the complacent solipsism of the aesthete in an intractable Philistine world, and he can make nothing of her diffident, but really wiser response of "Surely I and my life must be where I live" (A.62/P.77).

At this stage of the novel then, the attitude of the two protagonists to Italy is decidedly negative: the one disillusioned at the destruction of an aesthetic ideal, the other in a state of guilt-ridden reaction to its temptations. But Italy in the form of Gino Carella continues to exercise its magnetic attraction on Sawston. The postcards which Irma receives from her "lital brother" (A.63/P.78) force the Herritons into acknowledging the existence of Lilia's baby. Prompted by Caroline's frenzied sense of sin, Mrs Herriton investigates the possibility of adopting the child. Her motives are wholly selfish: her pride revolts at the idea of anyone appearing more charitable than herself. She will not acknowledge them as such, however, and for once Philip is stung out of his protective detachment. He sees his mother and the world she represents for what they are, insincere and empty:

> Her life, he saw, was without meaning. To what purpose was her diplomacy, her insincerity, her continued repression of vigour? Did they make anyone better or happier? Did they even bring happiness to herself? Harriet with her gloomy peevish creed, Lilia with her clutches after pleasure, were after all more divine than this well-ordered, active, useless machine. (A.68-9/P.84)

In spite of himself, Philip is drawn into a position of involvement, recognising the "human love and love of truth" that had escaped him previously. Yet he resists the change, as he does the nostalgia that Gino's letter to Mrs Herriton awakens. He tries to fall back on the easy moral judgements of Sawston: "A bounder's a bounder, whether he lives in Sawston or Monteriano" (A.72/P.87), he tells himself. But his words, when Mrs Herriton, driven to maniac fury by Caroline's plan to adopt the child herself, once again sends him on a rescue mission to Italy, suggest otherwise. Unconsciously frightened by Miss Abbott's determination and by the reality that Italy represents, he too gives way to hysterical passion:

> 'Let her go to Italy!' he cried. 'Let her meddle with what she doesn't understand! Look at this letter! The man who wrote it will marry her, or murder her, or do for her somehow. He's a bounder, but he's not an English bounder. He's mysterious and terrible. He's got a country behind him that's upset people from the beginning of the world.' (A.73/P.88)

His words will prove prophetic, both for Caroline and for himself; but for the present Philip reconciles himself to his unpleasant task by retreating to his position of ironic spectator, "indifferent to all in it except the humours" (A.74/P.89). With perfect cynicism he views the expedition in the light of one who has no part in it. Not even Italy, he feels, can have any effect on him now:

> There was nothing to distract him this time; his sentimentality had died, so had his anxiety for the family honour. He might be a puppet's puppet, but he knew exactly the disposition of the strings. (A.75/P.89-90)

In this mood, accompanied by Harriet, he makes his second trip to Italy as Sawston's emissary. Their arrival and the journey to Monteriano are chaotic and uncomfortable, but even at this stage Philip's detachment begins to disintegrate before the enchantment of the South. However unpleasant, "nothing — not even the discomfort — was commonplace" (A.77/P.91). Already he becomes aware of aspects of Italy which, in his superficial idealisation, he had missed before. Acknowledging Harriet's peevish reminder of his earlier dictum that "beauty is the only test" (A.77/P.92), he nevertheless tries to define that more subtle quality that is the romance of Italy: "So many things have happened here — people have lived so hard and so splendidly

— I can't explain" (A.77/P.92). Both the simplistic moral judgements of Sawston and his own refined aestheticism lose their force in the benevolent air of Italy. Speaking of Gino, he tells his unbending sister:

> 'Because he was unfaithful to his wife, it doesn't follow that in every way he's absolutely vile.' He looked at the city. It seemed to approve his remark. (A.78/P.93)

"Things", Philip is beginning to realise, "aren't so jolly easy" (A.78/P.93).

If, however, this is an insight which enables him to understand something of the complex romance of Italy, it is also one which confirms his reluctance to involve himself decisively in his "mission". His recognition of the mixture of good and evil brings with it, ironically, a moral paralysis; a passive surrender to external events in the light of his inability to pass judgement on them. It is the unresolved — and perhaps unresolvable — paradox of this position that lies at the centre of Philip's subsequent behaviour in Italy, and is ultimately at the heart of Forster's ambivalent vision in Where Angels Fear to Tread. As Harriet — "a straight, brave woman, as well as a peevish one" (A.79/P.93) — rightly points out, Philip has no interest in the baby whose life he is to play a part in changing. Like Santa Deodata, Monteriano's patron saint, and to whom his thoughts now turn dreamily, he is determined to play as small a part in life as possible.

The discovery of Miss Abbott awaiting them in Monteriano does, however, serve to jolt Philip out of his indifference. An unwelcome reminder of what he has come out to Italy to do, her "presence affected him too personally" (A.82/P.97). He is equally affected — although more happily — by her revelation that Gino, whom she had encountered by accident, regrets his discourtesy to him during that earlier and disastrous visit. Once again, against his will, Philip is being drawn into human involvement. The fate of the baby, however, remains in the background.

Meanwhile, Caroline Abbott, despite her moral determination, has also been influenced by the tolerant spirit of Italy. Caught off guard for a moment, she half admits to Philip that the issues are not as straightforward as they had seemed in Sawston. If only, she says, she could be like Harriet!

> She would not go further, but he believed that she had paid homage to the complexity of life. For her, at all events, the expedition was neither easy nor jolly. Beauty, evil, charm, vulgarity, mystery - she also acknowledged this tangle, in spite of herself. (A.89/P.104)

Together they silently consider the stirring history of Monteriano, "all fighting and holiness... all fighting and beauty", such as had entranced

Philip before. But by now he is beginning to recognise its connection with the tangle of the modern city. In the tower which has evoked the romance of Italy for them, he sees an appropriate symbol:

> 'It reaches up to heaven,' said Philip, 'and down to the other place.' The summit of the tower was radiant in the sun, while its base was in shadow and pasted over with advertisements. 'Is it to be a symbol of the town?' (A.90/P.104)

One of these advertisements is for a performance of Lucia di Lammermoor that night. They decide to go to it, still surrendering to the hedonism of Italy and forgetting for a moment their duty to be "tilting against the powers of evil" (A.92/P.107).

The opera proves to be Italy in essence. The theatre is vulgar and tasteless, and the performance is joined in and interrupted by the enthusiastic audience. But the whole suggests the vitality of the country, and both Philip and Caroline join in with the spirit of it, knowing that for all the sham, vulgarity and crudity, they are in the presence of romance and beauty. When eventually Harriet insists that they leave, Philip is hailed by and joins Gino and his companions. He soon falls in with their mood of easy comradeship.

It is a wonderful evening for Caroline Abbott. But the happiness it brings soon reminds her of her first trip to Italy, and with the memory comes shame and guilt. Believing herself the only one able to do battle with the "powers of evil", the next day she visits Gino alone.

Only later in the novel when Caroline tells Philip of her sexual attraction to the Italian do the full implications of her almost hysterical conviction of his evil become apparent. Even now, however, his effect on the sexually repressed young woman is evident. Acutely aware of his physical presence, she transfers her feelings of fear and guilt onto him, turning him into a monster of depravity.

The sight of the baby itself also does nothing to help Caroline in her mission. For the first time she is struck by its humanity. She recognises it as more than just the concept around which moral issues have revolved:

> The real thing, lying asleep on a dirty rug, disconcerted her. It did not stand for a principle any longer. It was so much flesh and blood, so many inches and ounces of life - a glorious, unquestionable fact, which a man and another woman had given to the world. (A.103/P.117)

Caroline who (like Philip in his aestheticism) has often, through moral

inflexibility, evaded the vital spirit of Italy, is prompted by the sight of this symbol of unsuppressed primitive nature to suspend all moral judgement. The child has the same effect on her as Italy itself has had: she wishes to accept it as itself, in its entirety. The ideals, "excellent things all" (A.104/P.118) which Sawston wishes to impose upon it, become suddenly negligible:

> The horrible truth, that wicked people are capable of love, stood naked before her, and her moral being was abashed. It was her duty to rescue the baby, to save it from contagion, and she still meant to do her duty. But the comfortable sense of virtue left her. She was in the presence of something greater than right and wrong. (A.109/P.122)

When Gino sets about bathing the baby, her sense of that "something" becomes even more acute:

> She turned away her head when Gino lifted his son to his lips. This was something too remote from the prettiness of the nursery. The man was majestic; he was a part of Nature; in no ordinary love scene could he ever be so great. (A.111/P.125)

This vision of father and son acquires a religious quality as she is drawn into assisting him. At first she "reverently" averts her eyes; then when she helps Gino she is "strangely exalted by the service"; and when no soft towel nor powder is available, she sacrifices her handkerchief for the purpose. The effect of the language suggests a sacramental quality in the scene, one typical of Forster's mystical humanism.

It is, however, here that one begins to discern those sub-textual undercurrents which flow against the more explicit humanist themes in Forster's works. Wilfred Stone offers what seems a plausible interpretation of Caroline's vision when he writes of it:

> By such glib translations Caroline misses her moment of truth. Why must an 'ordinary love scene' be inferior to this? Because Caroline is still not emancipated enough to face the human reality; she must spiritualize it in order to make it palatable, to get it past her moral sentries. She must, in other words, turn life into art before she can accept it.[29]

What Stone ignores is the way in which her view of paternal love is endorsed and developed by the narrator.[30] It is clear from his — often rather defensive — generalisations that he shares her point of view, however much it may appear to be, as Stone suggests, an indication of her sexual reticence.

What is at stake here is Forster's ambivalent attitude to two central themes in the novel. Rex Warner rightly observes that "much of the impact

of Forster's Italy depends on sexuality and violence".[31] It is in the passionate expression of realities such as these that, as I have suggested, the romance of Italy lies for Forster. And it is on a recognition and acknowledgement of these forces, either suppressed or entirely absent in Sawston, that the salvation of Philip and Caroline is largely to depend — as it had for Lucy Honeychurch in A Room with a View. This, at least, has been the tendency of the novel so far, and indeed continues to be so in most of the remaining chapters. It is therefore disconcerting that Caroline, whose repressed sexual attraction to Gino has been evident in the foregoing scenes, should now, with her creator's approval, see him in such semi-mystic terms. The focus of her perception has moved from one of unacknowledged sexuality to a kind of fertility mysticism in which sexual love is actually dismissed as trivial.

As Warner suggests, this reticence is equally evident in Forster's depiction of violence in Where Angels Fear to Tread. The violence of modern Italy, as implied in Gino's behaviour to Lilia, falls far short of the intensity of the fighting in the Italy of the past which Philip and Caroline imaginatively evoke. The scene in which he frightens Lilia with an unexpected display of sinister, animal-like anger is swiftly followed by repentance and physical collapse. When on another occasion she returns home to find him "in the kitchen, swearing and smashing plates" (A.50/P.66), she is soon able to gain the upper hand. There are, in fact, several references throughout the novel, made by Lilia, Caroline and the narrator himself, to how she might have gained control or managed Gino, had she been more careful.[32] Violence in Gino, however passionate, usually renders him absurd rather than awesome.

As Warner comments,

> ...it seems that though Forster's art needs violence and sex, he is not very happy with either. He realizes clearly and with feeling that both violence and sex are a part of life, indeed a part of that life which he pursues. Yet he mistrusts them both and their necessary appearances in his novels are too often either mechanical or unsatisfactory.[33]

The protagonists' experience of the passionate living implied in the violence and sexuality frequently gives way to a kind of transcendent detachment; the physical, all too often, is not so much transfigured by the characters' recognition of unseen forces, as emasculated completely. Immediacy of experience is replaced by mediated experience of a kind that verges on voyeurism.

This pattern is suggested again in the scene immediately following

Caroline's vision of Gino as a symbol of continuity. Philip enters the room to find her sitting with the baby on her knee and "twenty miles of view behind her", while Gino kneels before them. He sees "to all intents and purposes, the Virgin and Child, with Donor".

> 'Hallo!' he exclaimed; for he was glad to find things in such cheerful trim. (A.112/P.126)

Here the ironic use of language makes it clear that Forster means to distance himself from Philip's point of view. Philip is guilty of his characteristic aestheticism, converting life into art in order to make it more managable.[34] Yet it is remarkable that in the preceding description of the baby Forster has employed a similar technique. The baby is described as "a little kicking image of bronze" (A.111/P.124) and later compared to babies in Renaissance paintings similar to the one that Philip imagines.

There is already an uncomfortably close relationship between Forster and his protagonist,[35] whereby Philip's perception is often both the vehicle through which Forster's satire is expressed, and at the same time an indication of the perceiver's spiritual insufficiency. Here this intimacy between creator and character becomes all the more noticeable as Forster fails to distinguish sufficiently between his narrator's point of view and Philip's apparently repudiated aestheticism. The effect is to distort the novel's thematic consistency.

But — to return to Caroline — her vision persuades her that she should give up trying to "rescue" the baby. Philip later shrewdly guesses the nature of what has happened, although the full significance of the scene eludes him. Rightly, but superficially, he sees that for "the second time, Monteriano must have turned her head" (A.116/P.130). As for himself, he remains determined to preserve his detachment from the whole affair. He insists on this course even when Caroline challenges him to act decisively, one way or another, instead of being content with an "honourable failure". Sincerely moved by her passionate plea for action, he is nevertheless adamant that it is not for him. He tells her:

> I seem fated to pass through the world without colliding with it or moving it - and I'm sure I can't tell you whether the fate's good or evil. I don't die - I don't fall in love. And if other people die or fall in love they always do it when I'm not there. You are quite right: life to me is just a spectacle, which - thank God, and thank Italy, and thank you - is now more beautiful and heartening than it has ever been before. (A.121/P.134-5)

Thus he expresses the existential dilemma that lies behind much of his behaviour in the novel. In spite of being "the only one... who has a general view of the muddle" (A.119/P.132) — or rather because of it — Philip is unable to act in it. A detached overview of all the passionately held beliefs that make up that muddle — Gino's, Harriet's, Caroline's, even Mrs Herriton's cold, calculated insincerity — brings him understanding and compassion but, ironically, renders him impotent. It is a predicament that suggests Forster's own ambivalence in this and other of his works. On the one hand is his attraction to the passionate immersion in life of a Gino; on the other, and in fact running concurrent with the first, is a pull towards the transcendent, voyeuristic vision of a Philip, alone able to comprehend and interpret that life.[36] And it is this latter tendency which proves the stronger as this novel reaches its conclusion.

Caroline Abbott's urgings are to be justified by the development of the plot. Later in the day she speaks grimly prophetic words:

> There's never any knowing - how am I to put it? - which of our actions, which of our idlenesses won't have things hanging on it for ever. (A.123/P.136)

For Philip, to whom they are addressed, they have, however, "only an aesthetic value" (A.123/P.136).

When the English "rescue party" prepares to leave Monteriano that night — the last interview with Gino having, as Philip predicted, come to nothing — it is in an atmosphere of increasing melodrama. The night is "extraordinarily dark" (A.125/P.138) and it is beginning to rain as Caroline sets off in the first of the carriages. Philip, in search of Harriet, finds her prayerbook open at a passage from the Old Testament: "Blessed be the Lord my God, who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight" (A.125/P.139). The sentiments are characteristically Harriet's; and Philip, who has chosen the path of passive detachment, puts the book away, preferring "to brood over more profitable themes" (A.125/P.139). But the words are a doleful presage of the events to come.

The mood is developed through the incidents that follow. Responding to a note brought by an idiot, Philip meets his sister at a gate to the city. She is carrying the baby, having, unknown to him, kidnapped it from the Carella home. As they travel through the dark and the rain it seems to him "as if they were travelling with the whole world's sorrow, as if all the mystery, all the persistency of woe were gathered to a single font" (A.129/P.143).

The climax, when it comes, seems inevitable. The carriage overturns and

the baby is killed. Sawston's destructive interference in Italy has crystallised into a human tragedy. In the accident, however, lies Philip's salvation. In it he sees the consequences of his inaction:

> As yet he could scarcely survey the thing. It was too great. Round the Italian baby who had died in the mud there centred deep passions and high hopes. People had been wicked or wrong in the matter; no one save himself had been trivial. (A.133/P.146)

And recognising this, he further realises what he should do:

> The course of the moment - that, at all events, was certain. He and no one else must take the news to Gino. It was easy to talk of Harriet's crime - easy also to blame the negligent Perfetta or Mrs Herriton at home. Everyone had contributed - even Miss Abbott and Irma. If one chose, one might consider the catastrophe composite or the work of fate. But Philip did not so choose. It was his own fault, due to acknowledged weakness in his own character. Therefore he, and no one else, must take the news of it to Gino. (A.133/P.146)

His decision amounts to a conscious choice between his usual detachment and an acknowledgement of his individual responsibility in life.

The uncanny, animal-like brutality with which Gino, who had "inherited the skill of his ancestors" (A.137/P.150), responds to the news is the closest Forster comes to suggesting the violence of historical Italy in a modern context. It is also Philip's initiation into an aspect of reality that he has not experienced. In a letter to R.C. Trevelyan, Forster writes of the scene:

> P. [Philip] is a person who has scarcely ever felt the physical forces that are banging about in the world, and ~~I didn't forget~~ [sic] he couldn't get good and understand by spiritual suffering alone. Bodily punishment, however unjust superficially, was necessary too: in fact the scene - to use a heavy word, and one that I have only just thought of - was sacramental.[37]

The scene is also — ironically perhaps, because unconsciously — Forster's most effective evocation of the sexuality of Italy. As in many similar scenes in his work, there is clearly an undercurrent of the sado-masochistic homosexuality that so fascinated him.[38] Furbank notes of the scene that it "had stirred him [Forster] to write it, though at the time he neither knew nor wondered why".[39]

Gino's torture of Philip is brought to an end through Caroline Abbott's return and intervention. She comforts Gino and restores peace between the

two men. To Philip she seems a goddess, her eyes "full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned the boundaries of sorrow, and saw unimaginable tracts beyond. Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal" (A.139/P.151-2). Through her, we are told, his salvation is realised:

> Philip looked away, as he sometimes looked away from the great pictures where visible forms suddenly become inadequate for the things they have shown to us. He was happy; he was assured that there was greatness in the world. There came to him an earnest desire to be good through the example of this good woman. He would try henceforward to be worthy of the things she had revealed. Quietly, without hysterical prayers or banging of drums, he underwent conversion. He was saved. (A.139/P.152)

Philip's "salvation" through Caroline is as problematic as his earlier vision of her with the child had been. Although his desire to "be good" implies a new commitment to humanity and to his own part in life, the manner in which he perceives her suggests rather his old aesthetic detachment. She is compared to a figure in a picture, remote and spiritualised, and to a goddess, beyond the reach or comprehension of mortal mankind. Again, sexuality, violence and passion have faded, to be replaced with a detached mysticism.

The end of the novel is a deliberate anti-climax. As Philip and Caroline leave, the description of their train "slowly ascending out of Italy towards the St Gotthard tunnel" (A.141/P.153) suggests the spiritual regression that their return to England implies. Philip, although he does not plan to remain in Sawston, must nevertheless return to "London and work" (A.142/P.155); Caroline goes back to Sawston and her charitable activities. "All the wonderful things are over" (A.144/P.157), she says, and in time he agrees with her.

Philip has by now found himself to be very much in love with Caroline, having recognised that his goddess is also a woman:

> He had reached love by the spiritual path: her thoughts and her goodness and her nobility had moved him first, and now her whole body and all its gestures had become transfigured by them. The beauties that are called obvious - the beauties of her hair and her voice and her limbs - he had noticed these last; Gino, who never traversed any path at all, had commended them dispassionately to his friend. (A.141-2/P.154)

But even this somewhat apologetic acknowledgement of sexuality is short-lived. Though convalescent "both in body and spirit" (A.142/P.155), Philip feels no access of joy. He is plagued by the sense of anti-climax,

and more particularly by Caroline's calmly dismissive attitude to Italy. Even the "salvation" he had earlier been granted seems insufficient now:

> Life was greater than he had supposed, but it was even less complete. He had seen the need for strenuous work and for righteousness. And now he saw what a very little way those things would go. (A.142/P155)

Caroline's revelation of her love for Gino completes the irony of his disappointment. Even more ironically, she, believing him to be the detached cynic he had once been, asks his help in overcoming it: "I dare tell you this because I like you— and because you're without passion; you look on life as a spectacle; you don't enter it; you only find it funny or beautiful" (A.145/P.158).

The flippancy of his response is an indication of Philip's love for her: he gives her the kind of answer she wants. But in his own feelings there is horror mixed with the pity:

> He smiled bitterly at the thought of them together. Here was the cruel antique malice of the gods, such as they once sent forth against Pasiphaë. Centuries of aspiration and culture - and the world could not escape it. (A.146/P.159)

He who moments before had anticipated "the greatest of things" (A.144/P.157) for himself, now dismisses sexuality as gross humiliation, the antithesis of "aspiration and culture".

Philip's self-effacement remains as the novel closes. He stands aside from the events in which he has, at first unwillingly and later deliberately, played a part:

> For the thing was even greater than she imagined. Nobody but himself would ever see round it now. And to see round it he was standing at an immense distance. He could even be glad that she had once held the beloved in her arms. (A.147/P.160)

In Caroline — again the Miss Abbott of Sawston who can speak of herself as being "saved" from passion — he again sees a goddess, transfigured, having "no part with refinement or unrefinement any longer" (A.147/P.160). An aesthete to the end, he deals with his subconscious horror at her sexuality by exchanging one myth for another: for Pasiphaë's insane lust for a beast he substitutes "the fair myth of Endymion", the romantic story of a goddess's love for a mortal:

> For her no love could be degrading: she stood outside all degradation. This episode, which she thought so sordid, and which was so tragic for him, remained supremely beautiful. To such a height was he lifted that without regret he could now

> have told her that he was her worshipper too. But what was the use of telling her? For all the wonderful things had happened. (A.147-8/P.160)

A worshipper rather than a lover, Philip stands in a position almost akin to his creator, surveying the world of which he is part, compassionate now but nonetheless detached and uncommitted. In him we have a glimpse, even as early as this in Forster's novelistic career, of a transcendent vision such as we will see again at the end, in the figure of Professor Godbole.[40]

That Forster endorses Philip's final standpoint becomes clear if we turn again to his letter to Trevelyan. He writes:

> The object of the book is the improvement of Philip, and I did really want the improvement to be a surprise... He grows large enough to appreciate Miss Abbott, and in the final scene he exceeds her.[41]

There is, then, no question of Philip forfeiting his "salvation" because in the end he is unable to put into practice the reality he and Caroline Abbott have discovered in Italy. To what extent, furthermore, Forster is actually aware of Philip's failure is difficult to determine: there is little ironic distancing between Philip and the narrator in this final chapter. Clearly Forster regards the outcome as inevitable. Having brought his protagonists this far — Caroline to a recognition of sexual passion, and Philip almost to the point of declaring his love for her — he seems unwilling to go any further. The best they can hope for is to retire, "honourable failures", to a life of renunciation and vicarious living, warmed only by memories of the "wonderful things" of Italy. The most that can be gained (and Caroline does not even achieve this) is a godlike knowledge and a compassionate understanding which would enable them to transcend the muddle of life — in which it had seemed for a time that they would become passionate actors — and to contemplate it, detached from all human involvement. The spectatorship to which Forster so often returns, even while apparently condemning it in Philip, seems, in the end, the only salvation that he can bring himself to give his characters.

Notes

[1]E.M. Forster, Collected Short Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954). The collection is not yet available in an Abinger edition.

[2]E.M. Forster, The Life to Come and Other Stories, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol.8 (London: Edward Arnold, 1972); ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).

[3]K.W. Gransden, E.M. Forster (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd,

1962),p.11. Compare also Stone, p.161 and J. Colmer, E.M. Forster: The Personal Voice (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p.29. Forster's use of Greek classicism in the short stories is also a reflection of contemporary interest: see in this respect F.M. Turner, The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1981).

[4]Trilling, Ch.iii.

[5]E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, ed. O. Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976),p.104.

[6]Compare F.C. Crews, E.M. Forster,p.94. Crews comments that fantasy "frees the writer from being strictly accountable to a world of distasteful facts. His wish for a more congenial order is projected onto an otherwise realistic narrative, thus sparing him a hopeless antagonism to his subject matter". Compare also Stone,p.124: "Fantasy is a device whereby old and young alike (but particularly young) escape or make tolerable an environment they cannot cope with in a mature way. It always springs from frustration".

[7]A. Wilde, Art and Order: A Study of E.M. Forster (London: Peter Owen, 1965),p.80. Wilde correctly exempts "The Road from Colonus" from this analysis. This, he says, "forces the conclusion that most of the other stories shirk: that in the actual confrontation of the ideal with the real, the ideal has little chance of success" (p.80). This is equally true of "The Story of the Siren".

[8]A. Wilde, Art and Order,p.84

[9]E.M. Forster, A Room with a View, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol. 3 (London: Edward Arnold, 1977); ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978); editions hereafter designated in the text by A. and P., respectively.

[10]See the MSS of the early versions in The Lucy Novels: Early Sketches for A Room with a View, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol. 3a (London: Edward Arnold, 1977). See also Elizabeth Ellem, "E.M. Forster: The Lucy and New Lucy Novels: Fragments of Early Versions of A Room with a View", Times Literary Supplement, 28 May 1971.

[11]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.85. Compare also McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.117.

[12]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.92.

[13]D. Godfrey,p.91, remarks: "At no point in A Room with a View are the unseen and its emissaries being imposed on us explicitly; on the other hand the implications of their working... are too frequent and unmistakable to be lightly set aside".

[14]A belief in the power of Fate is, however, one shared at various times by Lucy and by old Mr Emerson, and one which the novel as a whole seems to endorse as another of the supernatural forces which control the actions of the characters.

[15]See, for example, Jeffrey Meyers, "'Vacant Heart and Hand and Eye': The Homosexual Theme in A Room with a View", English Literature in Transition, 13 (1970),pp.181-92. Meyers's claim that Mr Beebe is a covert homosexual is, however, unconvincing and unsubstantiated.

[16]Written after the completion of Where Angels Fear to Tread and The Longest Journey, this latter part of the novel indicates that "in the intervening years between the time Forster started writing and the time he completed this novel, life had deepened for him in complexity and seriousness" (Shusterman, The Quest for Certitude in E.M. Forster's Fiction,p.129).

[17]Note how throughout the novel Lucy's choice of music serves as a symbolic indication of her spiritual state.

[18]It is interesting to compare a sentence from the "New Lucy" MS: "They [Lucy and George] were god and goddess, with the little stupid world spinning far beneath them" (The Lucy Novels,p.122). Earlier in A Room with a View the narrator also speaks of the Piazza Signoria as a place where "a hero [might] meet a goddess, or a heroine a god" (A.57/P.78).

[19]See A.24/P.45 and A.130/P.149.

[20]It is nevertheless significant that Forster should choose to adopt a mode of perception similar to that of the character he repudiates. See my discussion below,p.37.

[21]In response to Furbank's question, "Do any of your characters represent yourself at all?", Forster mentioned, among others, Cecil Vyse. See Writers at Work,p.31.

[22]Mr Beebe is also often guilty of viewing things artistically (see A.93/ P.112), an aestheticism which, as Rosecrance points out, Forster tolerates and sometimes even shares while repudiating the same tendency in Cecil. See Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.99.

[23]On this issue compare J.S. Martin, E.M. Forster: The Endless Journey, pp.104-105.

[24]E.M. Forster, Where Angels Fear to Tread, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol. 1 (London: Edward Arnold, 1975); ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976); editions hereafter designated in the text by A. and P., respectively.

[25]Crews, E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism,p.72

[26]Crews, E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism,p.73.

[27]See, for example, the narrator's comment on Gino's infidelity: "It would have been well if he had been as strict over his own behaviour as he was over hers. But the incongruity never occurred to him for a moment" (A.46/P.63). Although the passage later modulates into irony at the expense of the Englishman "whose standard is higher even when his practice is the same", there can be no mistaking the clear moral judgement implied.

[28]Mrs Herriton's efforts at subduing and controlling people has a symbolic parallel in her gardening activities (see A.9-14/P.26-32). The disruptive effect of Italy is effectively suggested in the scene that greets her when she returns at night to complete the work that the news of Lilia's engagement has interrupted. The peas she had sown have all gone: "The sparrows had taken every one. But countless fragments of the letter remained, disfiguring the tidy ground" (A.14/P.32).

[29]Stone, The Cave and the Mountain,p.173.

[30]See Where Angels Fear to Tread, A.51/P.69 and A.109/P.123.

[31]Rex Warner, E.M. Forster (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950),p.14.

[32]See Where Angels Fear to Tread, A.33/P.51; A.46-47/P.63; A.60-61/P.75-76; A.130/P.143.

[33]Warner,p.16.

[34]It is significant that there are parallels between Philip's perception of this scene and the picture of Santa Deodata which he later contemplates: "There was a window open behind her, revealing just such a view as he had seen that morning, and on her widowed mother's dresser there stood just such another copper pot" (A.119/P.133). In both cases Philip is complacent since in neither scene is commitment of any kind demanded of him.

[35]Philip is one of the many "Forster figures" who recur in his fiction. See Forster's comment in the Furbank/Haskell interview, in Writers at Work, p.31. Compare also a deleted sentence from the MS in the Abinger Edition of Where Angels Fear to Tread: "So it was with Philip, my true and tried acquaintance, who, on this occasion, as on so many others, feels and behaves as I do" (A.158).

[36]Compare McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,pp.24-26 on this issue. McConkey says of Philip that he discovers "a weary and saddening paradox: the all-encompassing view, the one that includes humanity and not merely one's own particular niche, requires the exclusion of the individual ego with all its hopes and desires" (p.24).

[37]"To Robert Trevelyan",28 October 1905, Letter 60, Selected Letters,I, 83-84.

[38]Compare Forster's own words: "I want to love a strong young man of the lower classes and be loved by him and even hurt by him". This is from a personal memorandum (1935), quoted by Oliver Stallybrass in his Introduction to The Life to Come and Other Stories, A.xiv/P.16.

[39]Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,I,114.

[40]See my discussion above p.14.

[41]Selected Letters,I,83.

Chapter 3

The Longest Journey

The Longest Journey,[1] which appeared in 1907, was the second of Forster's novels to be published. It was however, as already indicated, the third in conception, and as such is remarkable for the new direction in Forster's thinking that it represents. Unlike the Italian novels and many of the short stories, it is set wholly in England; and it is there that "salvation" is to be found. Rickie Elliot, the protagonist, is repeatedly presented with the hope of visiting Italy: he never does, although it is often suggested that he, like Philip Herriton, might find the reality he seeks there. Forster is clearly no longer interested in treating England merely as the place of the suburban damned, from which the characters must escape if they are to redeem themselves. Rather, he turns inwards, contrasting the various elements within English society, and distributing his sheep and goats accordingly. This is emphasised by the division of the novel into three parts, named according to the places in which the action is mainly set: Cambridge, Sawston and Wiltshire. With his characteristic sense of place, Forster invests each with a particular ethos, thus implying its role in the moral pattern of the novel.

The Longest Journey is a patriotic work, resounding with a love of the spirit of rural England: patriotic, yet quite unlike the patriotism of Herbert Pembroke from which it seems "that only a short ladder lay between the preparation-room and the Anglo-Saxon hegemony of the globe" (P.161). Rather it is that of the little boy "who was regretting a villa in Guildford and his mother's half acre of garden" (P.161), and that of Shakespeare whom Pembroke so complacently dismisses. It is patriotism that values the human individual, the Englishman, before the abstract concept of the nation.

This "inward turning" in terms of setting is accompanied by psychological introspection on Forster's part. The novel describes a quest, often painful and confused, for the truth and reality which had been treated as more or less self-evident in his earlier works. The sense of muddle and inexplicability is greater than before: life — suggested throughout the novel by images of rivers and seas — is perceived to be uncertain and unpredictable, with mankind alarmingly vulnerable to its caprices.

> There is much good luck in the world, but it is luck. We are none of us safe. We are children, playing or quarrelling on the line, and some of us have Rickie's temperament, or his experiences, and admit it. (P.116)

So the narrator comments, endorsing a feeling shared in different ways by the three main characters. Such a recognition, the novel implies, is necessary if one is to live in this world: to pretend otherwise is to court the impossible.

In keeping with the new mood of uncertainty, the positive values of the novel are embodied in several characters, each in himself insufficient but contributing to a vision of wholeness. They are Rickie Elliot, his Cambridge friend, Stewart Ansell, and his illegitimate brother, Stephen Wonham. The philosophy of Rickie's uncle, Anthony Failing, provides an additional standard against which characters, their beliefs and their actions are measured. Each of these men, in his own way, has some insight into the nature of reality, and so contributes to the final complex vision of the novel. And even Sawston, generally treated with unparalleled harshness, is acknowledged to have its share of complexity, its mixture of good and bad. As Forster probes deeper into the structure of English society he, like his character, Rickie, becomes aware of the good-and-evil that is the heritage of the human race. Here is the first hint of that broadening of vision which will continue into Howards End and culminate in A Passage to India.

In Rickie Elliot's "longest journey", his movement from the certainties of a precious elect in Cambridge to confrontation with the "great world", we may thus discern Forster's own preoccupations. The novel is, indeed, the most autobiographical of all his works, one in which he attempts to work his personal doubts and problems into what Stone calls his "redemptive myth".[2] It is, in fact, this close relationship between author and work that accounts for much of the book's weakness. Forster has said of The Longest Journey that it is the novel in which "I have managed to get nearer than elsewhere towards what was on my mind...."[3] Clearly, he was unable to preserve the necessary aesthetic distance, either from the work as a whole or from his main characters: in the case of Rickie Elliot especially, the reader often finds it difficult to distinguish between the points of view of character and narrator. Equally, in his desire to endorse several points of view simultaneously, Forster often bewilders one by his tendency to build up and then immediately undercut a character's authority.[4] As narrator he intrudes uncomfortably into the world of the novel, imposing symbolism and significance rather too heavy-handedly — in much the same way, in fact, as Rickie does.

Much of the material in the novel is drawn — as it is to a lesser degree in the other works — from Forster's personal experience. Of particular significance are the events which led to the inclusion of the Wiltshire scenes in the novel. The English countryside generally had always held a special attraction for him, both personally and as a novelist. In a talk given in 1959 entitled "Three Countries", Forster describes his childhood home in Hertfordshire, the house on which Howards End would later be modelled, and comments:

> I never thought at the time that this running about over the fields or muddling around in the farm or chasing the chickens or being chased by a cow or fingering the wych elm would ever advantage me as a novelist. But I was certainly breathing in a notion of the continuity of England and the desirability of her continuance, and both my English novels - Howards End and The Longest Journey - touch on the theme.[5]

He goes on to describe his "second vision of England", the one which touches more directly on this novel. This was his experience of Wiltshire, and it dramatically affected his conception of the new novel on which he had begun work.[6] Furbank, who reproduces the early draft of the novel — "another Anglo-Italian story, neatly plotted and rounded like Where Angels Fear to Tread and 'Lucy'"[7] — gives a detailed account of this "momentous encounter with the spirit of place",[8] describing Forster's meetings with a lame shepherd boy and his father at Figsbury Rings. Both impressed him extraordinarily. Furbank comments on the effect of this chance meeting on the embryonic novel:

> Then this incident on Figsbury Rings supervened, combining in one symbol so many elements with meaning for him: the ideal English landscape, heroic human quality in a working-class guise, and an inherited handicap (as it might be, homosexuality) courageously overcome. It released a charge of emotion in him that swamped his first design, and the novel became the queer, ardent, fumbling affair that we know as The Longest Journey.[9]

The novel is, Forster says, "about reality".[10] It is an account of the search for reality by the unheroic protagonist, Rickie Elliot, who attempts to approach reality "rather by imagination and instinct than by logic" (P.170). He has, in fact, something of Philip Herriton in him: the lonely, sensitive aesthete trapped in Philistine suburbia. But it is a mark of Forster's new emphasis that Rickie, although granted some insight into reality through the transforming power of his imagination, is more emphatically subjected to his creator's criticism. Forster, though hampered by his close identification with his character, clearly attempts to move beyond the kind of detached aestheticism that repeatedly asserted itself in

the earlier novels.[11] To this end he supplies alternative approaches to reality which, while as incomplete as Rickie's, do serve to balance and qualify them.

It is the youth of the men who embody these alternative approaches that accounts both for their ability to discern the truth and also for their limitations in doing so. The narrator's analysis of Rickie and Ansell and their undergraduate friends might equally apply to Stephen Wonham. Rickie's friends are "as young and ignorant as himself".

> They are full of the wine of life. But they have not tasted the cup - let us call it the teacup - of experience, which has made men of Mr. Pembroke's type what they are. Oh, that teacup! To be taken at prayers, at friendship, at love, till we are quite sane, quite efficient, quite experienced, and quite useless to God or man. We must drink it, or we shall die. But we need not drink it always. Here is our problem and our salvation. There comes a moment - God knows when - at which we can say, 'I will experience no longer. I will create. I will be an experience.' But to do this we must be both acute and heroic. (P.66-7)

The passage carefully balances the claims of pragmatism against idealism: the former cannot be dismissed, yet it is clearly not to have the last word in deciding, in Ansell's words, "what is right" (P.85). Instead Forster offers the youthful heroism and vigour which he celebrates unambiguously in the short stories. The practical world of the Pembrokes, for all his acknowledgement of its necessity, remains ultimately symptomatic of "the ludicrous checks that so often stopped young men" (P.260).

The novel opens, appropriately enough, in Rickie's college rooms in Cambridge during an undergraduate discussion on the nature of reality. The differences between Rickie and Ansell are soon apparent. The latter's pedantic conviction of an absolute reality contrasts with his friend's diffidence and irrelevant day-dreaming. Rickie is attracted to people and emotions rather than to abstract philosophy. The discussion is more important to him for the comradeship and security that it represents than for its content. Cambridge, we learn, has offered him a refuge from an unfriendly world, and has awakened in him an idealistic love of humanity.

These differences are crystallised by the appearance of Agnes Pembroke. She is a typically Forsterian character: the shrill, unpleasant young woman who threatens to disrupt male comradeship and who opposes the forces of life and freedom. Her appearance now as she turns on the electric light in which the "philosophers were revealed with unpleasing suddenness" (P.10) is

an indication of the role she will play in the rest of the novel. Despite her claims to unconventionality and her complaints of the "deathly dullness of Sawston" (P.74), she and her brother Herbert soon reveal themselves as very much its representatives. In recognising her as one, all Ansell's philosophy and latent misogyny find practical expression. He refuses even to acknowledge her existence: she is unreal.

To Rickie, Agnes is a "girl like an empress" (P.22). So he tells Ansell later. But the philsopher remains obdurate: she does not even exist. He asks the bewildered Rickie:

> Did it never strike you that phenomena may be of two kinds: one, those which have a real existence, such as the cow; two, those which are the subjective product of a diseased imagination, and which, to our destruction, we invest with the semblance of reality? (P.22)

Ansell says this while drawing a strange diagram of circles and squares, placed inside one another alternately, each smaller than the last. They are for him a symbolic representation of the reality that he denies to Agnes Pembroke. Asked by the confused Rickie if they at least are real, he replies: "The inside one is — the one in the middle of everything, that there's never room enough to draw" (P.23).

But Rickie remains convinced of his empress's claims to an objective existence, and during his visit to Sawston his diseased imagination has ample opportunity to exercise itself. The Pembrokes' house encapsulates all the complacent snobbery of their existence, and Agnes's fiancé, Gerald Dawes — "a young man who had the figure of a Greek athlete and the face of an English one" (P.40) — awakens painful memories of school for Rickie. Yet he sees in the embrace of the two lovers an overwhelming vision of reality, finding in it the essence of love. The overblown, florid language describing how he perceives the scene is a clear indication of his over-active and faulty imagination again endowing an unreal world with a reality it does not possess. His vision is also (as was the case with Philip and Caroline Abbott in Where Angels Fear to Tread) a deft translation of sexual passion into a transcendental, pseudo-mystical — and hence less threatening — vagueness.[12] Yet at the same time the narrator endorses his sentiments, showing that the vision is real. The final paragraph of Chapter 3, which puts Rickie and his experience in a larger perspective, makes this clear:

> So the lovers fall into the background. They are part of the distant sunrise, and only the mountains speak to them. Rickie talks to Mr Pembroke, amidst the unlit valleys of our over-habitable world. (P.46-7)

Rickie's vision has been what Beer describes as "the moment of exaltation... the reality by which other states of human existence are to be judged and against which they sink into various modes of unreality".[13] Through the transforming power of Rickie's imagination, Agnes and Gerald have been granted a moment of the reality not normally theirs.

But as Beer goes on to point out, Forster "also recognises the dangers of the visionary moment". He writes:

> The experience of reality which it brings is a subjective revelation: and a character must beware of identifying it too hastily with the object which called it forth.[14]

This is exactly what Rickie fails to do. To the inhibited and self-conscious young man, the vision of sexual love becomes overwhelming, and he continues to mythologise the lovers in a way that increasingly distorts the relationship between vision and fact. Carried away by his veneration, Rickie loses perspective completely. Hearing that the lovers will not be able to marry soon for want of money, he idealistically conceives the idea of providing them with it. "And he supposed away till he lost touch with the world and with what it permits, and committed an unpardonable sin" (P.54): that of offering Gerald an annual income. The consequences of his nobly meant but inappropriate action is, predictably, disastrous. Agnes and Gerald react with all the disgust of outraged Sawston convention.

Rickie has his second glimpse of "reality" soon afterwards. Chapter 5 opens with the deliberately shocking announcement "Gerald died that afternoon" (P.56). Agnes's immediate reaction — displaying the undeveloped heart of Sawston — is to try to smooth over the reality of what has happened. It is Rickie who shakes her out of her spiritual dishonesty. He tells her with unaccustomed vehemence:

> I did not come to comfort you. I came to see that you mind. He is in heaven, Agnes. The greatest thing is over. (P.59)

The words are characteristically idealistic and absolute: they represent, nevertheless, an insight into the reality of death.

Rickie returns to Cambridge with new eyes. His experiences in Sawston, the realities of love and death that he has witnessed, have so overwhelmed him that the Cambridge he knows and loves suddenly seems insignificant by contrast. Faced with the "splendours and horrors of the world" (P.64), he no longer finds comfort in the womb-like security of the university. Instead, he is struck by the uncertainty of life:

> He knew once for all that we are all of us bubbles on an extremely rough sea. Into this sea humanity has built, as it were, some little breakwaters - scientific knowledge, civilized restraints - so that the bubbles do not break so frequently or so soon. But the sea has not altered....[ellipsis mine] (P.62)

He deprecates his own worth, continuing to elevate Gerald and Agnes to unwarranted heights. The narrator's sustained irony makes the inappropriateness of Rickie's evaluation painfully obvious. Nonetheless, the lovers become for him the touchstone of reality. He repudiates even his own powers of imagination; powers which, though often unstable, have been after all the driving power behind his visions. Instead, he looks to the untransformed objects of the visions and indiscriminately isolates them as being alone real:

> 'I am jolly unpractical,' he mused. 'And what is the point of it when real things are so wonderful? Who wants visions in a world that has Agnes and Gerald?' (P.65)

Rickie's idealistic love of humanity has, in fact, taken on another aspect through the intervention of Sawston in his life. Previously, his wish that everyone might join him in the dell at Madingley was a symbolic indication of his desire to share his newly found good fortune at Cambridge with the whole of humanity. He has wanted to invite everyone to join him in the security and seclusion of his "womb". Now, having, as it were, experienced something of the world "outside the dell", his reaction to the experience is as absolute. He sees it as the only reality possible and feels obliged once again to align himself with what he sees as the rest of humanity. He must now become a member of the "great world".

It is for Ansell, the other spokesman for the real, to correct Rickie's over-reaction. In his own way he shares Rickie's sense of the uncertainty and complexity of life; his reaction to it, however, is to accept it as such, and to cultivate honestly that limited area in which he plays a part. He tells Rickie:

> There is no great world at all, only a little earth, for ever isolated from the rest of the little solar system. The little earth is full of tiny societies, and Cambridge is one of them. All the societies are narrow, but some are good and some are bad - just as one house is beautiful inside and another ugly. Observe the metaphor of the houses: I am coming back to it. The good societies say, 'I tell you to do this because I am Cambridge'. The bad ones say, 'I tell you to do that because I am the great world' - and not because I am 'Peckham', or 'Billingsgate', or'Park Lane', but 'because I am the great world'. They lie. And fools like you listen to them, and believe that they are a thing which does not exist and never has existed, and confuse 'great', which has no meaning whatever,

with 'good', which means salvation. (P.68)

But for Rickie, at present the victim of such thinking, the issue is also a deeply personal one. It is not as easy for him as it is for Ansell to adopt such an academically detached stance. The loss of Cambridge will mean for him a return to uncertainty and insecurity. In his desire for stability, Rickie even wishes that friends such as he has made there could be labelled. Just as previously he had attempted to "fix" Agnes and Gerald into symbols, again Rickie wants to find in friendship the same static certainty amid the welter of life.

And it is while clinging to images of the deified lovers that Rickie moves further into the "great world" which so fascinates and troubles him. Against his own will be begins to cast himself in Gerald's role and to love Agnes himself. Sexual attraction had been implicit in his vision of them from the very beginning. He had been sexually attracted to both the man[15] and the woman, unconsciously sublimating the attraction by elevating them into mystical lovers. The dawning of physical love for Agnes consequently plunges him into further feelings of guilt. He feels he has no right to love her because in doing so he is challenging and betraying the masculinity to which he is himself drawn. Later when Rickie does marry Agnes, it is clearly less for her as an individual than for the sexuality which she as a woman represents to him. He, in effect, marries both Agnes and Gerald in his attempt to justify himself to the "great world", a masochistic betrayal of the role of voyeur to which he is really best suited. It is this same inherent masochism which prompts him to keep alive Gerald's image in his wife's mind, content that he should occupy a second place in her heart, and which allows him to submit to her tyranny. Rickie's love for Agnes is, in essence, as unreal as his perception of her as an "empress" had been.[16]

But it is Agnes who "seduces" Rickie in the dell, the privacy of which she invades as she had invaded his college rooms.

At this stage it must be noted that, in his treatment of Rickie's sense of the contrast between the secure but limited sanctuary of Cambridge, and the "splendours and horrors of the world", Forster's own sympathies are evenly balanced. Rickie has experienced realities which, even though he has failed to interpret them correctly, set him apart from and in some ways above the theory and inexperience of Ansell.[17] At the same time it is clear that the author endorses Ansell's claim for one's right to ethical individualism.[18] It is this ambivalence which points, as I have suggested, to the new direction in Forster's thinking that The Longest Journey represents. Rickie, like

Philip Herriton, has been granted a vision of reality: but Forster is no longer prepared to allow him, like that other anti-hero, to retire to his former life of aesthetic detachment, comforted by his memories but fundamentally unchanged. It is necessary that he at least attempt to participate in the world which evoked the vision.[19] In marrying Agnes and becoming part of Sawston School's "beneficent machine" Rickie is in effect denying his own nature. So Ansell implies when he writes that Rickie is unfitted in body and soul to marry (P.86). The attempt is doomed by its very nature. Yet Rickie's marriage is a fictional experiment that Forster seems to find necessary, anticipating in it his large-scale attempt at reconciliation with the world of prosaic everyday reality in Howards End.

The engagement and marriage prove to be just the disaster that Ansell anticipates. Rickie shows his unrealistic idealism when they make their engagement visit to his aunt Emily, widow of Anthony Failing, at Cadover, her home in Wiltshire. His almost hysterical refusal to believe that the train (in which he and Agnes, embracing, had seemed in heaven) is the same that had accidentally run over and killed a child, is only one indication of his continued failure to connect his sentimental idealism with reality. Already he has begun the descent into that unreality which his love of Agnes implies. She has become the sole object of his interest, the "single peg" on which he has "hung all the world's beauty" (P.106). Shelley's lines on those who

> With one sad friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
> The dreariest and the longest journey go

and which at Cambridge he had marked as "very good" now seem "a little inhuman" (P.133).

Rickie's degeneration is accelerated by Agnes herself. While visiting the Cadbury Rings, Mrs Failing, in a fit of pique, reveals to him that her ward, Stephen Wonham, is his illegitimate half-brother. To Rickie it is a shocking revelation: the past which, a moment earlier, he has been praising with characteristic idealism, suddenly gapes "ever wider, like an unhallowed grave" (P.136), and he faints, unable to bear the enormity of her words. Nevertheless, he recognises the incident for what it is, a "symbolic moment", a vision of reality such as he had experienced previously. But as before, he fails to react correctly to it. When, with "a cry, not of horror but of acceptance" (P.137), he is about to acknowledge Stephen as his brother, Agnes intervenes. With symbolic appropriateness she, who had been waiting at the barrier of the inner ring, "hurried from her post on the margin, and, as if understanding also, caught him to her breast" (P.137). She invades the Rings

even as she had invaded the dell (of which they remind Rickie) and his Cambridge rooms. She intervenes again later at Cadover, this time consciously and deliberately "stopping his advance quite frankly with wide-spread arms" (P.143). Relieved only that a scandal has been averted, she cannot see why he is determined to face the consequences of so unpleasant a truth. In vain he tries to explain to her:

> It seems to me that here and there in life we meet with a person or incident that is symbolical. It's nothing in itself, yet for the moment it stands for some eternal principle. We accept it, at whatever cost, and we have accepted life. But if we are frightened and reject it, the moment, so to speak, passes; the symbol is never offered again. (P.142)

To see life in symbolic terms is partly symptomatic of Rickie's approach to it; it is nevertheless in this case a right impulse on his part, one endorsed by the novel's thematic pattern. In allowing Agnes to dissuade him from acknowledging his brotherhood with Stephen, Rickie damns himself in his own terms: he has rejected life and reality.

Yet it must be noted that, correct though his recognition of the symbolic moment is, even in this he misses truly perceiving reality. He sees Stephen less as the man whom he has discovered to be his brother, than as the embodiment of an unwelcome yet undeniable truth. His desire to acknowledge him is a purely symbolic act, unconnected with the reality of the man himself. For a brief moment he had been aware of him as "a human hand" on his neck "guiding the blood back to his brain" (P.137). The rejection of that fleeting insight means that, even in the analysis of his own failure, Rickie is already participating in unreality.

The same tendency to impose symbolism is apparent in Rickie's short stories, which he tries to get published in the period following the Wiltshire episode. The story about the dryad[20] is symptomatic of his approach to the world. In it the symbolic significance that he attaches to the natural world is externally contrived, the relationship between symbol and reality artificial rather than organic. The effect is factitious and, as the editor of the Holborn suggests, the story "does not convince" (P.149).

For Rickie the rejection of his stories parallels his failure to find the reality which it had seemed would be his through Agnes. He is unable to respond to either his old friend Tilliard's or the editor's vague talk of "life". To him the essence of life remains as elusive as ever. His rejection of the symbolic moment has led him into increasing unreality, and as he leaves the Holborn offices he is obscurely troubled by the changes in his life since leaving Cambridge:

> He loved, he was loved, he had seen death and other things; but the heart of all things was hidden. There was a password and he could not learn it, nor could the kind editor of the Holborn teach him. He sighed, and then sighed more piteously. For had he not known the password once - known it and forgotten it already? (P.150)

Sawston School, which Rickie joins as a schoolmaster under the patronage of his brother-in-law, Herbert, is the epitome of this unreality. In superficial terms, it may appear far more "real" than do the novel's actual representatives of reality: yet in its sham traditions, its meaningless conventions, its mood of complacent arrogance, its rejection of the personal in favour of a non-existent esprit de corps, it reveals its essential unreality.

Although by no means blind to its deficiencies, Rickie hopes that in the school he may nevertheless work for the good of his fellow man instead of merely contemplating it as he has done in Cambridge. Here "his wound might heal as he laboured, and his eyes recapture the Holy Grail" (P.157). And as time goes on, Rickie, still determined to take his place in the "great world", consciously suppresses his reservations about the Sawston ethos, considering himself unqualified to pass judgement on it.

His actions are not without their spiritual cost. He gradually loses his independence of thought and behaviour, always following Herbert's lead in school matters. More significantly, he experiences life at second hand, learning about his pupils "not by direct observation — for which he believed he was unfitted — but by sedulous imitation of the more experienced masters" (P.168). This is perhaps his most telling betrayal of the spirit of Cambridge which, as he recognises himself, is characterised by its effort "to dispel a little of the darkness by which we and all our acquisitions are surrounded" (P.170). For such honest enquiry after truth and reality he has substituted the platitudes of Sawston.

His marriage is as unsatisfactory as his career. Agnes fails utterly to fulfil the symbolic role he had assigned her; nor does marriage to her provide the beatific vision of reality he had anticipated in the great world:

> The crown of life had been attained, the vague yearnings, the misread impulses, had found accomplishment at last. Never again must he feel lonely, or as one who stands out of the broad highway of the world and fears, like poor Shelley, to undertake the longest journey. So he reasoned, and at first took the accomplishment for granted. But as the term passed he knew that behind the yearning there remained a yearning, behind the drawn veil a veil that he could not draw. (P.170-71)

His imaginative vision of Agnes in the arms of her lover had been the highpoint in his relationship with her. Everything after that is an anti-climax, the spiritual decline that for Forster seems inevitably to follow the moment of heightened perception. After the vision "all the wonderful things are over" — for Rickie just as they had been for Philip Herriton. In marrying Agnes he has ventured beyond his limitations.[21] So the narrator suggests when he comments:

> Neither by marriage nor by any other device can men insure themselves a vision; and Rickie's had been granted him three years before, when he had seen his wife and a dead man clasped in each other's arms. She was never to be so real to him again. (P.171)

Perversely, Rickie does seem to recognise this, but from his wife's perspective: he realises that he will never be as real to her as Gerald had been. He hopes, in fact, that the memory of Gerald is still dear to her: "He did not want her to forget the greatest moment in her life" (P.171). Rickie fails to recognise the fundamental falsity of a relationship from which he expects to perceive "the infinities of love" (P.171), while at the same time turning it into a somewhat macabre ménage à trois with the dead Gerald. His love is of an essentially passive, vicarious kind: in attempting to combine with it an active marriage he is inviting disappointment and disaster. It is little wonder that with his romantic veneration of his dead mother and of Gerald, Agnes's image should become "somewhat transient, so that when he left her no mystic influence remained, and only by an effort could he realize that God had united them for ever" (P.172).

Meanwhile Ansell, a failure in Sawston's eyes although not in his own, has with ruthless logic refused to communicate with his old friend. Neither Agnes nor Rickie, he tells Widdrington, have any real existence: it would therefore be quite meaningless to attempt to communicate with or visit either. But this does not mean that he is not prepared to act: he is waiting for what he calls "the Spirit of Life" (P.185). It is an expression which surprises Widdrington, coming from Ansell: "It was a phrase unknown to their philosophy. They had trespassed into poetry" (P.185). But for all his abstraction and youthful inexperience, Ansell is capable of learning and extending his perception of reality. When they hear, while strolling in the statued galleries of the British Museum, that Agnes is expecting a child, he recognises the existence of forces he had not previously taken into account and which disrupt the neat pattern of reality and unreality in which he had placed Rickie:

> He left the Parthenon to pass by the monuments of our more reticent beliefs - the temple of the Ephesian Artemis, the statue of the Cnidian Demeter. Honest, he knew that here were powers he could not cope with, nor, as yet, understand. (P.186)

And it is indeed these forces, the mystical powers of human continuity as embodied in Demeter, that now seem to offer Rickie a break in the mists of unreality surrounding him. Acknowledging at last the failure of his marriage and Agnes's "certain terrible faults of heart and head" (P.186), he turns in hope to the "supreme event" (P.186) of birth:

> He saw it with Nature's eyes. It dawned on him, as on Ansell, that personal love and marriage only cover one side of the shield, and that on the other is graven the epic of birth. In the midst of lessons he would grow dreamy, as one who spies a new symbol for the universe, a fresh circle within the square. Within the square shall be a circle, within the circle another square, until the visual eye is baffled. Here is meaning of a kind. His mother had forgotten herself in him. He would forget himself in his son. (P.186-87)

In The Longest Journey Forster thus repeats the pattern of the Italian novels. Personal, sexual love becomes insignificant beside the greater mystery of an impersonal, mystic continuity, a vision of Nature renewing itself eternally. Rickie, having failed to find fulfilment in the world of heterosexual love, hopes to find vicarious consolation in the vast impersonality of Nature.

But he is denied even this comfort. The child is born lame, and dies soon after. It is ironically appropriate that at this stage Stephen Wonham, Rickie's half-brother, should re-enter his life, by means of his letter to the schoolboy, Varden.

In Stephen, Forster presents his vision of England as it might be. He is the human representative of that spirit of Wiltshire which Rickie had himself recognised earlier, the living embodiment of the place where the "fibres of England" unite and where, "did we condescend to worship her... we should erect our national shrine" (P.132). He is the inheritor of a genuine English tradition, one which contrasts markedly with the gimcrack and manufactured traditions of Sawston School. Rural Wiltshire suggests for Forster the spirit of England, or even of humanity itself. Beside it the suburban culture of Sawston is ephemeral and trivial. In Wiltshire, as the narrator facetiously — but with an undercurrent of seriousness — says, stand "the eternal man and the eternal dog, guarding eternal sheep until the world is vegetarian" (P.90). It is a

society which, like the Italy of A Room With a View and Where Angels Fear to Tread, is rooted in Nature and in its own past.

Stephen, the son of Rickie's mother and a Wiltshire farmer, and descendant of the county's ancient people, is in the tradition of such athletic heroes[22] as Gino and Gennaro (in "The Story of a Panic"). Like them he is instinctively in communion with the natural world, in a way that contrasts both with Mrs Failing's dismissal of the earth as "our dull stepmother" (P.91) and with Rickie's sentimental veneration of it. When he reads Rickie's short story about getting "into touch with Nature" (P.126), his bemused wonder at the "cant" of books is a comic indication of his own unconscious sense of being part of the natural world. His lack of self-consciousness is, in fact, the trait that most distinguishes Stephen, setting him apart from the sensitive self-consciousness of Rickie and indeed from all the intellectual or cultivated characters in the novel. As with similar figures in Forster, it is his very lack of self-awareness that shows him to be among the "saved". Though Forster's presentation of him is often contrived and stagy, his intention is clearly that Stephen should appear to be disarmingly "natural", gratifying his physical instincts with simple directness:

> He was the child of poetry and of rebellion, and poetry should run in his veins. But he lived too near to the things he loved to seem poetical. Parted from them, he might yet satisfy her [Mrs Failing], and stretch out his hands with a pagan's yearning. As it was, he only rode her horses, and trespassed, and bathed, and worked, for no obvious reason, upon her fields. (P.242)

The closest he comes to articulating the mysteries of Nature is in the "one instinct that troubled him" (P.240). So close is his unconscious affinity with the natural world that it seems strange to him that he should be distinguished from it, an individual with a will and desires of his own. Why, at night especially, he wonders,

> should there be this difference between him and the acres of land that cooled all round him until the sun returned? What lucky chance had heated him up, and sent him, warm and lovable, into a passive world? (P.240-41)

As a man Stephen undoubtedly has his limitations and faults, as do other representatives of the real in the novel. He can be boorish, brutal, crude, narrowly dismissive of the unfamiliar and blind to more subtle nuances of meaning or feeling. All too often he is, as Rickie sees, like Gerald Dawes — "the Gerald of history, not the Gerald of romance" (P.112). But even these limitations are — as had been the case in Forster's treatment of Italy in Where Angels Fear to Tread -- subsumed into the total image of

vibrant primitivism.

An avowed atheist in theory, Stephen shows himself in his behaviour to be a humanist in practice, committed to life in "the delightful world" (P.220). He shares with Cambridge a belief in the personal: his is a creed of "here am I and there are you" (P.244). He also has in common with Rickie a recognition of the uncertainty of life. His response is, however, more optimistic. He receives his unexpected defeat at the hands of Flea Thompson with a philosophic acceptance "that this delightful world is extraordinarily unreliable". "'One nips or is nipped,' he thought, 'and never knows beforehand'" (P.123). Though he would never articulate it as such, Stephen's attitude is an acceptance of the muddle of the universe, of what Forster will later present, through Margaret Schlegel, as the romance of life.

The reader is first introduced to Stephen when Rickie and Agnes visit Cadover. On that occasion Rickie's characteristic fastidiousness makes him unresponsive to Stephen's qualities. This natural antipathy is increased by the threat he seems to present to Rickie's veneration of Agnes. Stephen's insistence that their train had run over and killed a child suggests, at the outset, too firm a grip on concrete reality to be agreeable to someone as lost in the fantasy of his love as Rickie is. The ride to Salisbury only makes matters worse. Separated from his beloved Agnes, Rickie can find nothing else to interest him. This, his theoretical idealism and his guilty sense of his own inexperience, prompt him to react with prudish disgust to the forthright talk of Stephen and the soldier who joins them en route. The "great world" begins to lose some of its glamour for him. "Was experience going to be such a splendid thing after all?" (P.118), he wonders.

But even if Rickie rejects the reality of Stephen the man, the countryside itself has some effect on him. As he rides he has a sense of the infinite space of the Wiltshire plains, and he thinks again of the uncertainty of life. His thoughts modulate into a day-dream of himself and Agnes:

> In this great solitude - more solitary than any Alpine range - he and Agnes were floating alone and for ever, between the shapeless earth and the shapeless clouds. An immense silence seemed to move towards them. A lark stopped singing, and they were glad of it. They were approaching the Throne of God. The silence touched them; the earth and all danger dissolved, but ere they quite vanished Rickie heard himself saying 'Is it exactly what we intended?'. (P.117)

It is a vision in keeping with the idealised love he bears Agnes: in it they are transcendent, spiritualised and detached from earthly things. But the dream is interrupted by his own — subconscious — questioning of its

validity; and he wakes to hear Stephen's voice and to find himself in a valley sheltering a string of villages. This return to earth is a symbolic return to the humanism that Stephen represents and from which Rickie, in his single-minded veneration of Agnes, has alienated himself. Only much later, when already married and growing increasingly troubled by his wife's jealousy, does Rickie remember the vision and its conclusion. He then understands with greater insight. Why must Agnes be so selfish and exclusive in her love for him, he asks himself:

> He was willing to grant that the love that inspired her might be higher than his own. Yet did it not exclude them both from much that is gracious? That dream of his when he rode on the Wiltshire expanses - a curious dream: the lark silent, the earth dissolving. And he awoke from it into a valley full of men. (P.179)

At the time however, Rickie can only think of getting away from the gross humanity of Stephen and the soldier, and returning to Agnes at Cadover. Well might he say, in time, to Stephen of the ride to Salisbury:

> Ever since then I have taken the world at second-hand. I have bothered less and less to look it in the face - until not only you, but every one else has turned unreal. (P.254)

And it is on the Cadbury Rings, that ancient Wiltshire mound, symbol of continuity and appropriately resembling Ansell's diagram of reality, that Rickie again denies the truth that Stephen represents. Mrs Failing's revelation is made next to the tree at the very centre of the Rings — the centre which corresponds to the point of reality in the diagram — and it is here that Rickie has his symbolic moment of truth. It is Stephen who revives him after he faints at the news:

> He woke up. The earth he had dreaded lay close to his eyes, and seemed beautiful. He saw the structure of the clods. A tiny beetle swung on the grass blade. On his own neck a human hand pressed, guiding the blood back to his brain. (P.137)

Rickie has had a fleeting vision of the earth and a brotherhood of humanity based on the earth: "For one short moment he understood" (P.137). But before he can accept it, Agnes interposes and he returns to the world of unreality. Under her influence he passes to a total rejection of Stephen and what he believes him to represent. He becomes for Rickie no more than a symbol of his dislike for his father, whose child he automatically assumes him to be.

This, then, is Rickie's attitude to his illegitimate brother when the

latter impinges on his life in Sawston. By now he is fully aware of the unreality by which he is surrounded, and rightly traces its cause to his rejection of the "symbolic moment". He must attempt to rectify that failure by telling Stephen the truth now, he insists to the uncomprehending Agnes, because "the lie we acted has ruined our lives" (P.195). This acknowledgement does not, however, bring with it a recognition of Stephen's virtues: rather, his virility serves as a bitterly ironic comment on Rickie's own failure to perpetuate life. Once again, he is struck by the individual's helplessness in the face of an arbitrary and indifferent universe:

> He perceived more clearly the cruelty of Nature, to whom our refinement and piety are but as bubbles, hurrying downwards on the turbid waters. They break, and the stream continues. (P.195)

Stephen, having neither refinement nor piety, will continue while he, Rickie, cannot: "And he would have children: he, not Rickie, would contribute to the stream; he, through his remote posterity, might be mingled with the unknown sea" (P.196).

Troubled by "the mysteries of change and death" (P.196), Rickie has a dream of his mother in which she clearly indicates her wish that the Elliot line should not die out with him. He, not knowing that Stephen is in fact <u>her</u> son and not his father's, cannot see the full implications of her words, which are really addressed to Stephen. In her symbolic capacity of "earth-mother"[23] Mrs Elliot has chosen Stephen "for the basic type that shall replace the tainted Elliots and inherit the world from which they sprang".[24] When Rickie sees "above mean houses the frosty glories of Orion" (P.197),[25] it is a symbolic confirmation of the triumph of the natural man over the civilized, the victory of the impersonal forces of Nature over individual limitations. With this vision of his rejection by the forces of life, Rickie reaches his spiritual nadir. Nothing remains to which he can cling.

Yet hope is still to be offered to him, and ironically it is as a result of Agnes's interference. Alarmed at the turn of events and with Mrs Failing's legacy in mind, she engineers Stephen's expulsion from Cadover. Her action brings him to the school with the innocent intention of telling them the very news they have been keeping from him, that he is Rickie's brother. There, in a typically Forsterian coincidence, he encounters Ansell who has at last consented to come to Sawston. After a symbolic rite of combat they become friends, a union of two aspects of reality, the intellectual and the instinctual, which together prepare to save Rickie's soul. Ansell, from whose point of view the scene is presented, is impressed by Stephen, a man so unlike himself. Though

dubious of the brotherhood of man and the promise of nature expressed in Anthony Failing's essays — which he is reading at the time — he does recognise in Stephen something of the "spirit of life".

> Certain figures of the Greeks, to whom we continually return, suggested him a little. One expected nothing of him - no purity of phrase nor swift-edged thought. Yet the conviction grew that he had been back somewhere - back to some table of the gods, spread in a field where there is no noise, and that he belonged for ever to the guests with whom he had eaten. (P.217)

Through Ansell's perception Forster presents in Stephen the amalgam of classical paganism and nature that goes into the making of all his athletic heroes. Both these elements are, of course, aspects of Rickie's theoretical idealism; but in Stephen they are instinctively combined, and are part of that mysterious transfiguration of the ordinary man into the embodiment of Forster's humanist values. Stephen leaves the school disillusioned and disgusted by Agnes's attempt to buy him off; and Ansell, who has read the papers which contain the details of Stephen's birth, proceeds, as he promised Widdrington, to "hit out like any ploughboy" (P.184). In a fiery and melodramatic speech in which he "seemed transfigured into a Hebrew prophet passionate for satire and the truth" (P.228), he denounces the hypocrisy of Rickie, his wife and her brother before a room of astonished schoolboys. It is a scene that owes little to realism but which is superbly dramatic in its rhetorical effect. In the course of his speech Ansell also reveals that Stephen is the son, not of Rickie's father, but of his mother.

Chapter 28, which follows immediately after this, is one of the most remarkable, and in many ways least satisfactory, passages in Forster's fiction. Consisting entirely of the narrator's intrusion into the story, it provides an oblique — perhaps unnecessarily so — comment on the effect Ansell's revelation has on Rickie. His soul's currency has been stamped with the image of his mother's face: to him she had seemed "a thing unalterable, divine". But as he now realises, in his agony, that face, "however beloved, was mortal, and as liable as the soul herself to err" (P.230). His idealisation of her had been unrealistic, an evasion of his own part in life: "We do but shift responsibility by making a standard of the dead" (P.230). In his longing for certainty in an uncertain world, he had imposed upon her an ideal which in no way reflected the complexity of human nature. In much the same way Rickie has turned Agnes into a goddess, forgetting that she was, in Stephen's words, "simply a woman of her own sort, who needed careful watching" (P.266).

The rest of the passage is a humanist's plea that one should risk the uncertainties of this world rather than seek the static certainty of the supernatural. When the human face has proved less than divine, one might be tempted to turn to the truly divine, which is "incorruptible, and the soul may trust it safely; it will serve her beyond the stars" (P.230). But, the narrator goes on to ask, what is the price of such certitude? For the divine too has its limitations: it cannot

> give us friends, or the embrace of a lover, or the touch of children, for with our fellow-mortals it has no concern. It cannot even give the joys we call trivial - fine weather, the pleasures of meat and drink, bathing and the hot sand afterwards, running, dreamless sleep. Have we learnt the true discipline of a bankruptcy if we turn to such coinage as this? Will it really profit us so much if we save our souls and lose the whole world? (P.230)

This is a question that Margaret Schlegel will ask again in Howards End.[26] Then as now, Forster's answer is the same: man is the measure of all things, and within the limits of his experience and perceptions lies his salvation. Live passionately in a muddled and unpredictable world, he says, rather than abdicate your essential humanity by surrendering to a reality "beyond the stars".

But this triumphant assertion of the human norm is something which Rickie is never wholly able to translate into practice, nor to accept with all its potential for disappointment and disillusion. Nor, for that matter, is Forster: the remainder of the account of Rickie's search for reality is characterised by his creator's own uncertainty of intention. Although from now on The Longest Journey "builds up to a climax which will assert the 'costly but unmistakably plain' victory of humanism",[27] it is a climax undercut by what I have already observed to be Forster's ambivalent attitude to his protagonist. He wishes here both to demonstrate Rickie's misdirected idealism and, at the same time, to incorporate it into the meaning of the novel.

When, in time, Stephen drunkenly wreaks havoc on the school house and, in doing so, falls over the bannisters, it is to be saved by a very different Rickie, who calmly greets him as a returned brother. But if Rickie has at last managed to evade the clutches of Sawston, he has not escaped his own faults. If he greets his brother with joy now, it is not because Stephen is another human being, but because he sees in him a symbolic reincarnation of their beloved mother, a "symbol for the vanished past" (P.255). He has failed to learn "the true discipline of a bankruptcy" (P.230). Stephen himself recognises that Rickie's new affection for him amounts to a degrada-

tion of his humanity as much as the old distaste had been. "And where do I come in?" he asks furiously. "I haven't risen from the dead. I haven't altered since last Sunday week" (P.253). For a moment Rickie does take these words to heart, and he treats Stephen "as a man" (P.254).

But when Stephen leaves and, acting on a recognition of the effect that Sawston has had on Rickie, impulsively invites him to join him, Rickie once again sees in his brother their mother:

> The words were kind; yet it was not for their sake that Rickie plunged into the impalpable cloud. In the voice he had found a surer guarantee. Habits and sex may change with the new generation, features may alter with the play of a private passion, but a voice is apart from these. It lies nearer to the racial essence and perhaps to the divine; it can, at all events, overleap one grave. (P.257)

Rickie's time in Sawston has proved a rite de passage from which he emerges strengthened in his old Cambridge values. He has, to a degree, succeeded in reconciling his theoretical idealism with the reality of life. Nevertheless, although more tolerant of Stephen, he retains a dangerously static and limited view of him, still treating him less as a fallible man than as a symbolic hero. The novel moves to its climax in their visit to Cadover. As he and Stephen drive from Salisbury station to Mrs Failing's house, Rickie begins to realise the spirit of Wiltshire, contrasting it with that of Sawston. He recognises too, Stephen's deeply-felt love for the country-side and its past; and when the latter suddenly speaks of marriage it seems an appropriate extension of their conversation. Rickie sees again, this time without bitterness, that in men like his brother reside the continuity with the past and the hope of the future. The love of a woman for one man, having had such tragic consequences for himself and Agnes, might be "the salt of the world" (P.271) for others. The "rose of flame" (P.272) which Stephen floats on the stream is, though he does not realise it, a symbolic confirmation of Rickie's insight. It drifts down the stream and under the bridge.

> Then it vanished for Rickie; but Stephen, who knelt in the water, declared that it was still afloat, far through the arch, burning as if it would burn for ever. (P.272)

Human continuity, the mystic flower on the stream of life, is denied to Rickie: for Stephen it will be a reality.

And when Rickie later affirms his new-found hope in the reality of the earth and in humanity to a sceptical Mrs Failing, his words have a pathetic

irony in the way that they anticipate the events to come. After she leaves him he thinks again of the flames on the water:

> His thoughts went back to the ford, from which they had scarcely wandered. Still he heard the horse in the dark drinking, still he saw the mystic rose, and the tunnel dropping diamonds. He had driven away alone, believing the earth had confirmed him. He stood behind things at last, and knew that conventions are not majestic, and that they will not claim us in the end. (P.276-77)

Thinking this, he accidentally drops the lump of Wiltshire chalk he is holding, breaking a cup — a symbolic dramatisation of his desire to reject the "cup of experience" which he had drunk in Sawston, and which his aunt urges him to take up again. But, as McConkey perceptively points out, with Rickie's promise to Leighton, the footman, that he will apologise to Mrs Failing for the accident "it is clear that his opportunity for salvation is lost and his final disaster will soon follow".[28]

Later, when he walks down to the village with Leighton, and hears how the Thompsons, an old Wiltshire family, have been turned out by his aunt's bailiff, he is filled with hope and enthusiasm at the thought of Stephen's qualities:

> Against all this wicked nonsense, against the Wilbrahams and Pembrokes who try to rule our world Stephen would fight till he died. Stephen was a hero. He was a law to himself, and rightly. He was great enough to despise our small moralities. He was attaining love. This evening Rickie caught Ansell's enthusiasm, and felt it worth while to sacrifice everything for such a man. (P.278)

Here again his thoughts take on a grimly ironic aspect in the light of later events. His discovery that Stephen, contrary to his earlier — and unreasonably extracted — promise, is drunk, shatters him completely. Stephen has failed to be the impossible symbol he has turned him into, and with this failure Rickie gives in to despair. He turns, in the metaphor of Chapter 28, to the coinage "that bears on it not man's image but God's" (P.230). Ironically in full view of Orion — which in the novel has become a symbol for mankind's heroic potential — Rickie renounces his faith in humanity; a faith which he has, in the end, perverted into another static idealisation. In one moment he rejects all he has asserted to his aunt. "May God receive me and pardon me for trusting the earth" (P.280), he prays. The visionary hopes he had entertained earlier in the day when he watched Stephen bathing in the stream seem to him a bitter mockery now:

> The stream - he was above it now - meant nothing, though it burst from the pure turf and ran for ever to the sea. The bather, the shoulders of Orion - they all meant nothing, and were going nowhere. The whole affair was a ridiculous dream. (P.281)

The account of his death, in which he does "sacrifice everything" for Stephen, is a deliberate anticlimax. Aimless and despairing, acting from duty rather than conviction, he saves Stephen from the oncoming train, and is killed by it himself. "He died up in Cadover, whispering, 'You have been right,' to Mrs Failing" (P.281). And it is with her words that Rickie's failed quest for reality ends:

> She wrote of him to Mrs Lewin afterwards as 'one who has failed in all he undertook; one of the thousands whose dust returns to the dust, accomplishing nothing in the interval. Agnes and I buried him to the sound of our cracked bell, and pretended that he had once been alive. The other, who was always honest, kept away.' (P.281)

But Mrs Failing's sentiments are not Rickie's final epitaph. The novel closes with a pastoral coda depicting Stephen Wonham and his "happy tangible life" (P.287). It presents, in R. Martin's words, Forster's "final 'message'": that "reality is here and now and around us".[29] It shows a life that Rickie, through his sacrificial death, has won for Stephen. In the "shattered knees" (P.286) of Demeter, symbol of human generation, we find a symbolic echo of the manner of his death. It is a debt of life which Stephen himself acknowledges with gratitude, though in the impersonal mystery of nature and in the vibrancy of his own life his thanks seem to him of little account.

Of any ultimate pattern in the universe Stephen — and through him, Forster — does not pretend to know. He can only speak of the world around him as he perceives it; and of that Rickie can have no part. In the touch of his daughter Stephen recognises the primacy of human life:

> He was alive and had created life. By whose authority? Though he could not phrase it, he believed that he guided the future of our race, and that, century after century, his thoughts and his passions would triumph in England. The dead who had evoked him, the unborn whom he would evoke - he governed the paths between them. By whose authority? (P.288)

Agnostic to the last, there is only one thing he can with certainty do for his dead brother: grant him a vicarious immortality in the world of the living:

> He bent down reverently and saluted the child; to whom he had given the name of their mother. (P.288)

The novel ends here on this note of triumph. The three approaches to the real, as exemplified in Rickie, Ansell and Stephen, have been united in a final vision of reality and of England's destiny: Stephen, given life by Rickie, shares his home with Ansell. But it is with Stephen that the future really lies, and to him that Rickie must finally yield. To the end, noble as his intentions were, Rickie has been unable to reconcile the reality of his imagination and idealism with the reality of daily life. In Stephen and in his passionately lived experience of life, the two are instinctively combined. Rickie illustrates Mr Failing's belief that the Beloved Republic will require "self-sacrifice and — worse still — self-mutilation" (P.238) before it can come into being.

The Longest Journey, as I have shown, asserts the value of humanism, precarious and uncertain though such a faith might be. The greatest claim that Forster will make for anything beyond humanity lies in the cautious agnosticism of "such other tribunals as there may be" (P.170): it is for the "florid bulk" of the Roman Catholic Church in Cambridge to make wild assertions of "eternity, stability, and bubbles unbreakable upon a windless sea" (P.62-3). Though the novel's probing into the unknown anticipates the increased attempts of the later works, its conclusions are unmistakable. Such divinities as do preside over its action are those of the Greeks, embodiments of life in this world.

But if Forster repudiates such attempts at static certainty, both in religion and in Rickie's attempts at fixing people into idealised symbols, he is guilty of doing the same himself. In the end he, as much as Rickie did, treats Stephen as no more than a symbol, an expression of Mrs Elliot, the earth-mother's continuity. The author's close identification with his protagonist, apparent throughout the novel, here appears in its most confusing aspect.[30]

The novel as a whole betrays similar tendencies. The final vision of The Longest Journey is of an impersonal earth mysticism, in which people generally are subordinated to Nature's indifference and to the cycles of life and death recurring within an eternal continuity. Women are reduced to the status of instinctive emissaries of Nature; marriage is a way to the perpetuation of the race. Stephen himself is little more than an embodiment of the mystic spirit of Wiltshire, hardly human.

Godfrey remarks of Forster's vision here that it

> is certainly an extreme one, nothing less than an insistence that self-knowledge, any advance into self-awareness, is not in fact an advance but a retreat. In contrast to almost all the other characters in The Longest Journey, Stephen is presented to us as in essence unaware, an unselfconscious creature of instinct who knows nothing about himself.[31]

It is this insistence on an annihilation of the self, a surrender of human individuality to the impersonal processes of the earth, that finally serves to undercut the humanism and individualism with which Forster endows rural England. Such a transcendent vision of humanity looks forward to similar tendencies in Howards End and A Passage to India. As the alternative to Rickie's failure, it also anticipates the movement of these later novels. To quote Crews in conclusion:

> Rickie Elliot's bankruptcy, which is presented as a result of personal moral shortcomings, is generalised in A Passage to India to encompass the bankruptcy of any and every attempt to find human meaning reflected in the physical universe.[32]

In concluding this chapter we might note briefly Forster's posthumously published novel, Maurice.[33] Both Maurice and The Longest Journey are oblique forms of autobiography, and in both the Cambridge ethos plays an important part in the development of the heroes. Maurice might, in fact, be regarded as a more explicit rendering of what remained hidden or sublimated in The Longest Journey: to take an obvious example, the male comradeship that is so important to Rickie becomes for Maurice the far less ambiguous matter of homosexual love.

Written in 1913-14 and frequently revised in subsequent years, Maurice was inspired by Forster's visit to Edward Carpenter, advocate of simple-life socialism and the love of Comrades, at Milthorpe. There, Carpenter's lover, George Merrill, touched Forster on the backside, and the sensation "seemed to go straight through the small of my back into my ideas, without involving my thoughts".[34] Dedicated "To a Happier Year" the novel was, by his own wish, never published in Forster's lifetime.

Of all Forster's novels Maurice is, however, the least successful and least resonant. It deals almost exclusively with Maurice's homosexuality; and its treatment of that is, as many critics have observed,[35] in many ways unsatisfactory. For students of Forster the novel is nevertheless of interest for its echoes of many of the metaphysical themes and interests of

the other fiction, and for the way in which it suggests that these concerns were often a form of sexual sublimation on his part.

Such considerations are, however, only of tangential interest to the concerns of this study, and a full examination of the work will not be attempted. Instead, we will turn now to the next novel to be published after The Longest Journey, Howards End.

Notes

[1]E.M. Forster, The Longest Journey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960); edition hereafter designated by P. . Abinger edition at present unavailable in South Africa.

[2]Stone, The Cave and the Mountain,p.213.

[3]E.M. Forster, Introduction, The Longest Journey, The World's Classics (London: Oxford University Press, 1960),p.ix.

[4]This ambivalence is, of course, true of all Forster's writing. But in The Longest Journey he seems less in control of his technique: the contradictions are due less to artistic calculation than to a vision not entirely realised.

[5]E.M. Forster, "Three Countries", The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings, ed. Elizabeth Heine, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol.14 (London: Edward Arnold, 1983),p.294.

[6]See "Three Countries", The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings,p.295.

[7]Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,I,118-19.

[8]Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,I,116.

[9]Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,I,119.

[10]"Three Countries", The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings,p.295. In his introduction to the World's Classics edition of The Longest Journey Forster further comments: "There was the metaphysical idea of Reality ('the cow is there'): there was the ethical idea that reality must be faced (Rickie won't face Stephen)... "(pp.ix-x).

[11]Rosecrance notes the effect of these contradictory impulses on Forster's part: the 'mixture of approbation and hostility that pursues Rickie throughout the novel makes him ambiguous; the narrator's conflicting pronouncements call his own authority into question" (Forster's Narrative Vision,p.68).

[12]Compare Stone, The Cave and the Mountain,p.200.

[13]Beer,p.21.

[14]Beer,pp.21-2.

[15]Many readers have seen in Rickie's lameness an oblique symbol for homosexuality, Forster's projection of his ambivalent feelings about his own sexuality onto his character. The relationship between Rickie and Ansell is also, clearly, homosexual in its subtext. The latter's rejection of Agnes is as much an expression of sexual jealousy as of philosophical insight. See, for example, Colmer, E.M. Forster: The Personal Voice,p.71.

[16]For similar views on Rickie's relationship with Agnes and Gerald, compare Stone, The Cave and the Mountain,pp.200-203; and Trilling,p.78.

[17]Compare the narrator's implied criticism of Ansell when he thinks how impractical Dunwood House is: "It is a comment that the academic mind will often make when first confronted with the world" (P.212).

[18]Compare Forster's words in his Introduction to the World's Classics edition of The Longest Journey,p.xi: " ...and I still endorse Ansell's denunciation of the Great World".

[19]Compare F.C. Crews, "The Longest Journey and the Perils of Humanism", English Literary History,26 (1959),p.593.

[20]The story is, of course, based on Forster's own short story "Other Kingdom" (in Collected Short Stories). That he should refer to it here indicates the autobiographical nature of the novel; that its artistic quality should be open to question suggests the self-scrutiny that The Longest Journey involves.

[21]Compare Gransden,p.41.

[22]"Hero" and "heroism" are words that echo through the novel, and are in fact used of Stephen. See, for example,P.108,121,251,278.

[23]As an "earth-mother" figure, Mrs Elliot is the precursor of Mrs Wilcox (in Howards End) and Mrs Moore (in A Passage to India), other apparently ordinary women who, nevertheless, have a mysterious sympathy with the natural world.

[24]H.M. Doughty,Jr, "The Novels of E.M. Forster", Bookman (New York), 75 (1932); reprinted in E.M. Forster: The Critical Heritage, ed. P. Gardner (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul,1973),p.361.

[25]The symbolic use of Orion in The Longest Journey as an expression of the novel's humanist philosophy is in keeping with the private meaning Forster attached to the constellation. He said of it that it "gives a physical joy, as if a man of the kind I care for was in heaven" (See Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,I,161). Compare his use of the image in "The Machine Stops" and "The Point of It", in the Collected Short Stories.

[26]See Howards End,A.125/P.134.

[27]R. Martin,p.100.

[28]McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.115.

[29]R. Martin,p.104.

[30]Compare Colmer, E.M. Forster: The Personal Voice,pp.77-79.

[31]Godfrey,p.66.

[32]Crews, "The Longest Journey and the Perils of Humanism",p.595.

[33]E.M. Forster, Maurice (London: Edward Arnold,1971); (Harmondsworth: Penguin,1975); editions hereafter designated in the text by Arnold and P. respectively.

[34]E.M. Forster, Terminal Note to Maurice (Arnold 235/P.217).

[35]See, for example, Cynthia Ozick, "Forster as Homosexual", Commentary, 52 (Dec.1971),pp.81-5.

Chapter 4

Howards End

In the Editor's Introduction to the Abinger Edition of Howards End, Oliver Stallybrass mentions that on 16 June 1908, Forster noted in his diary:

> I opened Walt Whitman for a quotation, & he started speaking to me. That the unseen is justified by the seen; which in turn becomes unseen and is justified by the other....That the spiritual world might be robust -!....No more fighting, please, between the soul & the body, until they have beaten their common enemy, the machine.[1]

Written shortly before he began work on Howards End, this entry on the poetry of Whitman (one of whose poems, "A Passage to India", was to provide the title for Forster's last novel) points to the fundamental dichotomy which Forster examines and attempts to resolve in the novel. Through his heroine, Margaret Schlegel, he attempts to come to terms with both the "unseen" and the "seen". The reality which Margaret eventually finds in the English countryside, in the world of Mrs Wilcox, is one which "connects" both, each contributing to and informing the other in the way that Whitman describes.

The desire to define and portray a "robust" spiritual world is nothing new in Forster's fiction: it had already found expression in the paganism and pantheism of the short stories and the first three novels. In Howards End it is the honest attempt to see the uninspiring world of bourgeois suburbia — the seen untransformed by the unseen — as in itself valuable and desirable that marks a new departure for Forster. Sawston, the home of the Herritons and the Pembrokes, is no longer to be dismissed out of hand as unreal. It has become, to borrow Margaret's words, "a real force" (A.101/P.112), one to be reckoned with.

Howards End thus continues that broadening of Forster's field of interest which will culminate in the cosmic vision of A Passage to India. In it he presents a much wider and more complex picture of society than in the earlier works, taking into consideration the claims of people such as the Wilcoxes and Basts as well as the more obviously "saved" Schlegels.

The salvational theme of the novel extends far beyond the purely personal salvation of the earlier ones; Forster attempts, as Lionel Trilling points out, to determine who shall inherit England.[2] The characters stand for more than themselves; they represent the various strands of the Edwardian middle-classes, in whom Forster saw the hopes of England. On the "very poor" he does not presume to comment. It is this larger (although by most standards, still severely limited) social vision which has earned the novel its name as one of the greatest liberal statements of the twentieth century, and which prompted Trilling — wrongly, I think — to see it as Forster's masterpiece.[3]

The new, enlarged outlook must owe its origin to an increased maturity on the author's part. The exclusive idealism of the earlier works could clearly not stand the strain imposed upon it by Forster's growing awareness of what he saw to be the evils of the modern world. The threats posed by the "goblins" of commercialism, urbanisation and social injustice had become too insistent to be dealt with by simply retreating into the charmed security of Cambridge, Italy, Greece or the natural world. Salvation by inclusion rather than exclusion had become necessary. Through Margaret Schlegel Forster attempts to "connect" the disparate elements of experience and of society into an all-embracing whole.

Howards End is, as Cyrus Hoy has pointed out, a metaphysical novel, dealing with Margaret's search for an authentic way of life and with the relationship between the "unseen" and the "seen", the spiritual and the material. As Hoy says, the novel poses and attempts to answer the question "wherein lies the reality of experience?"[4] The problem had, of course, already received attention in The Longest Journey; but here it is presented with far more subtlety and complexity. Distinctions are now made less easily, and with less of the certainty found in the earlier work.

The issues confronting Margaret are, as I have suggested, also those facing Forster. She is to a great extent his representative in dealing with and resolving them. At times, in fact, it is impossible to distinguish between Forster as narrator and his character, so intimate is his identification with her. Nevertheless it must be emphasised that they should not be equated with each other in any simplistic way. Margaret's search will lead her into accepting attitudes which she later rejects. One is ultimately aware of Forster as the controlling consciousness, guiding his character through a circuitous route to her final vision of truth. In addition, with typical Forsterian ambivalence, he will often refuse to

commit himself wholly to any position, even if it is one which he seems to be advocating through her.

The answer which Margaret eventually finds in Howards End and the English countryside is in keeping with the themes of the earlier works. In presenting salvation as embodied in the spiritual life of rural England Forster is, in effect, taking up where he left off in The Longest Journey. The emphasis on a philosophy of "hope this side of the grave", in which death is seen not as a gateway to any further existence, but rather as something which lends meaning to the life it ends, is also in keeping with Forster's earlier humanism. The qualities which Margaret values are beauty, personal relations, imagination, romance, a belief in the importance of the past and a sense of adventure. These humanistic qualities remain with her throughout the novel and, in fact, assist her in the achievement of her final goal. The possibility of any transcendent reality is often explicitly rejected in favour of a more earthly, if imperfect, salvation.

But, as closer examination will show, the novel in fact marks a definite stage in the movement that will culminate in the transcending vision of A Passage to India. Godfrey notes that

> In Howards End the author's reticence on the subject of the unseen, his reluctance at all events to name it, comes to an end....[5]

And with more explicit focus on the unseen comes an increasing tendency to concentrate upon its more obviously spiritual aspects. In Howards End one has a greater sense than previously of spiritual realms lying beyond and transcending humanity. The pantheism of the earlier novels remains, an expression of the possibility of connection between the seen and the unseen in the world of the spirit. Yet the frequency with which transcendent spirituality is invoked, if only to be dismissed, is clearly an indication of the growing tension in Forster's thinking; and in the rejection of any solution which discounts the claims of the purely human, one may sometimes detect an undercurrent of yearning for it. This yearning finds expression not only in individual passages, but also in the overall movement of the novel itself, and it undercuts the ostensible attempt to connect the seen and the unseen.

Since it is Margaret's search for reality that informs the structure and plot of Howards End, it will, in our analysis of the novel, be convenient to trace her progress. Her actions throughout are best understood in the light of her thoughts on the importance of proportion. At the beginning of

her friendship with Mrs Wilcox, she acknowledges the truth of the older woman's tentative suggestion that she is lacking in experience. Life, Margaret admits, is "very difficult and full of surprises". She goes on to suggest how one should deal with it:

> To be humble and kind, to go straight ahead, to love people rather than pity them, to remember the submerged - well, one can't do all these things at once, worse luck, because they're so contradictory. It's then that proportion comes in - to live by proportion. Don't begin with proportion. Only prigs do that. Let proportion come in as a last resource, when the better things have failed, and a deadlock - gracious me, I've started preaching! (A.70/P.83)

Subsequent experiences confirm this early insight, and much later in the novel her reflections on the nature of truth lead her to similar conclusions. Then, in response to her sister Helen's assertion that the seen world is unreal, she muses on the need for a more balanced approach:

> The businessman who assumes that this life is everything, and the mystic who asserts that it is nothing, fail, on this side and on that, to hit the truth. 'Yes, I see, dear; it's about halfway between,' Aunt Juley had hazarded in earlier years. No; truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm, and, though proportion is the final secret, to espouse it at the outset is to ensure sterility. (A.192/P.195-96)

It is this philosophy of proportion that leads her to see the need for "connection". As the novel develops she becomes increasingly aware of deficiencies in her character and in her background which cause them to be unbalanced or one-sided. To redress the balance she attempts to connect, incorporating those aspects she lacks.

The opening chapters are masterly in their presentation of the Schlegel family and its setting. The sisters are introduced and characterised, and their London milieu is deftly hinted at. Stroke by stroke the details are painted in — their German blood, their belief in personal relations, their knowledge of the arts, their intellectual sophistication coupled with humanity and warmth — and a picture of the two brilliant, emancipated, slightly eccentric young women begins to emerge. Margaret is singled out for special attention:

> Away she hurried, not beautiful, not supremely brilliant, but filled with something that took the place of both qualities - something best described as a profound vivacity, a continual and sincere response to all that she encountered in her path through life. (A.7/P.25)

The novel begins with a crisis bringing the Schlegels into contact with people quite unlike themselves. Helen Schlegel, while visiting their acquaintances, the Wilcoxes, at their country home Howards End, believes herself in love with the younger son, Paul. The Wilcoxes are the very antithesis of all that the Schlegels value. They are masterful, self-confident and Philistine.

Nevertheless it is this very difference that attracts the emotional, idealistic Helen, and for a moment she completely succumbs to their appeal. Her supposed love for Paul, it soon emerges, is no more than an expression of her infatuation with the whole family.

But back in London, relations with Paul and his family broken off through the indiscreet intervention of the sisters' Aunt Juley, Helen sees them in a different light. Her disillusionment began, she tells Margaret, the morning after Paul's impassioned declaration of love. Then she saw beyond the Wilcoxes' "robust ideal" and could recognise them for what they were: "just a wall of newspapers and motor-cars and golf-clubs, and that if it fell I should find nothing behind it but panic and emptiness" (A.23/P.40).

Helen's revulsion is as absolute and dramatic as her earlier infatuation had been. She cannot get beyond that sudden vision of horror, and it continues to determine her behaviour for much of the novel. Margaret's reaction is — characteristically, as we in time realise — more moderate, and she insists that the Wilcoxes are"genuine people" (A.23/P.40). Helen remains unconvinced as her sister goes on to generalise about the world of the Wilcoxes:

> I've often thought about it, Helen. It's one of the most interesting things in the world. The truth is that there is a great outer life that you and I have never touched - a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations, that we think supreme, are not supreme there. There love means marriage settlements; death, death duties. So far I'm clear. But here's my difficulty. This outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one - there's grit in it. It does breed character. Do personal relations lead to sloppiness in the end? (A.25/P.41)

This is the first intimation of Margaret's awakening sense of the insufficiency of her values. "Wilcoxism", though mundane and unspiritual, clearly has a solidity which the Schlegels lack, and which she is tempted, fallaciously as later experiences prove, to see as more "real". Though she responds with an "Amen" to Helen's reply that "personal relations are

the real life, for ever and ever" (A.25/P.41), and though the sisters go on to pursue "the life that Helen had commended" (A.25/P.41), the issue is not forgotten and waits a chance to reassert itself.

Chapter 5 shows the Schlegels in action. It is here, at the performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, that one of the most important themes of the novel is introduced: that of the "goblins". They appear in Helen's imaginative interpretation of the music and she links them with her own experience of life:

> They were not aggressive creatures; it was that that made them so terrible to Helen. They merely observed in passing that there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in the world. After the interlude of elephants dancing, they returned and made the observation for the second time. Helen could not contradict them, for, once at all events, she had felt the same, and had seen the reliable walls of youth collapse. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! The goblins were right. (A.30-1/P.46)

Although the goblins soon give way to "Gusts of splendour, gods and demigods contending with vast swords, colour and fragrance broadcast on the field of battle, magnificent victory, magnificent death!" (A.31/P.46-7), the statement they make remains.

Helen's interpretation of the symphony in these terms is a reflection of her rather emotional, impulsive nature, and is later dismissed by Margaret, usually the narrator's spokesman, as "all rubbish, radically false" (A.36/P.52). But, as is often his practice throughout the novel,[6] Forster here borrows Helen's insight and incorporates it into the imagery of Howards End. The goblins become a metaphor for the discordant elements in the modern world, the forces of evil which were increasingly obscuring Forster's youthful optimism.

The goblins had reminded Helen of the Wilcoxes; the two sisters now encounter another of their manifestations in the form of the impoverished young clerk, Leonard Bast. The consequences of Helen's inadvertent "theft" of his umbrella have the effect of opening Margaret's eyes to another defect in her Schlegel values. His discomfiture at the accident gives her "a glimpse into squalor" (A.33/P.48). Such a reaction seems unnecessarily melodramatic, and is probably a reflection of Forster's as much as Margaret's uneasiness when confronted with the lower orders. Nevertheless, she realises that her liberal values, the limitations of which she has already sensed, are themselves not within everyone's reach. For those lacking her financial security, values such as trust may be little more than impracticable ideals. And, as Bast himself comes to realise, Schlegel

culture is equally beyond his reach. Lacking their wealth and leisure, he despairs of ever understanding the issues which Margaret so airily dismisses.

The encounter leads the sisters to consider yet another limitation of "Schlegelism". They bemoan the "femininity" of their household. Something is needed to redress the balance — "A touch of the W.s, perhaps?" (A.41/P.56) as Margaret teasingly suggests to Helen. Her allusion to the "robust ideal" of the Wilcoxes recalls her longing for the "grittines" she had perceived in that family. She concludes her thoughts on the "irrevocably feminine" (A.41/P.56) nature of their home with a typical desire for balance:

> So with our house - it must be feminine, and all we can do is to see that it isn't effeminate. Just as another house that I can mention, but won't, sounded irrevocably masculine, and all its inmates can do is to see that it isn't brutal. (A.41/P.56)

The morning after the concert comes the discovery that the Wilcoxes have taken one of the flats opposite the Schlegel house. Margaret, supported by Helen, insists that it is of no consequence. She reiterates the stand she took at the time of their previous contact with the family: that, in the case of human relations, plans or lines of action should be avoided. This belief characterises all her actions, expressing her awareness of the muddle of life that makes preparation so necessary. The events of the previous day still in her mind, she goes on to see the issue in economic terms. She is able to take the risks she advocates because she has money. She tells her aunt:

> You and I and the Wilcoxes stand upon money as upon islands. It is so firm beneath our feet that we forget its very existence. It's only when we see someone near us tottering that we realize all that an independent income means. Last night, when we were talking up here round the fire, I began to think that the very soul of the world is economic, and that the lowest abyss is not the absence of love, but the absence of coin. (A.58/P.72)

It is significant that in this honest attempt at demystifying the economic structure of society she aligns herself with the Wilcoxes. Unlike Helen and Aunt Juley, she is not prepared to dismiss them out of hand. Rather, she recognises that there is one important thing they have in common, however much they might differ in other respects — money.

All the same, the reappearance of the Wilcoxes awakens in Margaret a sense of personal insufficiency. Clearly she has reached something of a

crisis in her life. Intellectually and emotionally, her confidence is being undercut by doubt. Experiences have shown her the limitations of Schlegel values, and with this realisation come doubts of a more personal nature. It is at this stage that she and Mrs Wilcox become friends.

Mrs Wilcox has appeared only briefly in the story so far, and will, indeed, play a small part subsequently. Yet her spirit has an enormous effect on all the other characters in it, especially on Margaret. Like that of all Forster's mystic figures, Mrs Wilcox's influence far outweighs her active participation in the events of the novel. In fact, it is difficult to think of her as a character in any conventional sense. She seems, rather, a spirit of place, an embodiment of the English countryside, indistinguishable from the house and tree with which she is so closely associated.

Ruth Wilcox's "otherness" is apparent quite early in the novel. Helen, in her first letter to Margaret, mentions her hostess's love for the garden and meadow at Howards End, and how she walked "trail, trail, still smelling hay and looking at the flowers" (A.2/P.20). She also refers to "her steady unselfishness" (A.3/P.21). These praiseworthy but unremarkable qualities acquire new, unexpected dimensions when Mrs Wilcox suddenly appears in the midst of the quarrel precipitated by Aunt Juley's appearance:

> She approached just as Helen's letter had described her, trailing noiselessly over the lawn, and there was actually a wisp of hay in her hands. She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipped the past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow had descended upon her - that wisdom to which we give the clumsy name of aristocracy. High-born she might not be. But assuredly she cared about her ancestors, and let them help her. When she saw Charles angry, Paul frightened, and Mrs Munt in tears, she heard her ancestors say: 'Separate those human beings who will hurt each other most. The rest can wait. (A.19/P.36)

The effect of this sudden intervention of the unseen is dramatic, if somewhat contrived. Mrs Wilcox's brief utterances, the hint of a supernatural power of which she is the passive agent, her enigmatic quality — all suggest a sibylline figure, timeless and detached from the trivial cares of the other characters. But Forster's presentation of Mrs Wilcox here, as later, is not entirely successful. There is an evasive vagueness which ultimately serves to undercut any claims he may make about her. What exactly, for example, is one to understand by the reference to her ancestors? What is her relationship to them, and how do they "speak" to her? Is the expression purely metaphorical in the sense that Mrs Wilcox has been born

into a tradition which values human sympathy; or does she experience some kind of mystical communion with the past? Forster does not tell us. Nor does he make it clear who it is that perceives all these qualities in her. The phrasing of the passage suggests that it is one of the characters rather than an instance of the narrator's intervention. Of those present, Helen is the only likely candidate; yet her subsequent remarks about Mrs Wilcox, although revealing great insight into her nature, never seem to imply such knowledge.

To have belaboured the point in this way may seem an absurdly insensitive response to what, after all, approaches prophetic writing.[7] The issues briefly glanced at here do, however, anticipate the more serious problems presented by later scenes. In these, Forster through the medium of Margaret's perception, repeatedly asserts Mrs Wilcox's mystic nature. But he fails to convince, owing to his inability to dramatise these qualities sufficiently.

From Margaret's first visit to Mrs Wilcox in London, she senses an aura of mystery surrounding the older woman, who seems not entirely of this world. "The light of the fire, the light from the window, and the light of a candle-lamp, which threw a quivering halo round her hands, combined to create a strange atmosphere of dissolution" (A.65/P.78). In their conversation the reader is immediately struck by the contrast between Margaret's highly articulate, shrill verbosity and Mrs Wilcox's inarticulate, often enigmatic utterances. Taking the novel as a whole, the two women form a complementary union of rationality and instinct. In this context however, the emphasis lies rather in the contrast that they offer. Mrs Wilcox's enigmatic simplicity has the effect of reducing Margaret's intellectualism and her interests to triviality. Margaret herself realises this:

> Mrs Wilcox's voice, though sweet and compelling, had little range of expression. It suggested that pictures, concerts and people are all of small and equal value. Only once had it quickened - when speaking of Howards End. (A.67/P.80-1)

This is her first intimation of what the house means to Mrs Wilcox.

When Margaret rises to leave, Mrs Wilcox in her tentative way asks her if she ever thinks about herself. After some prompting from the surprised and confused Margaret, Mrs Wilcox decides that it is experience that the younger woman lacks. Margaret accepts the criticism in a spirit of sincere self-scrutiny. It is here that she utters her memorable senti-

ments on the necessity for proportion.[8] Mrs Wilcox's reaction is significant:

> 'Indeed, you put the difficulties of life splendidly,' said Mrs Wilcox, withdrawing her hand into the deeper shadows. 'It is just what I should have liked to say about them myself.' (A.70/P.83)

It is something she will tell Margaret several times again, indicating the faith she places in her judgement. It is this quality in Margaret that will enable her, in spite of her other limitations, to develop her spiritual resources and ultimately acquire the stature of Mrs Wilcox herself.

But for the present it is still the differences between the two women that are most apparent. Margaret has much to learn before she can aspire to the countrywoman's instinctive wisdom. The luncheon-party she gives in Mrs Wilcox's honour serves as confirmation of this. Margaret's experience of life is revealed to be of a limited, somewhat shallow kind. Mrs Wilcox and the Wickham Place set have nothing in common: the atmosphere is one of "polite bewilderment" (A.71/P.84). In Margaret's eyes the "one or two delightful people" (A.71/P.84) and herself show up to increasing disadvantage beside the grave serenity of her new friend. The narrator endorses her feeling, drawing with a liberal hand the vociferous and witty chatter of the cultured and somewhat affected sophisticates. Mrs Wilcox's conversation is mundane in comparison yet Margaret recognises her as their spiritual superior, beside whom their frenzied intellectualism dwindles into triviality:

> Margaret, zigzagging with her friends over Thought and Art, was conscious of a personality that transcended their own and dwarfed their activities. There was no bitterness in Mrs Wilcox; there was not even criticism; she was lovable, and no ungracious or uncharitable word had passed her lips. Yet she and daily life were out of focus; one or the other must show blurred. And at lunch she seemed more out of focus than usual, and nearer the line that divides daily life from a life that may be of greater importance. (A.74/P.86-7)

The Christmas shopping expedition on which Margaret accompanies Mrs Wilcox confirms these impressions. It is then that Margaret casually mentions that the lease on Wickham Place will soon expire, and consequently the Schlegels will need to find a new home. Mrs Wilcox's reaction to this news is strangely disproportionate. Her respect for the past and her love for her own home find expression in her horror at the idea that "people mayn't die in the room where they were born" (A.81/P.93). She impulsively invites Margaret to accompany her to Howards End immediately. Margaret, disconcerted, tactfully suggests that another day would be more suitable for such a lengthy trip — to Mrs Wilcox's annoyance.

Later she regrets her refusal. While shopping she had been struck by London's commercialization of the divine event which Christmas celebrates — "the grotesque impact of the unseen upon the seen" (A.79/P.90). Now, having declined the invitation, she meditates again on London's spiritual poverty, and recognises a similar deficiency within herself:

> She felt petty and awkward, and her meditations on Christmas grew more cynical. Peace? It may bring other gifts, but is there a single Londoner to whom Christmas is peaceful? The craving for excitement and for elaboration has ruined that blessing. Goodwill? Had she seen any example of it in the hordes of purchasers? Or in herself? She had failed to respond to this invitation merely because it was a little queer and imaginative - she, whose birthright it was to nourish imagination! (A.82/P.94)

The distaste for urban life which acquaintance with Mrs Wilcox has awakened, feeding on earlier doubts about her way of life, has reached a pitch. After lunch, she follows Mrs Wilcox to the station, determined after all to accompany her to that "Holy of Holies into which Howards End had been transfigured" (A.83/P.95).

But the expedition is doomed to failure. Before she and Mrs Wilcox can board the train, before imagination can triumph, they are intercepted — appropriately enough — by Mr Wilcox and Evie, returning unexpectedly from their motoring trip. The visit must be put off until another day, and Margaret is left alone.

Mrs Wilcox's death is typically Forsterian in its unexpectedness. Though hints of her illness are scattered throughout the preceding chapters, the reader has had little reason to anticipate it, and the effect is all the more dramatic for this.

The description of the funeral at her home village of Hilton emphasises the irrevocable finality of death. Death, for the poor mourners, "enhanced life's values" (A.87/P.98); and the young woodcutter soon turns his thoughts from death to love and life. Yet the tone of the scene is ultimately optimistic. The Hardyesque figures lingering around the grave, the description of the rural sunset, and even the woodcutter — all suggest the dead woman's relationship with her environment. Her death is part of a larger natural cycle, not an alienating, isolating incident. She has, it is delicately suggested, been absorbed into the ongoing process of existence; and Margaret's flowers for her grave provide the woodcutter's offering to his sweetheart. The final impression is one of unity and peace:

> Hour after hour the scene of the interment remained without an eye to witness it. Clouds drifted over it from the west; or the

> church may have been a ship, high-prowed, steering with all its company towards infinity. Towards morning the air grew colder, the sky clearer, the surface of the earth hard and sparkling above the prostrate dead. (A.87/P.98)

For Margaret, too, the death of her friend brings a message of hope. Unaware that Mrs Wilcox had intended her to inherit Howards End, the house that "to her had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir" (A.96/P.107), and that the wish had been rejected by her family as "treacherous and absurd" (A.97/P.108), Margaret considers what she has learnt from her death. "Her friend had vanished in agony, but not, she believed, in degradation. Her withdrawal had hinted at other things besides disease and pain" (A.100/P.110-11). Mrs Wilcox had died with characteristic serenity and dignity, exhibiting that quality which Margaret has already learnt to value: proportion. She had died "as the seafarer who can greet with an equal eye the deep that he is entering, and the shore that he must leave" (A.100/P.111). Her death was complete and utter; yet, as for the women in the Hilton churchyard, it has helped Margaret to understand the life which it ended, awakening in her a renewed appreciation of its greatness:

> She saw a little more clearly than hitherto what a human being is, and to what he may aspire. Truer relationships gleamed. Perhaps the last word would be hope - hope even on this side of the grave. (A.101/P.111)

As this passage makes clear, the vision of reality which Margaret is granted by Mrs Wilcox's example, is essentially humanistic. She has learnt from her how to live life worthily; the "fragments torn from the unknown" (A.100/P.110) are of mysteries "this side of the grave". Margaret's concept of the unseen lies within the bounds of the human. Through her Forster still presents the classical ideal, the Mediterranean norm which he celebrated in the earlier novels. Salvation lies within this world; of anything beyond it he and Margaret — her dilettantish interest in Theosophy notwithstanding — take no account.

Before we trace the remainder of Margaret's search for reality, it is necessary to examine more closely the precise nature of Mrs Wilcox, and her effect on Margaret. Ruth Wilcox is Forster's most ambitious attempt so far to personify the forces of the unseen. His use of her to create "an atmosphere of mystery, hinting at strong obscure forces in the world"[9] is, as I have already suggested,[10] itself an indication of the direction that his perception of the unseen is taking. Mrs Wilcox, like Stephen Wonham, is a human embodiment of the spirit of rural England: the difference between the character of the virile young man and the elderly, mysteriously shadowy lady points, however, to

Forster's increasing tendency towards mystical detachment and a transcendence of human activities.

But Mrs Wilcox is also one of Forster's most unsatisfactory characters. Few readers find her wholly convincing. The uneasiness in presentation which we detected at her first appearance tends to be true of her characterisation throughout. Repeated assertions are made, via Margaret's consciousness, of Mrs Wilcox's greatness, of the mystic quality she embodies. Yet the reader finds little in her behaviour to merit such assertions. We are told that she "came of Quaker stock" and that she had at one stage "expressed a desire for 'a more inward light'" (A.88/P.99).[11] She is shown to be capable of flashes of rare insight, such as her assertion that houses cannot stand without bricks and mortar (see A.74/P.87), and her comment to Margaret that "we are all in the same boat, old and young" (A.75/P.88). But apart from this, she appears remarkably commonplace, meriting little more than credit as a good wife and mother and a kindly countrywoman. At times her values resemble those of her husband and son rather than those which Margaret, "supported" by the narrator, perceives in her.

Given the assertions made of Mrs Wilcox's significance, it is easy to see how her simplicity, ordinariness and lack of any intellectual depth might serve as confirmation of them, and even provide a favourable contrast with the elaboration and complexity of the Schlegels' London. But, to repeat, one can see no reason why Margaret should make such assertions in the first place. Forster does not allow Mrs Wilcox to develop organically as a character out of whom the gleam of the unseen might emerge naturally. She remains a thin, unconvincing character built around an intellectual concept, a purely symbolic figure uneasily at variance with the other vividly realised characters.

Nevertheless, it is through Mrs Wilcox that Margaret finds an alternative to her own mode of life. And her death does not mark the end of Margaret's search. It is necessary first that she gain the experience in which Mrs Wilcox believed her to be lacking. She must undergo a rite de passage, what Widdowson calls "a thorough process of preparation".[12] To do this she must, like Ruth Wilcox before her, turn to the world represented by the rest of the Wilcox family. Mrs Wilcox herself will stay with her, like Margaret's father, a spiritual influence, guiding her as she makes her excursion into the seen realm of Wilcoxism in pursuit of proportion.[13]

Increased contact with the Wilcoxes during Mrs Wilcox's illness stimulates Margaret's interest in them. Now she thinks of how she and they, and the different perspectives on life that each represents, might complement each other:

> 'Don't brood too much,' she wrote to Helen, 'on the superiority of the unseen to the seen. It's true, but to brood on it is medieval. Our business is not to contrast the two, but to reconcile them.' (A.101-102/P.112)

Over two years pass before the story is taken up again. During that time the Schlegels continue their "life of cultured but not ignoble ease" (A.106/P.115) against the ever-changing background of London. The narrator, who summarises these interim events, gives further emphasis to Margaret's earlier distaste for London, and significantly turns to the country, the world of Mrs Wilcox, as an alternative. He suggests ironically that the earth "as an artistic cult" (A.106/P.116) is no longer fashionable, at the same time implying the real mystery that it embodies. The earth is also closer to mankind, while London is supremely inhuman:

> It lies beyond everything: Nature, with all her cruelty, comes nearer to us than do these crowds of men. A friend explains himself; the earth is explicable - from her we came, and we must return to her. But who can explain Westminster Bridge Road or Liverpool Street in the morning - the city inhaling - or the same thoroughfares in the evening - the city exhaling her exhausted air? We reach in desperation beyond the fog, beyond the very stars, the voids of the universe are ransacked to justify the monster, and stamped with a human face. London is religion's opportunity - not the decorous religion of theologians, but anthropomorphic, crude. Yes, the continuous flow would be tolerable if a man of our own sort - not anyone pompous or tearful - were caring for us up in the sky. (A.106-107/P.116)

Much later in the novel, Margaret, concerned about Helen's strange behaviour, suddenly sees London for what it really is: "a caricature of infinity".

> The familiar barriers, the streets along which she moved, the houses between which she had made her little journeys for so many years, became negligible suddenly. Helen seemed one with the grimy trees and the traffic and the slowly flowing slabs of mud. She had accomplished a hideous act of renunciation and returned to the One. Margaret's own faith held firm. She knew the human soul will be merged, if it be merged at all, with the stars and the sea. Yet she felt that her sister had been going amiss for many years. It was symbolic the catastrophe should come now, on a London afternoon, while rain fell slowly. (A.277/P.275)

Both these passages are noteworthy for several reasons. Both contrast the urban and natural worlds to the advantage of the latter. Both assert the worth of individualism, humanism and personal relations above a depersonalised transcendentalism — even the deity which London drives man to seek is conceived upon human lines. This is in keeping with the salvational themes of the novel. What is remarkable, however, is the way in which what is so

explicitly rejected points, as will become increasingly clear, to the subtextual tendencies of the novel as a whole, and thus anticipates the themes of A Passage to India.

Meanwhile the flux and instability of London strike Margaret even more forcibly than before as the time for the expiry of the lease on Wickham Place approaches. Her growing sense of insecurity leads her to consider related issues. She thinks of the stability that regular employment gives people such as the Wilcoxes. "Work, work, work if you'd save your soul and your body" (A.109/P.118), she tells her brother Tibby. Soul and body — Margaret's emphasis is as always, on wholeness and proportion. The issues are nevertheless not wholly resolved in her mind, and she is forced to admit that the results of the approach she advocates are often unfortunate. She has recognised the deficiencies in herself and in her mode of living; she sees some of these missing elements in the lives of other people. The problem for her is to combine the best of both worlds and avoid their weaknesses.

Margaret's feelings are given further impetus by the appearance of Jackie Bast, "risen out of the abyss, like a faint smell, a goblin footfall, telling of a life where love and hatred had both decayed" (A.112/P.122). She presents Margaret with another aspect of modern society in which meaning and certainty no longer seem possible.

But Leonard Bast, when he calls to explain Jackie's behaviour, offers Margaret hope after all. Leonard, representative of another aspect of London civilization, has been able to save neither his soul nor his body. He has been caught up in the changing patterns of modern society, a victim of larger social forces. The Schlegels have forgotten their previous meeting with him, but Margaret, preoccupied with her own doubts, views him with interest:

> Culture had worked in her own case, but during the last few weeks she had doubted whether it humanized the majority, so wide and so widening is the gulf that stretches between the natural and the philosophic man, so many the good chaps who are wrecked in trying to cross it. She knew this type very well - the vague aspirations, the mental dishonesty, the familiarity with the outsides of books. (A.113/P.123)

The patronising tone should not hide the truth of her insight. It is, after all, a confirmation of Leonard's and Margaret's cultural incompatibility at the concert, and of Forster's portrayal (often equally patronising) of his attempts to "acquire culture" via Ruskin. Art, such as the Schlegels value, is clearly not for Leonard.

On this occasion his talk is at first of pretentious culture. Gradually however, the immediacy of experience asserts itself as he recounts how he had walked all Saturday night in an effort "to get back to the earth" (A.115/P.124). Margaret recognises him for "a born adventurer" (A.117/P.126). The sisters, to his joy, are thrilled and inspired by the story:

> Somehow the barriers of wealth had fallen, and there had been - he could not phrase it - a general assertion of the wonder of the world. 'My conviction,' says the mystic, 'gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it,' and they had agreed that there was something beyond life's daily gray. He took off his top-hat and smoothed it thoughtfully. He had hitherto supposed the unknown to be books, literature, clever conversation, culture. One raised oneself by study, and got upsides with the world. But in that quick interchange a new light dawned. Was that 'something' walking in the dark among the suburban hills? (A.122/P.131)

His thoughts are an echo of Margaret's earlier musings. He has made the same discovery that she had previously: that earthly salvation, the colour in life's daily gray, might lie in the spirit of the English countryside.

In the debate which the sisters attend that evening, Leonard figures again as representative of a depressed class whose "conditions must be improved" (A.123/P.132). Here Margaret repeats her previous assertions of the importance of money. If they wish to help Mr Bast, she insists, they must give him money itself, not the goods that it buys. "Money's educational. It's far more educational than the things it buys" (A.124/P.133). Money, she goes on to explain, "is the warp of civilization, whatever the woof may be. The imagination ought to play upon money and realise it vividly, for it's the — the second most important thing in the world" (A.125/P.134).

The stress she places on money is another aspect of Margaret's desire for connection between the seen and the unseen. Previously she had recognised the relationship between morality, culture and a secure income. Now, in answering the flood of criticism that deluges her proposal, she rejects the view that Mr Bast would gain the world at the cost of his soul. She insists that "he would not gain his soul until he had gained a little of the world" (A.125/P.134).[14] Her fellow guests disagree:

> Then they said, No, they did not believe it, and she admitted that an overworked clerk may save his soul in the superterrestrial sense, where the effort will be taken for the deed, but she denied that he will ever explore the spiritual resources of this world, will ever know the rarer joys of the body, or attain to clear and passionate intercourse with his fellows. (A.125/P.134)

As usual she sees the unseen — presumably the most important thing in the world — in purely humanistic terms, the "wonder of the world". Later that evening, Helen asks Margaret what the woof of the world is. "'Very much what one chooses,' said Margaret. 'It's something that isn't money — one can't say more'" (A.127/P.136). For Leonard Bast it is walking at night, for Tibby, Oxford — clearly whichever of the spiritual resources of this world appeal to one most, whatever brings colour into life's daily gray. For herself she thinks it is Wickham Place, just as for Mrs Wilcox it had been Howards End.

The mention of Mrs Wilcox's name attracts Mr Wilcox, coincidentally nearby, and yet again the Wilcoxes enter Margaret's life, this time to play an even greater role in it. At this first meeting the contrast presented by the two sisters' differing responses to Henry Wilcox — Helen's hostility and Margaret's tolerance — is an indication of future developments.

In spite of their difference of opinion over the Schlegels' patronage of Bast, intimacy develops between Margaret and Henry Wilcox with remarkable rapidity. When they meet at Simpson's restaurant some time later, she greets him warmly. They meet with the impending move from Wickham Place troubling Margaret even more than usual. Her depression at her inability to find a new house receives additional impetus at the sight of the newly-engaged Evie Wilcox and her fiancé, Mr Cahill. Her sense of flux acquires a more personal, sexual dimension: "Depressed at her isolation, she saw not only houses and furniture but the vessel of life itself slipping past her, with people like Evie and Mr Cahill on board" (A.147/P.155).

The narrator is careful to show that Margaret's feelings of insufficiency at this stage are not entirely merited:

> There are moments when virtue and wisdom fail us, and one of them came to her at Simpson's in the Strand. As she trod the staircase, narrow, but carpeted thickly, as she entered the eating-room, where saddles of mutton were being trundled up to expectant clergymen, she had a strong, if erroneous, conviction of her own futility, and wished she had never come out of her backwater, where nothing happened except art and literature, and where no one ever got married or succeeded in remaining engaged. (A.147-48/P.156)

He makes it quite clear that Margaret is over-reacting in her revulsion against a life which, whatever its defects, also has much to commend it. It is equally clear from the details that he allows into his description of Simpson's, that the world to which Margaret is instinctively turning is equally, if not more, limited. His tone is one that characterises the rest of this scene, and indeed most of Margaret's dealings with the world of the

Wilcoxes.

Suffering from this sense of insufficiency and instability, Margaret now greets with relief the appearance of Mr Wilcox, virile, confident and assured. Her admiration for the "masculinity" of Wilcoxism begins to take on a more personal aspect. Throughout the meal she frequently gives in to his masculine chauvinism. But she is alternately attracted to the solidity of the Wilcoxes, and repelled by their absurdities.

It is this see-saw attitude which will also characterise Margaret's dealings with the Wilcoxes in the future. Shortly after this Mr Wilcox proposes to her. She accepts, partly through true regard for him, but equally, it is made clear, because she sees in him and the world he represents a comforting alternative to a life that no longer satisfies her. Just prior to the proposal she thinks of him:

> He was not a rebuke, but a stimulus, and banished morbidity. Some twenty years her senior, he preserved a gift that she supposed herself to have already lost - not youth's creative power, but its self-confidence and optimism. He was so sure that it was a very pleasant world. His complexion was robust, his hair had receded but not thinned, the thick moustache and the eyes that Helen had compared to brandy-balls had an agreeable menace in them, whether they were turned towards the slums or towards the stars. Some day - in the millennium - there may be no need for his type. At present, homage is due to it from those who think themselves superior, and who possibly are. (A.158-59/P.165)

In the phrasing of the passage, the deft allusion to Helen's unflattering comparison and the wistful glance towards the millennium, we again detect Forster's studied ambivalence towards Margaret's admiration of Wilcoxism. It may provide her with what she lacks, it may complement the one-sidedness of Schlegelism — but that is no indication of its intrinsic worth.

Margaret's approach to her proposed marriage is remarkably honest and clear-sighted. To her horrified sister she admits Henry Wilcox's faults, showing an acute understanding of his spiritual shortcomings. Knowing this, she is nevertheless prepared to marry him. Yet the narrator shows that her awareness of the issues at stake is only partial. She does not consider the extent to which marriage will alter her character. And more significantly, even Wilcox's "public qualities" (A.171/P.177), which form so important a part of his attraction for her, are open to question. The landscape which, when speaking to Helen, Margaret glibly adduces as proof of the Wilcoxes' worth, is one "which confirmed anything" (A.171/P.177). The narrator himself goes on to examine the extent to which Wilcoxes have made England what she is — as Margaret claims they have.

> England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through the mouths of all her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary motion, blew stronger against her rising seas. What did it mean? For what end are her fair complexities, her changes of soil, her sinuous coast? Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who have added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity? (A.172/P.178)[15]

The question is not answered, but it is clear that practical people like the Wilcoxes are not the only ones to whom England has reason to feel grateful. If anything, it is the Schlegels and their like,who have done nothing concrete, but who have understood and loved her in a way that the others cannot, to whom England really belongs.

Of all the heterosexual relationships in Forster's fiction, the love affair and subsequent marriage of Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox is probably the most unconvincing. In time, the reader is told, Margaret grows to love Henry; but he might be forgiven for not seeing how or why. Through all the difficulties that beset their relationship — and, as Margaret soon discovers, there are many — her love remains. She is insistent that this is so, and the narrator offers no evidence to the contrary.

Love, which has been an important theme in the novel so far, now acquires greater dimensions as Margaret, having decided to marry Henry, muses on the significance of this new emotion that has entered her life. In a passage in which her perceptions and those of the narrator are indistinguishable, she considers the vast implications of love. Love is eternal.

> He [i.e. love] knows that he will survive at the end of things, and be gathered by Fate as a jewel from the slime, and be handed with admiration round the assembly of the gods. 'Men did produce this,' they will say, and, saying, they will give men immortality. (A.173/P.179)

The imagery here is vague and highly metaphorical: Forster seems to be striving for dramatic effect rather than making a direct thematic statement. Nevertheless, within the humanistic framework of the novel, this is high praise indeed! The nature of the "immortality" is not made explicit, but the suggestion that man, through his own spiritual resources, is able to "win" it is an indication of the power of love as an aspect of the earthly unseen. And it is on this power of love that Margaret must now depend.

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the difficulties which beset her in her courtship and marriage. What should be noted however, is the depressing way in which her expectations of Henry become increasingly pessimistic and the quality of her relationship with him deteriorates. Parallel to this is her growing doubt whether the reality she seeks is to be found in the world of the Wilcoxes after all.

The problems presented by Henry's half-guilty embrace of her in the dark at Swanage (reminding her for a moment of Helen and Paul), his refusal to acknowledge his involvement in Leonard Bast's loss of income, and finally her discovery that Jackie Bast was once his mistress, are crises which Margaret manages to weather — although at the cost of considerable internal conflict — by her love for him.

At first she believes that Henry's limitations might be overcome. Even this however, is a departure from her earlier optimism. When Henry proposed to her she had determined that

> never, if she could avoid it, should he lose those defences that he had chosen to raise against the world. He must never be bothered with emotional talk, or with a display of sympathy. He was an elderly man now, and it would be futile and impudent to correct him. (A.163/P.169-70)

But this is exactly what closer contact has driven her to do. Her innate sense of proportion cannot bear that one-sidedness which before had refreshed her. She had previously written to Helen of the importance of connecting the seen and the unseen. Now she turns her attention to the individual, and considers the necessity for connection <u>within</u>. This, she believes, is what Henry needs:

> Mature as he was, she might yet be able to help him to the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have never joined into a man. With it love is born, and alights on the highest curve, glowing against the gray, sober against the fire. Happy the man who sees from either aspect the glory of those outspread wings. The roads of his soul lie clear, and he and his friends shall find easy going. (A.183/P.187)

Margaret's vision is an expression of Forster's classical humanism. So, too, is her perception of the source of salvation for Henry: "She need trouble him with no gift of her own. She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul, and in the soul of every man" (A.183/P.188). Salvation lies within: mankind has the potential to effect its own salvation. No external aid is necessary: man, again, is the measure of all things.

But the narrator warns us, even at this early stage, that Margaret's attempt is doomed to failure. Henry, in his obtuseness, is irredeemable. Events soon show this to be all too true.

In his behaviour over the Leonard Bast affair, Henry demonstrates his inability to connect even at the most elementary level, and Margaret is forced to shelter him from the truth in a manner which bodes ill for the future. This is perhaps the most disquieting aspect of their relationship. Earlier it had been noted how Margaret is, in her own way, as masterly as Henry:

> If he was a fortress she was a mountain peak, whom all might tread, but whom the snows made nightly virginal. Disdaining the heroic outfit, excitable in her methods, garrulous, episodical, shrill, she misled her lover much as she had misled her aunt. He mistook her fertility for weakness. He supposed her 'as clever as they make 'em,' but no more, not realising that she was penetrating to the depths of his soul, and approving of what she found there. (A.179-80/P.185)

It is this dangerously patronising attitude, potentially present even in her sermon on connection, to which Margaret has frequently to resort — apparently unaware of the emotional dishonesty which it involves. It certainly does little to advance the cause of connection.

By the time of Evie's wedding at Oniton, Margaret is still finding it difficult to accommodate the world of Wilcoxism. Oniton proves to be "one of her innumerable false starts" (A.207/P.208), and the journey there is daunting enough. Margaret is confronted with all the characteristic Wilcox shortcomings, its conventionality and sexism in particular. The atmosphere is given further depth for the reader by Forster's technique of setting the characters within a larger natural background. Of Shropshire and the travellers' response to it, he writes:

> Quiet mysteries were in progress behind those tossing horizons: the west, as ever, was retreating with some secret which may not be worth the discovery, but which no practical man will ever discover.
>
> They spoke of Tariff Reform. (A.209/P.210)[16]

Margaret is herself aware of this discrepancy. The climax of the journey comes when one of the cars in which they are travelling hits a cat belonging to a cottager's daughter. The Wilcox men, in typical fashion, treat the matter lightly and attempt to hide it from the women. Margaret, who up to now has acquiesced in Wilcox norms is at last stung into a reassertion of her old Schlegel values. She insists that women should deal

with the situation, and when Charles ignores her, jumps out of the moving motor-car. For a moment we see a Margaret of whom Helen would be proud:

> But Margaret walked forward steadily. Why should the chauffeurs tackle the girl? Ladies sheltering behind men, men sheltering behind servants - the whole system's wrong, and she must challenge it. (A.211/P.213)

Although later she deliberately plays down the incident so that the Wilcoxes need not feel threatened by her behaviour, it has a profound effect on Margaret:

> No doubt she had disgraced herself. But she felt their whole journey from London had been unreal. They had no part with the earth and its emotions. They were dust, and a stink, and cosmopolitan chatter, and the girl whose cat had been killed had lived more deeply than they. (A.212/P.213)

She, who had previously seen the Wilcoxes as "honest-English", "real" and stable, now recognises them as part of the malaise afflicting her own social group.

The visit to Oniton reveals further chinks in the Wilcox armour. Watching Charles Wilcox and Albert Fussell elaborately preparing for a morning dip in the river, it occurs to her that even the famed Wilcox virility is an illusion. The simplicity of the apparently over-civilized and effeminate Schlegels, or of Leonard Bast, becomes all the more appealing by contrast.

Nevertheless, Margaret continues to play the Wilcox game with vigour, determined to fit in. Her hope of changing Henry has diminished: she continues to love him, hoping that this at least will work to his benefit. "She had abandoned any plan of action. Love is the best, and the more she let herself love him the more chance was there that he would set his soul in order" (A.217/P.219). When, after the wedding, Helen unexpectedly arrives with the destitute Basts, demanding that Henry do something for them, so complete is Margaret's attempt to identify herself with Wilcoxism that her first thought is to spare him any inconvenience. Her manner to Leonard Bast is conventional and stilted. Her words to Helen show her determination even more clearly:

> Let me tell you once for all that if you take up that attitude I'll do nothing. No doubt you're right logically, and are entitled to say a great many scathing things about Henry. Only, I won't have it. So choose. (A.225/P.226)

She goes on to dismiss "this absurd screaming about justice", saying "I have no use for justice" (A.225/P.226).

Margaret's motives in taking this attitude are clearly complex. Part must lie in her sincere desire for proportion, her attempt to balance Helen's hysterical and counter-productive irrationality. Part lies in a very human desire not to imperil such progress as she has made in her "difficult relations" with Henry. Yet is is not easy to ignore her wilful rejection of justice, her deliberate decision to act against her better judgement. It is on a par with her employment of "the methods of the harem" (A.227/P.228) when breaking the news to Henry, and her earlier patronising attitude. Whatever her motives, at Oniton Margaret has reached a moral nadir. She is herself aware of this, and the passage describing her feeling is remarkable both for the insight it allows into her character and the way in which it hints at Forster's own ambivalences in Howards End and elsewhere:

> How wide the gulf between Henry as he was and Henry as Helen thought he ought to be! And she herself - hovering as usual between the two, now accepting men as they are, now yearning with her sister for Truth. Love and Truth - their warfare seems eternal. Perhaps the whole visible world rests on it, and, if they were one, life itself, like the spirits when Prospero was reconciled to his brother, might vanish into air, into thin air. (A.227/P.228)

Margaret's generalisations are of somewhat doubtful validity. Henry is generalised into "men" — it is of course his "masculinity" which has always attracted her. More significantly, truth is reduced to a static concept far removed from the vibrant ideal "only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm" (A.192/P.196). Following the general pattern in the novel, she goes on to choose the earthly in preference to the disembodied and transcendent:

> On the whole she sided with men as they are. Henry would save the Basts as he had saved Howards End, while Helen and her friends were discussing the ethics of salvation. His was a slapdash method, but the world has been built slapdash, and the beauty of mountain and river and sunset may be but the varnish with which the unskilled artificer hides his joins. Oniton, like herself, was imperfect. Its apple trees were stunted, its castle ruinous. It, too, had suffered in the border warfare between the Anglo-Saxon and the Celt, between things as they are and as they ought to be. Once more the west was retreating, once again the orderly stars were dotting the eastern sky. There is certainly no rest for us on the earth. But there is happiness, and as Margaret descended the mound on her lover's arm she felt that she was having her share. (A.227-28/P.229)

Margaret is desperately trying to justify both Henry and herself. The situation in which she finds herself leaves her with little alternative,

apart from completely rejecting Henry and all that he stands for. This she is not prepared to do, and so comforts herself with an acceptance of earthly imperfection. It is a view in keeping with the themes of the novel as a whole; but bearing in mind subsequent developments, one is struck by the precariousness of her happiness. This is all the more apparent when one recognises the undercurrent of yearning — felt by both Margaret and Forster — for that orderly, ideal world which she explicitly rejects. For all their genuine desire to accept the world of the seen and incorporate it into their own vision, there is little doubt where their true sympathies lie. The desire for connection comes increasingly to seem like an admission of defeat, a resigned acceptance of less than perfect conditions, rather than a disinterested desire to expand horizons.

The revelation that Jackie Bast was once Henry's mistress — one of Forster's more obvious contrivances — offers the greatest challenge yet to Margaret. Coming so hard upon her hope that happiness at least is possible in an imperfect world, it shatters her delicate equilibrium. Her immediate instinct is to evade the issue, seeing it as no concern of hers: "For it was not her tragedy: it was Mrs Wilcox's" (A.230/P.231). But her own values, which she has never really abandoned however much she has attempted to understand others, prove too strong. Her beliefs in comradeship — connection between masculine and feminine — and in personal relations, have suffered a severe setback. In the end she turns again to her hope, even fainter by now, of eventually effecting Henry's salvation by love.

Her conversation with him the next day however, makes it abundantly clear that the concessions and allowances have been on her side only. Far from achieving a balance between her values and his, Margaret has only gone deeper into Wilcox territory, unconsciously compromising her own integrity as well as his by her patronising acceptance of his obtuseness. She herself recognises the utter falsity of his supposed repentance. Henry, as the narrator makes clear, is incapable of connecting either past and present, or cause and effect: "He lived for the five minutes that have passed, and the five to come; he had the business mind" (A.245/P.245).

As might have been predicted, Margaret's marriage does not give her any greater sense of stability than before. Her alliance with Wilcoxism has not saved her from the flux that haunted her in London. Nevertheless some change is discernible in her after her marriage. She takes less part in the intellectual activities of her Wickham Place days. The narrator endorses her Chelsea friends' fear that the change is in part due to her marital status,

but emphasises that "the main cause lay deeper still". She

> had outgrown stimulants, and was passing from words to things. It was doubtless a pity not to keep up with Wedekind or John, but some closing of the gates is inevitable after thirty, if the mind itself is to become a creative power. (A.259/P.258)

This change in Margaret however, points to a more hopeful aspect of her search for reality. Even while battling to come to terms with Henry and his Wilcox values, Margaret has been investigating what will eventually prove to be her final goal, the world of Mrs Wilcox as it is embodied in Howards End. When Mrs Wilcox invited her to see the house, their expedition had been cut short. The symbolic significance of this is clear. Margaret, even if able to "put things so wonderfully", at that stage lacked the experience which would enable her to appreciate the concrete symbol of Mrs Wilcox's values. Then too, Howards End held no special meaning for her: she responded only to the imaginative quality of the invitation. It is only now, as she begins to fill the older woman's place, that she can understand something of what the house meant to her. Her first visit to Howards End comes shortly after her engagement.

Significantly, she enters the house alone, Henry having gone off in search of the key for the apparently locked door. Margaret is immediately struck by the beauty and fertility of the garden. Having left London where everything "seems just alike in these days" (A.193/P.197) and made the journey by a motor-car from which it seemed that the scenery "heaved and merged like porridge" (A.195/P.199), she is struck by the difference that Howards End presents, and for a moment is tempted to see reality in Helen's absolute terms:

> She must have interviewed Charles in another world - where one did have interviews. How Helen would revel in such a notion! Charles dead, all people dead, nothing alive but houses and gardens. The obvious dead, the intangible alive, and - no connection at all between them! Margaret smiled. Would that her own fancies were as clear-cut! Would that she could deal as high-handedly with the world! (A.197/P.200)

In spite of an obvious longing for such idealism, Margaret's characteristic reasonableness and sense of proportion come to her rescue.

In this mood she discovers that the house is not, after all, locked up, and she enters alone. In it she finds symbolic confirmation of Schlegel humanism and its belief in personal relations — as opposed to Wilcox social convention: "Drawing-room, dining-room and hall — how petty the names sounded! Here were simply three rooms where children could play and friends

shelter from the rain" (A.198/P.201). And it is here that she remembers her father's dictum on the value of smallness. She also thinks of Helen's fear that she "will have to lose something" (A.198/P.201) by her association with the Wilcoxes: "She was not so sure. For instance, she would double her kingdom by opening the door that concealed the stairs" (A.198/P.201-202). The salvation and reality which she had hoped to find in the world of Wilcoxism is coming to her now, as yet half-unconsciously, at Howards End, the home of Mrs Wilcox and repository of her values. As Cyrus Hoy points out, Mrs Wilcox had, in fact, those very qualities that Margaret has sought for in the rest of the Wilcox family. She had manifested in her personality "all the finest virtues of the outer life: the life of fields and trees and open sky, of nature conceived as a virtually spiritual presence". Margaret having attempted — with little success — to find the balance she needed in "the grosser, more blatant form of the outer life that is led by the other Wilcoxes"[17] is turning now to that worthier form. She begins to enter the world of her admired dead friend. It is appropriate that at this moment the eccentric but strangely mystic Miss Avery should mistake her for Mrs Wilcox as she stands clutching a bunch of weeds — reminiscent of the bunch of hay so intimately associated with Mrs Wilcox, and suggesting here Margaret's unripened experience.

Margaret's meditations that evening make the discrepancy between the values of Howards End and those of Wilcoxism even more explicit:

> The sense of flux which had haunted her all the year disappeared for a time. She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty, and, starting from Howards End, she attempted to realize England. She failed - visions do not come when we try, though they may come through trying. But an unexpected love of the island awoke in her, connecting on this side with the joys of the flesh, on that with the inconceivable. (A.202/P.204)

Her vision here anticipates her feelings during the journey to Oniton. Wilcoxism, in which she has been seeking stability, has become part of unreality. Salvation is glimpsed in the stability of rural England. There she sees the possibility of the connection she so ardently desires, a confirmation of the instinctive proportion she detected in Mrs Wilcox. In the house and the wych-elm beside it are epitomised the various aspects of connection: the seen and the unseen, masculine and feminine. The tree especially suggests this balance:

> It was neither warrior, nor lover, nor god; in none of these roles do the English excel. It was a comrade, bending over the house, strength and adventure in its roots, but in its utmost fingers tenderness, and the girth, that a dozen men could not have spanned, became in the end evanescent, till pale bud clusters

> seemed to float in the air. It was a comrade. House and tree transcended any simile of sex. Margaret thought of them now, and was to think of them through many a windy night and London day, but to compare either to man, or woman, always dwarfed the vision. Yet they kept within limits of the human. Their message was not of eternity, but of hope on this side of the grave. As she stood in the one, gazing at the other, truer relationships had gleamed. (A.203/P.206)

The last sentences of the passage, an echo of her feelings on Mrs Wilcox's death,[18] confirm Margaret's return to the truth she had earlier perceived. She has since investigated the possibilities of two different extremes: the feminine and the unseen world of the Schlegels, and the masculine, seen world of the Wilcoxes. Now in the uniquely English atmosphere of Howards End she finds a balance between the two: she has a vision of a world that combines both. It is an earthly hope, a vision of authenticity and integrity this side of death.

But Henry Wilcox and his values are not to be dismissed completely. Unsympathetic though his attitude to Howards End is, Margaret recognises that it is only through his efforts that the house has been preserved: "But Henry had saved it; without fine feelings or deep insight, but he had saved it, and she loved him for the deed" (A.203/P.205). This is a reiteration of her awareness of the practical value of people like the Wilcoxes; she might find it increasingly difficult to continue to assert their intrinsic worth, but she retains a lively sense of their ability to make so much possible for the less practical. And it is for this reason that she continues, as we have seen, in her attempt to reconcile herself with Wilcoxism.

The seeds which this first experience of Howards End sows in Margaret's mind flower in her love for Oniton and the hope which it offers for a stable home. It is a hope doomed to disappointment, since Henry soon sells it without telling her of his intentions. Her feelings for the Shropshire country-house nevertheless mark a stage in Margaret's development, as is suggested in the symbolism of her "stooping over the mowing-machine and playing with the grass which trickled through her fingers like sand" (A.245/P.245). It is an advance on the bunch of weeds she held at Howards End, pointing again to Mrs Wilcox's bunch of hay.

Margaret's second visit to Howards End is after her marriage. Again alone, she goes to investigate rumours of Miss Avery's activities in the house. As before, the countryside strikes a sympathetic chord in her as she finds in its scenery parallels to her own values of liberalism and comradeship; and as before, she finds her ideal of connection embodied in it:

> In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect - connect without bitterness until all men are brothers. (A.266/P.264)

To her horror she finds that Miss Avery has unpacked the Wickham Place furniture and books which were being stored there, and has arranged them in the rooms of the house. The old woman is unperturbed by Margaret's protests, insisting in her oddly mysterious way that the Wilcoxes will soon return to live at Howards End. Ignoring Margaret's repeated denial, she tells her: "You are living here, and have been for the last ten minutes, if you ask me" (A. 269/P.267).

> It was a senseless remark, but with a queer feeling of disloyalty Margaret rose from her chair. She felt that Henry had been obscurely censured. (A.269-70/P.267)

Miss Avery's subsequent remarks on the Wilcoxes are far from obscure. They are "better than nothing" she tells Margaret and "They keep a place going" (A.270-71/P.268). All Margaret's defensive insistence on their qualities of leadership and administration elicit no more than a repetition of this half-hearted admission. But Miss Avery's wish that Ruth Wilcox had married a soldier — a soldier such as Mr Schlegel had been, and such as Margaret admires — seems to her "a criticism of Henry's character far more trenchant than any of her own" (A.271/P.269). She is "conscious of some invitation to disloyalty, which was echoed by the very breeze and by the songs of the birds" (A.271/P.269). Once again Howards End and its curious guardian are having their effect on Margaret, weaning her away from her adherence to the false values of the Wilcoxes. At Howards End Schlegelism has found its true resting place: the furniture which Miss Avery has unpacked "fitted extraordinarily well" (A.270/P.267). Here is the concrete expression of the reality she has been looking for, a reality to which the Wilcoxes contribute, but of which they are only a minor part.

But the time is not yet ripe for Margaret, although now legally the second Mrs Wilcox, to assume her full spiritual role. She still sees her future with Wilcoxism. It takes a tragedy — one of the goblins — to force the issue, and bring her to her rightful inheritance. The spirit of Mrs Wilcox, working through Miss Avery, the house's guardian, has prepared Howards End for her; but she is still not ready to accept it.

The crisis and last phase of Margaret's spiritual development is provided indirectly, and as events will show, appropriately enough, by Helen. Leaving England abruptly after Evie's wedding, she has been a source of concern to

Margaret by her mysterious elusiveness. Even when summoned back by Aunt Juley's illness, she refuses to communicate with her family. Margaret, by now seriously alarmed and fearing that her behaviour is motivated by reaction against the Wilcoxes, eventually acts on Tibby's suggestion that they lay the matter before Henry and ask his help. It is noteworthy that in dealing with a matter so close to her heart, she finds it difficult to be patient with her husband's obtuseness. The tolerance which she has been able to extend — albeit with an increasing sense of strain — to Wilcox values, does not come easily. The narrator emphasises this, showing Henry in the most unfavourable light yet. His plan for capturing Helen which "drew its ethics from the wolf-pack" (A.279/P.277) is compared to his unscrupulous behaviour at the time of his first wife's illness. While promising to take her back to her beloved Hertfordshire, he had arranged to send her to a nursing-home instead. There she died. Now, in dealing with Helen's supposed illness, he

> rose to his feet and thought intently. The genial, tentative host disappeared, and they saw instead the man who had carved money out of Greece and Africa, and bought forests from the natives for a few bottles of gin. (A.280/P.277)

The plan is to send Helen down to Howards End in search of books she has asked for. They will intercept her there and decide what action should be taken.

Margaret follows his advice though it violates her most sacred beliefs in personal relations. Her attitude to Henry in doing so indicates a further decline in her hopes for true connection with him: "Whether Henry was right or wrong, he was most kind, and she knew of no other standard by which to judge him. She must trust him absolutely" (A.283/P.279).

At Hilton, however, reaction sets in. Rightfully resentful at Henry's and Dr Mansbridge's impersonal attitude, she sees the issue as one of Wilcox versus Schlegel, masculine versus feminine, and at last abandoning her attempts to reconcile the two extremes, she reverts to her old loyalties. The discovery that Helen is pregnant — with Leonard Bast's child, as she later reveals — confirms Margaret's resolution. She sends the men away, and the two sisters are reunited at Howards End. It is a climax in the thematic movement of the novel: Schlegelism, having explored other possibilities, has at last found its new home. Margaret, in urging Henry to leave, stands "clutching the keys, as if all their future depended on them" (A.287/P.283). Literally and symbolically it does. She is herself obscurely aware of the link she and her sister have with the house: "A new feeling came over her: she was fighting for women against men. She did not care about rights, but if men came into Howards End it should be over her body" (A.287/P.283). By now she has given up all pretence

of playing the Wilcox game, and we glimpse the old, earnest, garrulous Miss Schlegel of Wickham Place as she resumes "her usual methods", asserting the value of affection and writing "the word on the house with her finger" (A.288/P.285) — again a symbolic touch, emphasising the Schlegels' relationship with Howards End and its values.

In the house the sisters find their salvation, release from the cares that have beset them. It is a salvation that marks a return to the humanist values of both the Schlegels and Mrs Wilcox — the sense of continuity embedded in material things, the unseen illuminating the seen, and of personal relations. Margaret, nearing the end of her search for reality, has made a full circle. In the company of her sister, the Wilcoxes recede entirely. Nevertheless, when Helen — again the charming and impetuous Helen "who had written the memorable letters four years ago" (A.298/P.293) — suggests that they stay the night at Howards End, Margaret retains enough sympathy for Wilcox values to see the need to ask Henry's permission to do so. Helen's emotional assertion that the house is theirs because they feel it to be so is correct, in a way that the literal-minded Wilcoxes would not understand, and in terms of the symbolic pattern of the novel; but Margaret, true to her philosophy of proportion, recognises that things are far more complex. "In spite of imagination and poetry — perhaps on account of them — she could sympathize with the technical attitude that Henry would adopt. If possible, she would be technical, too" (A.299/P.295).

But not even Margaret's sense of proportion can prevent the crisis which her request precipitates. Her interview with Henry is her last attempt to accommodate Wilcoxism, and she is finally forced to acknowledge that the differences between her values and his are irreconcilable. No connection is possible with someone who himself refuses to connect.

Henry's obtuseness and crude insensitivity eventually drive her, after numerous attempts to control herself, into outright denunciation of Wilcox hypocrisy. For the first — and last — time she does not patronise him or attempt to shelter him from himself. Throughout the interview she keeps her gaze on the Six Hills, one of the symbols of Mrs Wilcox's yeoman values. And it is Henry's reference to his first wife that, significantly, prompts her outburst. This time she does not try to avoid her responsibility to the first Mrs Wilcox. In a memorable and dramatic speech she tries to show him the connection between Helen's supposed sin and his liaison with Jackie Bast:

> Do you see the connection? Stupid, hypocritical, cruel - oh contemptible! - a man who insults his wife when she's alive and cants with her memory when she's dead. A man who ruins a woman for his pleasure, and casts her off to ruin other men. And

> gives bad financial advice, and then says he is not responsible. These men are you. You can't recognize them, because you cannot connect. I've had enough of your unweeded kindness. I've spoilt you long enough. All your life you have been spoilt. Mrs Wilcox spoiled you. No one has ever told you what you are - muddled, criminally muddled. Men like you use repentance as a blind, so don't repent. Only say to yourself: 'What Helen has done, I've done.' (A.305/P.300)

But her words are in vain, and they separate, Margaret to return to Howards End and her sister.

The evening that the sisters spend together marks the beginning of the last phase of the novel. The various strands which have run through the story are now, in the final chapters, united and set in their full relation to each other.

For Margaret and Helen the house provides rest and comfort after their respective ordeals. Already they are being absorbed into its timeless tranquillity. Margaret at last recognises the full significance of Mrs Wilcox's mysterious influence. She sees her in pantheistic terms, similar to those hinted at by the narrator in the account of her funeral. She is, in fact, the embodiment of the ideal of connection. Margaret tells Helen:

> I feel that you and I and Henry are only fragments of that woman's mind. She knows everything. She is everything. She is the house, and the tree that leans over it. People have their own deaths as well as their own lives, and even if there is nothing beyond death we shall differ in our nothingness. I cannot believe that knowledge such as hers will perish with knowledge such as mine. She knew about realities. (A.311/P.306)

In spite of Margaret's modest distinction between herself and the first Mrs Wilcox, it is appropriate that at this moment Miss Avery should pass through the garden and greet her with that name. Again, the old woman has penetrated to the heart of the matter: Margaret has by now assumed Mrs Wilcox's spiritual role, taking over the custodianship of Howards End, symbol of a particular kind of England. The fondness for rural England that she has herself come to feel is clear from her hesitation at accepting Helen's invitation to return to Germany with her.

Margaret's sense of the dead Mrs Wilcox's unity with the natural world is complemented by her recognition of the timeless quality of Howards End:

> The present flowed by them like a stream. The tree rustled. It had made music before they were born, and would continue after their deaths, but its song was of the moment. The moment had passed. The tree rustled again. Their senses were sharpened, and they seemed to apprehend life. Life passed. The tree rustled again. (A.312/P.306-307)

Margaret's insights suggest a Wordsworthian sense of the mystical oneness that communion with the natural world can bring: a "spot of time" amidst the transitory flux of daily life, and an experience based in a heightened awareness of commonplace things. The stability and wholeness that Margaret has always sought have come to her at last at Howards End. By an intellectual striving after proportion, she has achieved the harmony which Mrs Wilcox had by instinct.

But even now, her journey is not wholly over. The goblins were an integral part of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; they are also, as Margaret and Helen have discovered, an integral part of life, the complement to its splendour and heroism. Margaret's search for reality has involved confrontation with some of these goblins. The "panic and emptiness" of the Wilcoxes provided a major challenge. It remains that she should face up to another of them, represented by Leonard Bast. Only then can her own happiness be assured. Forster, like Beethoven, chooses "to make all right in the end" (A.31/P.47) — for Margaret at least — but his method of doing so proves one of the most problematic aspects of Howards End, and seriously affects the plausibility of its conclusion. I shall attempt to demonstrate this in the remaining pages of this chapter.

On the evening of their dramatic descent on Evie's wedding at Oniton, Helen and Leonard sit in the coffee-room at the inn discussing his situation. In the course of their conversation Leonard who, like Margaret, has been searching for reality and shares her desire "to see life steadily and to see it whole" (A.52/P.67), tells Helen that poverty has taught him the importance of money. Adventure and culture such as he wanted, are meaningless unless one has the financial security to make their pursuit possible. "Miss Schlegel, the real thing's money, and all the rest is a dream" (A.235/P.236), he says to her. This, although stated in balder terms, is much the same discovery Margaret made long before this. But Helen is of more idealistic stuff, and shows him that he has failed to take death into account. She tells him:

> If we lived for ever, what you say would be true. But we have to die, we have to leave life presently. Injustice and greed would be the real things if we lived for ever. As it is, we must hold to other things, because Death is coming. I love Death - not morbidly, but because He explains. He shows ~~one~~ me the emptiness of Money. Death and Money are the eternal foes. Not Death and Life. (A.235/P.236)

Leonard, troubled by his poverty, cannot comprehend such disinterested high-mindedness, but for Helen "the paradox became clearer and clearer. 'Death destroys a man; the idea of Death saves him'" (A.236/P.237).

The scene has followed what has become a typical pattern in the novel. Helen's lecture is inappropriate and insensitive to the circumstances. It betrays her somewhat naïve idealism as much as anything else. Yet she has enunciated a truth which the more prosaic, rational Margaret resists. It is "the vague yet convincing plea that the Invisible lodges against the Visible" (A.236/P.237) — simplistic and disregarding many other factors, it is none the less in an absolute sense, true.

It is these thoughts that return to Leonard now, as he travels to Howards End to confess his supposed seduction of Helen to Margaret. Symbolically, he is returning to the rural England from which his ancestors came. As has happened for the Schlegel sisters, the eternal present of the countryside enters his soul, making his remorse beautiful. His journey becomes a vehicle by which the narrator begins to draw together the threads of the story, enabling him to contrast the rural yeoman, "England's hope" (A.320/P.314) and the destructive Imperialist, who "prepares the way for cosmopolitanism, and though his ambitions may be fulfilled the earth that he inherits will be gray" (A.320/P.315). And in Leonard's mind, two further themes are intertwined and developed:

> To Leonard, intent on his private sin, there came the conviction of innate goodness elsewhere. It was not the optimism which he had been taught at school. Again and again must the drums tap and the goblins stalk over the universe before joy can be purged of the superficial. It was rather paradoxical, and arose from his sorrow. Death destroys a man, but the idea of death saves him - that is the best account of it that has yet been given. Squalor and tragedy can beckon to all that is great in us, and strengthen the wings of love. They can beckon; it is not certain that they will, for they are not love's servants. But they can beckon, and the knowledge of this incredible truth comforted him. (A.320-21/P.315)

With this passage, one of the major themes of <u>Howards End</u> falls into place. Death and the goblins are the parameters which give the humanistic creed of the novel its meaning. It is death, as Helen pointed out, that gives meaning to life, enabling it to be an authentic life of beauty and adventure, not the gray of daily existence. It is the goblins who make the splendour and heroism all the more precious. And not only do both serve to highlight life, but they seem in some way a <u>necessary</u> complement to it, without which it would lose all its meaning. It was for this reason that Mrs Wilcox, having lived a full and vivid life, could greet her end with such equanimity; and it is for this reason that Leonard, having suffered at the hands of society, can now feel himself to be "on a supreme adventure" (A.321/P.315). And now it is this which grants him a splendid and heroic death at the hands of Charles Wilcox, sordid though it is in external detail.

Similar thoughts are in Margaret's mind as she views the body of Leonard. His death is the catharsis which effects the final stage of her transition into the second Mrs Wilcox. Stunned by the "jangle of causes and effects" (A.327/P.320) that have led up to this, she nevertheless realises that reality lies beyond them, that there is something beyond this outer world of meaningless horror.

> Here Leonard lay dead in the garden, from natural causes; yet life was a deep, deep river, death a blue sky, life was a house, death a wisp of hay, a flower, a tower, life and death were anything and everything, except this ordered insanity, where the king takes the queen, and the ace the king. Ah, no; there was beauty and adventure behind, such as the man at her feet had yearned for; there was hope this side of the grave; there were truer relationships beyond the limits that fetter us now. As a prisoner looks up and sees stars beckoning, so she, from the turmoil and horror of those days, caught glimpses of the diviner wheels. (A.327/P.320)

The images she associates with life and death defy exact analysis, but they all point to her experiences of that reality. It is this recognition that gives her hope amid the destruction that the Schlegels and Wilcoxes together[19] have brought upon Leonard:

> To what ultimate harmony we tend she did not know, but there seemed great chance that a child would be born into the world, to take the great chances of beauty and adventure that the world offers. She moved through the sunlit garden, gathering narcissi, crimson-eyed and white. There was nothing else to be done; the time for telegrams and anger was over, and it seemed wisest that the hands of Leonard should be folded on his breast and be filled with flowers. Here was the father; leave it at that. Let squalor be turned into tragedy, whose eyes are the stars, and whose hands hold the sunset and the dawn. (A.327-28/P.320-21)

For herself, Margaret also sees things in their full perspective. She recognises her failure to make anything of Henry or of the Wilcox world. The unseen world is what matters now:

> At such moments the soul retires within, to float upon the bosom of a deeper stream, and has communion with the dead, and sees the world's glory not diminished, but different in kind to what she has supposed. She alters her focus until trivial things are blurred. Margaret had been tending this way all the winter. Leonard's death brought her to the goal. Alas! that Henry should fade away as reality emerged, and only her love for him should remain clear, stamped with his image like the cameos we rescue out of dreams. (A.329/P.322)

The shock of Charles's imprisonment for manslaughter and Henry's consequent breakdown, means that the Wilcoxes do not, after all, pass out of her life. Nevertheless, Margaret's destiny remains with Howards End.

The novel ends with a typically Forsterian epilogue. Margaret, the new Mrs Wilcox, presides at Howards End, a magna mater figure through whom all the disparate elements have been reconciled. She has found in the house the metaphysical reality she sought. At the same time Howards End has become a symbol for a new England, absorbing into itself the three classes depicted in the novel. Its heir, Helen's son, is the product of the classes represented by the Schlegels and Leonard Bast, and his future is guaranteed by Wilcox wealth.[20] He stands for a better England, a return to the yeoman tradition of Mrs Wilcox.

Yet it is in symbolism such as this that the major weakness of the novel lies. The fact that Forster has presented his salvation of England in these terms is not in itself a fault: the problem lies rather in that it serves as a "solution" to a novel in which social issues have been depicted in realistic detail. The discrepancy between the two modes of presentation points to what Virginia Woolf has demonstrated to be Forster's failure to blend the realistic and the symbolic.[21] Or, to use the terminology of the novel itself, it demonstrates his own inability to connect the seen and the unseen.

This failure to connect is surely true of Margaret as well. Helen tells her that it was she who "picked up the pieces, and made us a home" (A.336/P.328). Although she modestly demurs at such praise, she does admit that "things that I can't phrase have helped me" (A.337/P.329) — presumably referring to the spirit of Howards End. Yet, although this is true on a symbolic level, from a realistic point of view one sees very little reason for such optimism. Connection has not really taken place. As in the earlier novels, salvation has been achieved only by exclusion, at the cost of recalcitrant elements. Leonard Bast, whose poverty denied him true salvation, has had to be killed off before his spirit can be absorbed into Howards End; Charles, the most extreme of the Wilcoxes, is in prison; Henry has been destroyed in such a way that he has ceased to be himself; characters such as Jackie Bast and Tibby Schlegel, who played significant, if minor roles in the human drama of the novel, have disappeared from it completely, abandoned in a fictional limbo. If anything, the conclusion of the novel marks the triumph of the Schlegel sisters who, by a cannibalistic incorporation into themselves of the aspects of modern society which they lacked, have managed to ensure their own survival.[22] There is a strange indifference in Margaret's attitude to those who have failed to cross "the black abyss of the past" (A.334/P.326). She is herself aware of her victory when Henry announces that he is to leave the house to her, thus fulfilling the first Mrs Wilcox's request.

> Margaret did not answer. There was something uncanny in her

> triumph. She, who had never expected to conquer anyone, had charged straight through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives. (A.339/P.331)

On a realistic level one cannot avoid seeing the conclusion in any other terms; yet the symbolism clearly implies that connection has taken place.

In developing this argument, one may then further question the extent to which Margaret — and, by implication, Forster — has actually come to terms with the "goblins". Margaret and Helen in the last chapter do acknowledge their continuing presence in the creeping red rust of London. Yet the hope that Howards End offers against this menace is at best only a gesture, depending on the unlikely "weakness of logic" (A.337/P.329). The goblins have been vanquished, as I have suggested, only on a purely symbolic level. Howards End provides no more than an escape, a temporary shelter from the problems of the modern world. Forster's depiction of the goblins and death as somehow necessary evils which give meaning to the beauty and adventure of life feels like an admission of defeat rather than an assertion of meaning. The novel's conclusion amounts to a dramatisation of the failure of the love on which Margaret had pinned her hopes.[23]

In view of this, her words to Helen now have a hollow ring to them:

> It is only that people are far more different than is pretended. All over the world men and women are worrying because they cannot develop as they are supposed to develop. Here and there they have the matter out, and it comforts them. Don't fret yourself, Helen. Develop what you have; love your child. I do not love children. I am thankful to have none. I can play with their beauty and charm, but that is all - nothing real, not one scrap of what there ought to be. And others - others go further still, and move outside humanity altogether. A place, as well as a person, may catch the glow. Don't you see that all this leads to comfort in the end? It is part of the battle against sameness. Differences - eternal differences, planted by God in a single family, so that there may always be colour; sorrow perhaps, but colour in the daily gray. Then I can't have you worrying about Leonard. Don't drag in the personal when it will not come. Forget him. (A.335-36/P.327-28)

To seek to justify sorrow by its colourfulness is surely to evade the issues with which she herself has, in the course of the novel, attempted to come to terms.

In the sentiments Margaret expresses here, in her somewhat tepid attitude to the personal, and her obvious approval of those who "move outside humanity altogether", we also see something of her final vision of reality in the novel. In becoming the second Mrs Wilcox, she has absorbed many of the older woman's characteristics. She is absent-minded, uncommunicative, has lost the shrill

verbosity which made her such an endearing figure before. She has acquired something of Mrs Wilcox's pantheistic quality by her deep involvement with the material world of Howards End. She has also developed the same mysterious detachment from everyday life.

But it is in the dramatisation of Margaret's transformation into the new Mrs Wilcox that the major inconsistency of the novel lies. Alan Wilde comments on her development towards this position, and rightly questions the quality of her final achievement. He writes of Margaret:

> It is her symbolic function also to effect a rapprochement with Mrs Wilcox, to come closer to the instinctive and quiet wisdom of her older friend. This she does throughout the book, and in large measure the change is a good one. Margaret becomes less frenetic, less like her Bohemian friends; as the sense of flux all around her is moderated, as she relies less on the excitement of new movements and ideas, her stature as an individual grows. But in her final phase Margaret betrays the very proportion she holds as an ideal: love of stability turns into love of comfort; concern for order becomes concern for neatness; desire for significance leads to desire for busyness. An anti-intellectual Margaret is a poor substitute for Miss Schlegel of Wickham Place; she is after all, fascinating precisely because of her intelligence, her awareness, her conscious approach to life.[24]

As Wilde suggests, Margaret, by the end of Howards End, is in many ways a lesser person. She seems, to use her own words, to have moved outside humanity. Her beliefs in individualism and that it is the "private life that holds out the mirror to infinity" (A.79/P.91) have been taken to their logical extremes, leaving her isolated and aloof, hardly human in fact. Her faith that it is "personal intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision" (A.79/P.91) is, on the other hand, less in evidence now. Things and places seem more important to her than people: the feelings of Paul and Dolly Wilcox are easily sacrificed in her decidedly trivial concern for the paint on the front door and neatness in the hallway.[25] Margaret's human sympathies may by now have developed to become wider and deeper, but they are also more distanced; and like Mrs Wilcox herself, she has gained her mystic vision only to incur the danger of being mundane.

Her mysticism, in short, amounts to a deliberate annihilation of consciousness, an abdication of involvement in a world too difficult to deal with in rational terms. The fact that it required all her consciousness and rationality to reach this point anyway, makes it all the more problematic. The tendency towards a transcendent detachment which we noted in the course of the novel has here found its full expression.

Such a view is implied by Calvin Bedient when he writes of the novel's

conclusion:

> In her disgust with the Imperialists of the seen, Margaret retreats to the unseen; disillusioned with materialism, she rebounds from matter herself.

Forster, Bedient goes on to suggest, seems not to see Margaret's behaviour in these pages as at all unsatisfactory, perhaps because he is himself "finding unwitting rest in her withdrawal". By the time of his next novel, A Passage to India, he will significantly have moved completely into "the spaceless and timeless regions of the mystical". In Howards End then, Bedient concludes, Forster is secretly turning "from England's future to the eternal, surrendering daily life to the Wilcoxes of the world".[26]

The salvation that Howards End offers is, in the last analysis, as much salvation by exclusion and escape as was found in the earlier, less mature works. Having taken on the goblins and the grayness of daily life, Forster found himself at an impasse, and could only retreat into the detached mysticism always latent in his writing. In a novel which constantly and explicitly emphasises the need for connection and the hope to be found this side of the grave in a life of adventure and beauty, the inconsistency becomes all the more glaring. By the end of the novel Margaret, whatever her intentions (and through her, Forster's) were, is clearly withdrawing from human life in an attempt to "penetrate a new metaphysic".[27] Meanwhile the goblins — the forces of evil — remain a menacing and unvanquished presence, ready to appear again — as they will, with devastating results, in the Marabar Caves in India.[28]

Whatever hope the novel offers, whatever possibility there is of connection between the seen and the unseen, between mysticism and action, it must be reserved for some dim, prophetic future. Only then can the last words of the novel which speak of the harvesting of the hay — symbol of Mrs Wilcox's heritage — carry the full force of conviction and authority:

> 'The field's cut!' Helen cried excitedly - 'The big meadow! We've seen to the very end, and it'll be such a crop of hay as never!' (A.340/P.332)

Notes

[1]E.M. Forster, Howards End, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol. 4 (London: Edward Arnold, 1973),p.x; ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975),p.10; editions hereafter designated in the text by A. and P. respectively.

[2]See Trilling,p.102.

[3]See Trilling,p.99.

[4]Cyrus Hoy, "Forster's Metaphysical Novel", PMLA, 75(1960),p.126.

[5]Godfrey,p.106.

[6]Forster's treatment of Helen is similar to that of Rickie in The Longest Journey, as Stone (The Cave and the Mountain,p.245) and McConkey (The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.34) observe. While criticising her dangerous tendency to extreme romanticism and emotionalism, he nevertheless frequently makes use of her as offering a more attractive point of view than Margaret's more considered, balanced one. While Margaret's is the sensible, practical response to the modern world, Helen's is emotionally the more appealing; and we may often imagine Forster yearning rather wistfully for her idealism in place of Margaret's pragmatism, for the world as it might be rather than as it is.

[7]See Forster's chapter "Prophecy" in Aspects of the Novel.

[8]Quoted above,p.88.

[9]E. Beaumont, "Mr E.M. Forster's Strange Mystics", The Dublin Review, 453 (1951),p.41.

[10]Chapter 1,p.12.

[11]It is worth noting here Forster's interest in Quakers. In Arctic Summer, Martin Whitby is "the son of a Quaker manufacturer" and is shown to have benefitted from his forebears' quest "for the inward light". Arctic Summer and Other Fiction, ed. Elizabeth Heine, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol.9 (London: Edward Arnold, 1980),p.130.
In an essay "Henry Thornton", Forster compares his own Thornton ancestors, members of the famous Clapham Sect, with the Quakers. The Quakers, he says, have something that the Thorntons (upon whom the Wilcoxes are largely based) did not: "a touch of mysticism, a sense of the unseen". "Henry Thornton" (1939), reprinted in Two Cheers for Democracy,A.188/P.204.

[12]Peter Widdowson, E.M. Forster's Howards End: Fiction as History (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977),p.79.

[13]In the Furbank/Haskell interview, Forster said in reply to the question "What was the significance of Mrs Wilcox's influence on the other characters after her death?" that he "was interested in the imaginative effect of someone alive, but in a different way from other characters - living in other lives" (Writers at Work,p.29). Mrs Wilcox's posthumous influence is, in fact, a confirmation of the pantheism hinted at in the description of her burial. It anticipates Forster's more subtle treatment of Mrs Moore in A Passage to India.

[14]Compare The Longest Journey: "Will it really profit us so much if we save our souls and lose the whole world?" (P.230).

[15]The image of England as a ship is reminiscent of the description of the Hilton church after Mrs Wilcox's burial - thus adding force to the narrator's point here. The use of water and related imagery throughout the novel should be noted. It represents, as McConkey points out, not only "continuity and the 'deeper stream' and man's merging with the infinite", but also the exact opposite, "flux without meaning or purpose" (McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.123).

[16]Forster employs this technique with even greater effectiveness in A Passage to India in his description of the Anglo-Indians at the Collector's Bridge Party. Against the vast backdrop of the Indian sky, the guests speak of Cousin Kate, the play in which they "had tried to reproduce their own attitude to life upon the stage, and to dress up as the middle-class English people they actually were" (A Passage to India,A.34/P.60).

[17]Hoy,pp.127-28.

[18]See above p.96, and Howards End,A.101/P.111.

[19]Symbolically, Leonard is destroyed by the values of the two families. Charles Wilcox, the arch-capitalist, attacks him, using Mr Schlegel's sword, and he falls, clutching at a shelf of Schlegel books.

[20]This, by the end of the novel, seems to be the only use that Forster can find for the Wilcoxes. He seems to agree with Miss Avery that they are "better than nothing". On a more positive note, one might remember Mrs Wilcox's comment that houses cannot stand without bricks and mortar.

[21]See Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of E.M. Forster", in The Death of the Moth and Other Essays (London: The Hogarth Press, 1943).

[22]Compare James Hall, "Forster's Family Reunions", English Literary History, 25 (March 1958),pp.60-78. After suggesting that Howards End "involves a dichotomy between structure and texture or, to use other terms, between formal and sympathetic structures", Hall says that the "truly interested writing" in the novel is in fact about "the split between Margaret and Helen over how life should be lived" (Hall,p.63). He thus sees Howards End as really being about connection and reconciliation within the Schlegel family, rather than between it and the Wilcoxes, as the ostensible themes imply. Compare also Stone, The Cave and the Mountain,pp.265-266.

[23]The narrator has also, quite explicitly, turned to love as the only hope for mankind under cosmopolitanism (see A.258/P.256-57). The failure of love to effect connection here, at a time when "trees and meadows and mountains" are shown to be still a binding force, does not bode well for the future.

[24]Wilde, Art and Order,p.118.

[25]Contrast with this Margaret's earlier sadness at the thought that places might be more important than people, A.127/P.136.

[26]Calvin Bedient, Architects of the Self, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972),pp.232-33.

[27]Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.147.

[28]For a particularly penetrating analysis of the relationship between Forster's growing sense of evil in Howards End and the tendency towards mystical detachment that the course of the novel demonstrates, and of how this dichotomy leads to the vision of A Passage to India, see Rosecrance's chapter on Howards End in Forster's Narrative Vision.

Chapter 5

A Passage to India

Introduction

In his address "Three Countries", Forster said of A Passage to India[1] that

> 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 Indian sky, about the horror lurking in the Marabar Caves and the release symbolised by the birth of Krishna. It is - or rather desires to be - philosophic and poetic, and that is why when I had finished it I took its title, 'Passage to India', from a famous poem of Walt Whitman's.[2]

On another occasion he said of the novel: "I am delighted A Passage to India had a success and that it was influential, because the political side of it was an aspect I wanted to express, although it is not primarily a political book".[3]

Both these comments by the author himself are important for a full understanding of A Passage to India. Although on one level it is clearly a novel dealing with racial and socio-political relations in colonial India, its range of significance is really far greater. The physical setting is largely — although not wholly — incidental. India and its people provided Forster with a way of dramatising a muddled, apparently meaningless universe in which man is unable to communicate with man, or with any ultimate reality. Most of the contemporary reviewers and critics of the novel did not realise this; and even later commentators, such as Chaudhuri and Bentley[4] — who should have been able to see the work in better perspective — continued to treat it as little more than a political statement. Such an approach is, in fact, anticipated and refuted in the novel itself when the narrator comments that "most of the inhabitants of India do not mind how India is governed" (A.105/P.126). In a work of art whose imaginative vision extends from the divine to the lowest living organism, the political activities of the human minority can, clearly, be of only tangential significance.

A Passage to India represents a development in Forster's range of interest. That broadening of vision which we have observed in his later novels has here, quite literally, reached universal proportions. In his search for reality, Forster has explicitly voyaged beyond the "human norm" which ostensibly marked the earlier limits of his range. He has examined the void which lies behind all human activity, and has sought to transform it by a mystic apprehension of divine love. He has gone to the very source of existence and found nothing there, but has returned to the world with tentative hopes of salvation. The mysticism always inherent in him, the longing to transcend and escape the world of physicality and conscious thought, has at last found its full expression. Intention and performance are now in perfect accord: no longer do we find the author subconsciously in conflict with the avowed themes of his novel.

Forster first visited India in 1912-13 in the company of his friends, Goldsworthy Dickinson and R.C. Trevelyan.[5] The country's effect on his imagination is evident from the quantity of writing on Indian subjects which he produced during and after his visit. While in India, Forster wrote extensive letters and kept a diary, both of which give a vivid picture of his early impressions. The letters to his mother and other relatives (later to be published in The Hill of Devi) convey his keen, amused and sometimes irate sense of Oriental confusion, the celebrated "muddle" of India which would form such an important part of his novel. In one of these letters, addressed to his friend Mrs Aylward, he also presents another aspect of India which would always impress him: the importance of religion to the Indian. He writes to her of his conversation with the Rajah of Dewas Senior:

> He [the Rajah] believes that we - men, birds, everything - are part of God, and that men have developed more than birds because they have come nearer to realizing this. That isn't so difficult; but when I asked why we had any of us ever been severed from God, he explained it by God becoming unconscious that we were parts of him, owing to his energy at some time being concentrated elsewhere.... Salvation, then, is the thrill which we feel when God again becomes conscious of us....
>
> I think I see what lies at the back of this - if you believe that the universe was God's conscious creation you are faced with the fact that he has consciously created suffering and sin, and this the Indian refuses to believe....
>
> I expect that as I have tried to describe it to you, this reads more like philosophy than religion, but it is inspired by his belief in a being who, though omnipresent, is personal, and whom he calls Krishna.[6]

Forster says elsewhere in The Hill of Devi that he had a similar conversation with the Maharajah of Chhatarpur, and says of the two men that "they have between them helped to illuminate Indian religion for me".[7]

That he was himself well aware of the possibilities that India might offer for a novel is clear from a letter he wrote to his friend Forrest Reid while in India. After admitting the difficulty he then experienced in writing — Arctic Summer, the novel he had begun in 1911, was "too like Howards End to interest me" — he adds significantly:

> I want something beyond the field of action and behaviour; the waters of the river that rises from the middle of the earth to join the Ganges and the Jumna where they join. India is full of such wonders, but she can't give them to me.[8]

India would eventually surrender her wonders to the transforming power of art, but not before several years had elapsed.

On returning to England, Forster began work on an Indian novel. He found progress difficult, and by late 1913 abandoned it to write Maurice. But he continued to express his interest in India through various reviews and articles dealing with Indian subjects.[9] Here again we find in embryo many of the preoccupations of A Passage to India. His tone is often ironic or facetious: the writings, nevertheless, clearly represent a continuing attempt to come to terms with the world that he had encountered.

A recurring theme is Forster's insistence that religion is never far beneath the surface in India. In "The Indian Mind" (1914) he writes that "the Indian who is not interested in religion will never take us much beyond Bombay".[10] Hinduism, in particular, receives his continued attention at this time. In two important reviews, "The Gods of India" (1914)[11] and "The Mission of Hinduism" (1915)[12] Forster stresses the Hindu concept of the ultimate unreality of this world, the belief that reality is only to be found in a transcendent, humanly inconceivable unity. Both essays suggest an enthusiasm for and interest in the answers that Hinduism offers. While by no means an apologist for the religion, or in any way committed to its beliefs, Forster is nevertheless clearly impressed and intrigued. In "A Great Anglo-Indian" (1915) he reviews the essays of Sir Alfred Lyall, a retired Anglo-Indian official, and remarks:

> It is in his Verses, not in these late essays, that Hinduism catches him, as it has caught sceptics at all times, and wrings cries of acquiescence and whispers of hope. As men grow old they seem to think of religion either always or never.[13]

"Cries of acquiescence and whispers of hope" — might Forster not be thinking of himself as much as anyone here?

Many critics have commented on the effect that the First World War had on Forster — as indeed it did on the whole intellectual milieu of his day.[14]

That his pessimism about the fate of the modern world, already apparent in the goblin footfalls in Howards End, received further impetus as a result of the war, can be borne out by reference to other examples of his writing at this time. Essays such as "The Game of Life" (1919)[15] suggest a profound despair and sense of the futility of existence, feelings that would later find full expression in the pessimism of A Passage to India.

The two non-fictional works that Forster produced in the years following the war, Alexandria: A History and a Guide (1922)[16] and Pharos and Pharillon (1923),[17] also deserve brief mention here. They were conceived during his time as a search-officer for the Red Cross in Alexandria. Both are noteworthy for their preoccupation with history and with religion. Forster wrote elsewhere[18] of the consolations that are to be derived from a study of history; and it is interesting to speculate whether the various aspects of religion that he examines in these books also provided him with a consoling escape from the horror of a muddled and irrational world at war with itself. Coupled with his recent exposure to the spirituality of India, this concern with the Christian past of Alexandria expressed and further developed that tendency to a mystical transcendence of the physical world that we have noticed in his fiction so far. The author's tone in both books is facetious and dismissive, but the consistency with which he returns to the subject suggests an interest and perhaps a need that the wit cannot entirely obscure. Alexandria's great question "How can the human be linked to the divine?"[19] is also Forster's, and will be the insistent query of A Passage to India.

Forster visited India again in 1921, this time to take up the post of Private Secretary to the Maharajah (he had been a Rajah when Forster met him on his previous visit) of Dewas Senior. In a note in The Hill of Devi Forster explains that he had then taken the opening chapters of A Passage to India with him. He goes on to say:

> But as soon as they were confronted with the country they purported to describe, they seemed to wilt and go dead and I could do nothing with them....The gap between India remembered and India experienced was too wide.[20]

Back in England "the gap narrowed" and by 1924 he was able to transform his experiences of the last few years into his last and greatest work of fiction.

Of the years leading up to the completion of A Passage to India, Wilfred Stone comments:

> Forster's sojourns in the Middle East and in India mark stages in his maturing as a man and a writer. As he moved further and further from home geographically, he came closer and closer

to home spiritually.[21]

It is to the novel itself that we must now turn.

"All invitations must proceed from heaven perhaps...."

A Passage to India depicts, in its action, the divisions between man and man. India, with its countless social, racial and religious divisions, and its vast and complex natural world that constantly impinges on human life — "the hundred Indias which fuss and squabble so tiresomely" (A.251/P.261) — presented Forster with an image of a muddled and divided universe in which personal relations are, if not entirely impossible, certainly no more than temporary.

The opening chapters dramatise this theme of the difficulties of human communication. In Chapter 2 the young Moslem doctor, Aziz,[22] and his friends discuss "whether or no it is possible to be friends with an Englishman" (A.5/P.33). Their consensus that in India it is not, is apparently endorsed when Aziz is abruptly summoned by the Civil Surgeon. The discourtesy of the Anglo-Indian women to him, and the dishonesty of their servant, both point to the unlikelihood of any real relations with anyone beyond those of one's immediate circle. His meeting with Mrs Moore in the mosque immediately after this does provide a moment of peace and beauty in which the barriers of race and religion are transcended. But the respite is a temporary one, for the elderly Englishwoman as much as for the Indian, and Mrs Moore returns to the Club to be met with the Anglo-Indians' scorn at someone "wanting to see Indians!" (A.21/P.48).

The Bridge Party which the Collector organises proves to be equally futile in its attempt to "bridge" the gap between East and West. The tea-party given by the Principal of the Government College, though more successful, is also characterised by misunderstanding and division. In all these failed attempts at human meeting, the incompatibility is not only between Englishman and Indian: each group is also divided against itself. The "pukka" Anglo-Indians resent the questioning spirit of their two English visitors, and among the Indians, Moslem and Hindu are constantly at odds with each other. Over and above these divided groups are the thousands of people even more diverse and divided, whose existence and nature can only be guessed at by the narrator, "humanity grading and drifting beyond the educated vision" (A.32/P.58), and whom the main characters will never know, "people whose emotions they could not share, and whose existence they ignored" (A.91/P.114). And even beyond

these are the other inhabitants of India, those who "do not mind how India is governed" (A.105/P.126) — the animals, insects and other living creatures, as cut off from each other as from mankind.

What possible hope of unity can there be for such diversity of life? The action of the novel seems to suggest that there is none at all. The universe is too large, too complex for any individual to transcend his own limitations and those of the group to which he belongs.

But from the very beginning, hints of a possible solution to these failures of communication form a counter theme in the novel. The narrator continually sets the social action within a larger context, in which human activities are dwarfed and which implies realms of meaning beyond them. Kenneth Burke aptly sums up the effect of this technique when he writes that

> at strategic moments along the way, despite the novel's comic stress upon the dislocations of society as such, there are traces of a transcendental dialectic. For the presentation as a whole involves a stylistic device whereby social motives are viewed in terms of nature, and nature in turn is infused with glancing references to realms beyond.[23]

The introduction of these transcending realms brings a temporary relief to the strain of human relations. Thus, when Aziz recites poetry at Hamidullah's dinner party, the bitterness of their discussion is momentarily soothed by their sense of the extra-human quality of art and history. They hear a voice from another world, and are provided with a fleeting, if erroneous sense of unity. The encounter in the mosque and Mrs Moore's sight of the moon later that evening are two similar moments, introducing another dimension into the action, the world of the spirit in which peace, beauty and unity are possible.

But these experiences, however liberating, fail finally to transcend human limitations, and the characters are soon returned to the division and conflict that are shown to beset the human race. It is rather in the comments of the narrator that the possibility of a realm of reality beyond these is suggested, one that might offer a greater hope to mankind.

In chapter 1 (a chapter remarkable for its anticipation of most of the major preoccupations of the novel) the narrator says of the Civil Station that "it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky" (A.3/P.32). He goes on to develop the idea of the sky as a source of unity:

> The sky too has its changes, but they are less marked than those of the vegetation and the river. Clouds map it up at times, but it is normally a dome of blending tints, and the main tint blue. By day the blue will pale down into white where it touches the white of the land, after sunset it has a new circumference - orange,

> melting upwards into tenderest purple. But the core of blue persists, and so it is by night. Then the stars hang like lamps from the immense vault. The distance between the earth and them is as nothing to the distance behind them; and that further distance, though beyond colour, last freed itself from blue. (A.3/P.32)

Here then, is a hint of uniformity and permanence under which the fragments of India might be united. But even the sky lacks complete unity: its colours do change and vary. It is only in "that further distance" that the diversity and changes finally disappear in the purity of colourlessness. Only in a realm completely free of earthly association can unity be found.

The idea hinted at here is taken up again by the narrative voice in the description of the Anglo-Indians at the Bridge Party:

> There was a silence when he [Ronnie Heaslop] had finished speaking, on both sides of the court; at least, more ladies joined the English group, but their words seemed to die as soon as uttered. Some kites hovered overhead, impartial, over the kites passed the mass of a vulture, and, with an impartiality exceeding all, the sky, not deeply coloured but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies, more impartial even than they? Beyond which again....
> They spoke of Cousin Kate. (A.34/P.59-60)

The masterly juxtaposition of human triviality and an impartial cosmos points to the tone of yearning hope that frequently characterises the narrator's voice. The hope expressed here lacks the element of personal pleasure found in the experiences of Mrs Moore and Aziz: but the wish for a transcendence of human misunderstanding is similar.

The narrator's most explicit suggestion that human unity can be found in a supra-human realm comes before the account of the Bridge Party. Chapter 4 relates the Indian reactions to the Collector's invitations to the party. "His action caused much excitement and was discussed in several worlds" (A.30/P.56). After a scene marked by its sense of human discord, the narrative voice intrudes and pictures all the people who "had not received a card from Mr Turton" (A.32 /P.57): the millions whom "no earthly invitation can embrace" (A.32/P.58). He surmises:

> All invitations must proceed from heaven perhaps; perhaps it is futile for men to initiate their own unity, they do but widen the gulfs between them by the attempt. (A.32/P.58)

This allusion to the divine is immediately undercut by his ironic demonstration of Christianity's insufficiency for the task. Its invitation to salvation is large, but not nearly large enough to accommodate the multipli-

city of life that is India. The possibility of the divine invitation which will unite all disparities has nevertheless been sounded, and the motif of the call on heaven to effect that unity will continue to reverberate throughout the novel.[24]

A Passage to India, then, contains the explicit, if often ironically qualified suggestion that the answer to the problems of the world may lie in the divine. The human norm which Forster had advocated in his earlier novels has been crushed by the abnormality of India. Such diversity and muddle can surely only find coherent meaning through appeal to an external force, wholly beyond and above it. Only through such divine intervention, too, could humanity come to terms with itself. Its powers had proved insufficient to effect its own salvation: it must perhaps turn to God instead. But who or what is the divinity that can do this? A Passage to India becomes Forster's own search for God, for the absolute reality. He does not emerge from it formally proclaiming any religious creed. His non-fictional writings after 1924 mark a return to an agnostic, humanist point of view. But even they exhibit that loss of confidence in human powers which the early novels had celebrated — in intention at least — so triumphantly.

In this novel Forster presents through his characters four different approaches to the divine. One, the humanist agnosticism of Fielding and Adela Quested, is, more accurately, a disregard for the divine. The complete failure of such a philosophy when confronted by India, is itself an indication of Forster's search for an alternative to his earlier humanism. Fielding is in many ways another "Forster-figure", an older and more mature Philip Herriton, and his belief that the world "is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of goodwill plus culture and intelligence" (A.56/P.80) suggests something of his creator's youthful faith in humanity. As the novel demonstrates, this is a creed not only "ill suited to Chandrapore" (A.56/P.80), but to India and the universe generally. But whereas Fielding does have some inkling of his spiritual limitations, Adela — the Miss Quested whom Margaret Schlegel had invited to luncheon to meet Mrs Wilcox[25] — has none; and in her dry rationalism, her somewhat theoretical desire to "see the real India" (A.19/P.46), lie the seeds of the disaster around which the plot of the novel will revolve. India weighs her and her beliefs in the balance, and finds her greatly wanting.

The other approaches to the divine are found in the three religions Forster depicts in the novel: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. None of them succeeds in the attempt to reach God; all fail at realising the incomprehensible and inexplicable nature of whatever it is that transcends human limitations.

The gulf stretching between the two planes is too wide to be bridged, especially in a universe in which even the differences that separate man from man cannot be overcome.

But fail though they must, there are, it is implied, many degrees of failure. Mrs Moore, referring to the importance of human relations, of "behaving pleasantly", as an expression of love for God, says that

> The desire to behave pleasantly satisfies God...The sincere if impotent desire wins His blessing. I think everyone fails, but there are so many kinds of failure. Goodwill and more goodwill and more goodwill. Though I speak with the tongues of... (A.45/P.70-71)

Her emphasis on the importance of the attempt rather than the achievement is echoed throughout the novel in the motif of the call on a god who "never comes yet is not entirely disproved" (A.103/P.119).

The failure of any religion to reach God should therefore be judged in relative terms, according to the extent to which it can bridge the gap between the human and the divine. The religions which Forster presents in A Passage to India all fail because man, by his very nature, cannot conceive of God. They are nevertheless judged and graded according to the extent to which they can conceive of a transcendental reality and, equally important, offer a scheme of salvation that will do the most to unite the warring and disparate muddle that is humanity.

It is only Hinduism, the religion of Professor Godbole, that comes near to achieving this. Both Christianity and Islam fail because their focus is on the human rather than the divine. The Anglo-Indian parody of Christianity, an expression of national solidarity rather than a religion; the missionaries' faith in a loving but nonetheless anthropomorphic Father; Islam, which for Aziz is "an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and his thoughts found their home" (A.13/P.41), an aesthetic refuge as much as a religion; and even Mrs Moore's mystic faith in a God who is above human religions — all these attempts to reach heaven fail ultimately.[26] Hinduism, with its ability to transcend the earthly, its serene detachment from human norms, and its all-inclusive salvation, escapes many of their limitations, though it too must fail.

In Hinduism, Forster found a medium through which he could express his own needs and hopes: it offered him a vision of completeness and wholeness such as he had always attempted to express in his writing. It was a religion that both accepted and transcended all aspects of human experience, thus answering to his own divided needs. It offered hope to a universe troubled

by muddle and evil. And finally it offered that distanced perspective to which Forster continually tended. It is not that Forster ever advocates the teachings of Hinduism as the answer to humanity's spiritual needs in any literal way: rather it provided him with an appropriate fictional metaphor with which he could resolve the thematic concerns of the novel, and which he would work into its very structure. Thus not only does Forster make use of Hinduism as a way of suggesting an "answer" to the problems which he sets himself; he also borrows its patterns of thought and expression as his means of communication. This is apparent, for example, in the images that he regularly employs: the sky, caves, snakes, death, dreams, illusion, flames, nullity, the sun, are all motifs which have their sources in the traditions of Indian thought and writing.

Even more significant is the way in which the Hindu perspective on good and evil, as articulated by Professor Godbole, finds expression in the general design of the novel. Godbole hints at the complementary nature of good and evil, that "they are both of them aspects of my Lord" (A.169/P.186). This insight is borne out in the novel's design and the unfolding of its plot. A Passage to India is divided into three parts: "Mosque", "Caves" and "Temple". These divisions, Forster has said, correspond to the seasonal divisions of the Indian year: the Cold Weather, the Hot Weather and the Rains.[27] This latter scheme suggests a cyclical pattern, and it is into this concept of a cycle that Forster builds his presentation of good and evil. The natural imagery briefly alluded to before is employed here to create the atmosphere appropriate to each seasonal division, and to reinforce its symbolic meaning. Mankind is shown to be largely in the grip of the seasonal changes, even as Professor Godbole suggests that it is affected by the presence and absence of God. The seasons and their effect on man become symbolic of the divine itself. The natural world is a symbol for, and a way of pointing to, the transcendental.

In so complex a novel it is difficult to isolate any particular sequence of events in the text and designate it the plot. It does not have a single continuous plot: rather it consists of several interwoven strands, all contributing to the great theme, India herself. In the remainder of this chapter I shall isolate what, in terms of the interests of this study, is the main sequence of events, and attempt to justify and expand on the generalisations I have made so far. The action of the novel will be seen mainly in terms of the spiritual journey of the two Englishwomen, Mrs Moore and Miss Quested, and their attempts to find "a passage to India". In tracing their spiritual odyssey it will sometimes be necessary to refer to and anticipate later events, since much of the novel's meaning can only be understood in retrospect.

"Mosque"

J.S. Martin has pointed to the importance of the journey in Forster's fiction. He writes that the "exploratory character of Forster's fiction is thematically suggested through its pervasive emphasis on travel".[28] His generalisation about Forster's travellers is particularly apposite in the case of Adela and Mrs Moore:

> All these travellers visit places that yield them a new order of experience - an experience, that is to say, that lies beyond their normal range of activity and expectation. Their fundamental problem is to assimilate the new experience and accommodate it to their accustomed world.[29]

Martin further remarks that

> In their drive toward self-fulfilment and their attempt to reconcile into a single vision the disparate elements of their experience, Forster's travellers are surrogates for Forster himself. As a man he would like to integrate his inner needs with outer facts. As an artist he would ideally like to weld into a unifying vision his experience of inner and outer life, art to Forster being chiefly valuable because it possesses 'internal harmony' and presents a vision of order to 'a permanently disarranged planet'.[30]

Like their creator before them, Mrs Moore and Adela Quested travel to India, to find a world which bewilders and confuses them. They are confronted with a range of experience that they have never encountered before, and with which they attempt, with decreasing success, to come to terms. This confrontation begins, as the novel unfolds, to stand for something much larger than their own experience, larger even than the reflection of Forster's own complex response to India which, to some extent, it is. It is a symbol of man confronted by the inexplicability of a chaotic universe, and his attempts to understand that universe using his limited human understanding while at the same time trying to reach beyond those limits. The novel presents the void of meaninglessness which man is likely to encounter in consequence; but it also goes on to offer hope and a vision that will transform the void and make the passage to India a possibility at least.

After the horror of the Marabar expedition, the disillusioned Mrs Moore thinks back to her arrival in India. Mrs Moore is a development on the kind of figure Forster created in Mrs Wilcox, a more successful dramatisation of the forces of the unseen in the person of an ordinary, yet strangely intuitive old lady.[31] In her, Forster in effect brings his earlier character up to date with his own experiences, and subjects her and her values to a new test.[32] Mrs Moore's initial impressions of India are optimistic:

> As soon as she landed in India it seemed to her good, and when she saw the water flowing through the mosque-tank, or the Ganges, or the moon, caught in the shawl of night with all the other stars, it seemed a beautiful goal and an easy one. To be one with the universe! So dignified and simple. But there was always some little duty to be performed first, some new card to be turned up from the diminishing pack and placed, and, while she was pottering about, the Marabar struck its gong. (A.198/P.212)

In this passage are contained nearly all the elements that characterise the initial mood of the novel. Part I, "Mosque", is dominated by the religion for which the mosque stands as a symbol: Islam. In Chapter 2 when Aziz and his Moslem friends are together, talking of the difficulty of communication between English and Indian, the bitterness that the subject arouses soon gives way to a mood of lyrical beauty. While the older men discuss their eternal politics, Aziz, the romantic young doctor for whom faith, poetry and history are combined in one aesthetic whole, goes into the garden: "The trees smelt sweet — green-blossomed champak — and scraps of Persian poetry came into his head" (A.8/P.36). This mood returns later when he begins quoting poetry to the others: "It never bored them to hear words, words; they breathed them with the cool night air, never stopping to analyse...." (A.10/P.37-8). But the atmosphere is soon destroyed by the Civil Surgeon's message, summoning Aziz to his bungalow.

Later that evening Aziz, returning home, stops at a wayside mosque. The building has the same refreshing, serene quality that characterised those earlier moments:

> He had always liked this mosque. It was gracious, and the arrangement pleased him. The courtyard - entered through a ruined gate - contained an ablution-tank of fresh clear water, which was always in motion, being indeed part of a conduit that supplied the city. The courtyard was paved with broken slabs. The covered part of the mosque was deeper than is usual; its effect was that of an English parish church whose side has been taken out. Where he sat, he looked into three arcades whose darkness was illuminated by a small hanging lamp and by the moon. The front - in full moonlight - had the appearance of marble, and the ninety-nine names of God on the frieze stood out black, as the frieze stood out against the sky. (A.13/P.40-41)

It is a scene from the India of legend and romance. That, certainly, is how the sensitive Aziz perceives it, and he goes on to think of the mosque which he too would build, "smaller than this but in perfect taste, so that all who passed by should experience the happiness he felt now" (A.14/P.41).

It is here that he meets Mrs Moore. Her sympathy and goodwill enable them to transcend the human barriers which would normally separate them, and

for a moment the "secret understanding of the heart" (A.14/P.42) of which Aziz had dreamt becomes a reality.

Mrs Moore shares his appreciation of the beauty of the night. Returning to the Club, she is asked by Adela if she had any success "in catching the moon in the Ganges", because

> The two ladies had happened, the night before, to see the moon's reflection in a distant channel of the stream. The water had drawn it out, so that it had seemed larger than the real moon, and brighter, which had pleased them. (A.19/P.46)

And later, inspired by her adventure, the effect of which not even the stupidity of the Club can dispel, Mrs Moore has a vision of unity with the universe:

> She watched the moon, whose radiance stained with primrose the purple of the surrounding sky. In England the moon had seemed dead and alien; here she was caught in the shawl of night together with earth and all the other stars. A sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies, passed into the old woman and out, like water through a tank, leaving a strange freshness behind. (A.24/P.50-51)

But moments such as these are of an ambivalent nature. The Cold Weather, during which the scenes are set, contributes to their mood. The atmosphere suggested by the images of the moon, water, coolness and luminosity, is lyrical and serene. It is no wonder that Mrs Moore and Aziz are able to see the universe in such optimistic terms. The moments of unity and meaning which both experience under the influence of their surroundings offer a refuge from the tensions and difficulties of human communication. But it becomes increasingly clear that they are no more than that: a refuge.

The optimism that Mrs Moore and Aziz share is facile and the spiritual range of both is limited. Like the religions to which they belong, they can only achieve a peaceful sense of unity or meaning by the exclusion of all contrary evidence. Neither takes into account the vastness and complexity of India. Aziz's faith and poetry are no more than escapes from a world which he cannot understand or control; and as the novel progresses, Mrs Moore finds her Christian certainty undermined more and more by doubts. The narrator, too, repeatedly undercuts their hopes by showing the scenes from a slightly different perspective: the moon which plays such a major part in their thoughts is really "the indifferent moon" (A.10/P.38).

The limitations of Mrs Moore's vision of unity are illustrated shortly afterwards. On their way home from the Club, she, her son Ronny, and Adela

look down on the Ganges, a river already redolent with romantic associations for the two Englishwomen. But it will not accommodate itself to such a view:

> Below them a radiance had suddenly appeared. It belonged neither to water nor moonlight, but stood like a luminous sheaf upon the fields of darkness. He [Ronny] told them that it was where the new sand-bank was forming, and that the dark ravelled bit at the top was the sand, and that the dead bodies floated down that way from Benares, or would if the crocodiles let them. (A.26/P.52-53)

It is this mixture of beauty and cruelty that points to the insufficiency of the old lady's spiritual vision. She is struck by the two aspects of the river, but cannot reconcile them in her mind. "She continued: 'What a terrible river! What a wonderful river!' and sighed" (A.26/P.53).

And not only is the beauty of the river mixed with hints of cruelty and pain: it is also, in itself, transient:

> The radiance was already altering, whether through the shifting of the moon or of the sand; soon the bright sheaf would be gone, and a circlet, itself to alter, be burnished upon the streaming void. The women discussed whether they would wait for the change or not, while the silence broke into patches of unquietness and the mare shivered. (A.26/P.53)

Here is an aspect of India different from the one Mrs Moore encountered earlier. The uncertain, amorphous quality of India is something which was stressed at the very beginning of the novel. The opening chapter points to the impossibility of any certainty in India, of the wide ranges of truth possible, and the difficulty of distinguishing one thing from another. In view of this, Mrs Moore's sense of unity with the universe becomes increasingly open to question. The moon, already shown to be indifferent, is also "shifting". The description of the Ganges goes on to suggest even more disturbing qualities. The "streaming void" and "patches of unquietness" have a sinister ring to them, and grimly foreshadow the effect that India will eventually have on the old woman.

Mrs Moore does become aware of the way in which the country is becoming too much for her spiritual reserves. She is plagued by doubts even as she continues to assert the validity of her Christian values. Some days later she reproves her son for his attitude to the Indians. She tells him that "India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to each other. God....is....love" (A.45/P.70). Yet she begins to doubt the efficacy of her own faith even as she articulates it. Having told Ronny that God is omnipresent "even in India", she is nevertheless aware of a sense of insufficiency: "Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence" (A.46/P.71). The God of Christianity who had satisfied her before seems to have dwindled to insignificance in India. Again she is

aware of some element in India which resists optimism.

Adela, too, finds India unsatisfactory. Her problems are sociological and psychological rather than spiritual. Lacking the older woman's mystic intuition, she is not even able to experience those moments of peace which give Mrs Moore such joy. Nevertheless her expectations of India are similar. She too longs to find romance in India, and is consequently disappointed by the Anglo-India she gets instead. "I want to see the real India" are the first words she speaks in the novel, and to a large extent they characterise much of her behaviour in the rest of it. Earnest, serious, well-intentioned and often tiresome, she is determined to find the metaphysical essence of India. Adela also differs from Mrs Moore in her lack of human spontaneity. There is, as Fielding notes, "something theoretical" (A.40/P.66) in her. Her search for the real India and her protests against the behaviour of the Anglo-Indians are intellectually rather than emotionally motivated. It is significant that she thinks in terms of "India", rather than of "Indians"; of an abstraction rather than people. Mrs Moore, with no pretensions to intellectual stature, who only knows she likes and dislikes people, unconsciously and at times against her will, achieves more than Adela ever can.

But whatever their differences, Adela shares Mrs Moore's discomfort about India, which increasingly threatens to disrupt her ordered, rational universe. At the Bridge Party she is offered an opportunity to discover the "real India" she so longs for, but ironically she feels further from it than ever:

> Miss Quested now had her desired opportunity; friendly Indians were before her, and she tried to make them talk, but she failed, she strove in vain against the echoing walls of their civility. Whatever she said produced a murmer of deprecation, varying into a murmur of concern when she dropped her pocket-handkerchief. She tried doing nothing, to see what that produced, and they too did nothing. Mrs Moore was equally unsuccessful. (A.37/P.62-63)

Significantly, the same images appear here as in the passages, already quoted, which illustrate Mrs Moore's failure to come to terms with India. "Echoing" and the silence of the Indian ladies are reminiscent of Mrs Moore's disturbing sense of the universe receding into unimaginable infinity, "beyond the remotest echo a silence"; while the repetition of "nothing" suggests the "streaming void" of the Ganges. Both images anticipate the spiritual journey upon which the two women are embarking, an odyssey which will reach its climax — or rather its nadir — in the caves of the Marabar Hills, where the echoes will appear again with devastating effect.

The Marabar Hills appeared at the beginning of the novel, sounding the first of the sinister notes that swell as the story unfolds. They appear again now

when Fielding finds Adela "looking through a nick in the cactus hedge at the distant Marabar Hills" (A.39/P.65). The hills become for her a symbol of the India she cannot reach: "How lovely they suddenly were! But she couldn't touch them. In front, like a shutter, fell a vision of her married life" (A.39/P.66). She realises how Anglo-India will separate her from "the true India":

> Colour would remain - the pageant of birds in the early morning, brown bodies, white turbans, idols whose flesh was scarlet or blue - the movement would remain as long as there were crowds in the bazaar and bathers in the tanks. Perched upon the seat of a dogcart, she would see them. But the force that lies behind colour and movement would escape her even more effectually than it did now. She would see India always as a frieze, never as a spirit, and she assumed that it was a spirit of which Mrs Moore had had a glimpse. (A.41/P.66)

The visual detail of her imaginings returns us to the sensuous lyricism of those earlier passages in which Aziz and Mrs Moore thought they had found meaning and certainty. While Adela is correct in assuming that Mrs Moore has experienced India as more than " a frieze", in essence the older woman's experience has been as far from the spirit of India as are these superficial appearances that Adela so resents. Both have a pleasing aesthetic quality, the result of optimism and selectivity.

These, then, are the feelings of the two women by the time of the tea-party to which they are invited by Fielding to meet Dr Aziz and Professor Godbole. The party is one of the more successful social occasions in the novel, and initially similar in atmosphere to the romantic interludes of the early chapters. The guests meet in Fielding's beautiful garden-house, and Aziz imaginatively recreates scenes from the building's past. It reminds him of his meeting with Mrs Moore in the mosque; and he links the water there with the tank outside the house, thus himself emphasizing the atmospheric connection between the two scenes. His inaccuracy here reflects his limitations as the representative of India, something which Adela does not realise. "In her ignorance, she regarded him as 'India', and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India" (A.65/P.88-89). She tells him that Mrs Moore "learned more about India in those few minutes' talk with you than in the three weeks since we landed" (A.61/P.85).

But Aziz's unreliability is not the only indication that they have not yet penetrated the secret of India. Adela tells him of the Bhattacharyas' failure to send their carriage for her and Mrs Moore, as had been arranged at the Bridge Party. She learns from him that these people are Hindus — an aspect of India that the Englishwomen have not encountered before. Their first brush with it

now has left them perplexed and confused. Professor Godbole, who joins the party soon after this, is also a Hindu, and has a similar effect on them.

The narrator's comment that "no one is India" should discourage us from repeating Adela's mistake, and seeing in Godbole or in Hinduism generally, the embodiment of the "real India". Such a thing, the novel makes clear, does not exist. Yet Hindus such as the Bhattacharyas and Professor Godbole, by the very incomprehensibility of their behaviour to Westerners, most resemble India herself, and so seem more "Indian" than the more manageable and comprehensible Moslems. This is well illustrated in Godbole's behaviour at the tea-party.

It is now that the Marabar Caves, mentioned briefly before, begin to make their impact on the minds of Mrs Moore and Adela. Already described as "extraordinary" and to Adela a symbol of the India she cannot reach, their significance is developed here until they become one with the baffling confusion of the country. Introduced innocuously enough by Aziz in an attempt to divert Adela from her plans of visiting him in his bungalow, the caves evoke responses from the guests which suggest their different experiences of India. Adela's reaction is typical of her. She says to Aziz: "Then tell me everything you will, or I shall never understand India" (A.67/P.91). But he, it soon turns out, is as little able to answer her eager questions as he is to explain India. It is left to Godbole to furnish the details. Adela, however, learns no more from him. His inability to describe the caves is, in a sense, a re-enactment of the Bhattacharya incident. Godbole displays the same disregard for reason and logic. He can only describe the caves in terms of negatives — a grim anticipation of the nihilistic effect that they will later exercise on the two visitors.

Professor Godbole appears only a few times in the course of the novel, and on each occasion his utterances are characterised by this same enigmatic quality. He is, nevertheless, Forster's spokesman for some of the major concerns and themes in the novel. James McConkey has seen in him the character who "becomes the human counterpart of the Forsterian voice".[33] Although it is true that his distanced, mystical view of the universe, his ability to see life steadily and whole while largely cut off from active participation in it, marks the culmination of Forster's own similar tendencies, such an equation is far too simplistic.[34] Forster's treatment of Godbole, is, in fact, much the same as his presentation of Hinduism: he is aware of their value and the possibilities that they represent, but at the same time, through his narrative voice, he maintains an ironic distance from them, refusing to commit himself in any way. Godbole articulates the philosophy on which

the novel is, in part, based; his mystical love which embraces and unifies the muddle of the universe is a vision to which Forster is straining; it is he who most explicitly enunciates the concept of the call on God. Yet any possibility of his being read as a prophetic figure is undercut by the irony with which the narrator distances himself from the character. The narrator both endorses Godbole's spiritual authority and at the same time, in a moment of "double-vision", steps back and sees it from a less sympathetic perspective.

Godbole is, in fact, a serio-comic figure. The narrator takes a particular delight in returning again and again to the comic aspect, and stressing it in a way that undermines — but does not entirely cancel — the serious aspect. It does however, become increasingly clear, as the novel progresses, that Godbole's comicality is only apparent to those who do not share his outlook on life. It merely indicates his distance from Western morals, behaviour and conceptions of reality. He only appears comic to some characters in the novel — and presumably to the reader too — because of their limitations in understanding and perception. To people as immersed as they are in a world which, in Godbole's terms, is ultimately unreal, someone with his mystic understanding of reality is bound to appear a little odd. The narrator, nevertheless, manages to maintain simultaneously both these attitudes to his character. By treating Godbole comically he avoids committing himself fully to an endorsement of the character's mystic vision; at the same time, by realising some of his own limitations — which he further embodies in characters such as Adela and Fielding — he implies that the comicality is apparent only. The narrator, in other words, at different times treats both Godbole and himself ironically.

This paradoxical situation will become clearer if we turn again to the tea-party and examine the presentation and dramatisation of Professor Godbole in those scenes. Initially Godbole is presented comically and ironically. The narrator, adopting a Westerner's perspective, finds the Brahman's behaviour strange and a little absurd:

> He took his tea at a little distance from the outcastes, from a low table placed slightly behind him, to which he stretched back, and as it were encountered food by accident; all feigned indifference to Professor Godbole's tea. (A.65/P.89)

Here the incongruity of the situation is delightfully presented. The narrator views the scene from a position of amused detachment. For a moment he ironically presents it from Godbole's point of view ("the outcastes"); then, "and as it were encountered food by accident" moves towards those outcastes' slightly bemused perception of the Hindu. Both centres of perception are

subordinated to the narrator's ironic over-view. The comedy continues into "a turban that looked like pale purple macaroni". The tone then becomes more serious:

> ...and his whole appearance suggested harmony - as if he had reconciled the products of East and West, mental as well as physical, and could never be discomposed. (A.65/P.89)

The comic note is still there, but another element has also entered the description, and this continues into the remainder of the paragraph:

> The ladies were interested in him, and hoped that he would supplement Dr Aziz by saying something about religion. But he only ate - ate and ate, smiling, never letting his eyes catch sight of his hand. (A.65/P.89)

Here again, the comicality of his behaviour is shown, but in contrast with the ladies' trivial expectations, begins to acquire an enigmatic quality. His comicality now indicates his distance from Western (or even non-Hindu) expectations. Without entirely abandoning his comic presentation of Godbole, Forster has shifted his emphasis slightly to allow the reader a glimpse of the reality which lies behind the world of appearances.

The narrator retains this ambivalence throughout his presentation of Godbole at the tea-party. The reason for Godbole's silence over the Marabar is never explained. Is he deliberately and consciously withholding information? Is he in some mysterious way unable to tell them what he knows? Or is it — as we later learn — that the Marabar Caves simply defy any human attempts at description? Forster, through his narrator, chooses not to know. Godbole appears as elusive and enigmatic to the narrator and reader as he does to the other characters. Aziz thinks he sees what lies behind the Hindu's strange behaviour, but his is only "the comparatively simple mind of the Mohammedan... encountering Ancient Night" (A.68/P.92). The image of "Ancient Night" must ultimately describe Godbole: it suggests his links with the mysteries of primeval reality. Antiquity and darkness are also the main characteristics of the Marabar Caves: the image here serves both to anticipate their description and to suggest their link with Godbole's mysticism.

When the party is broken up by Ronny's arrival, Adela is left knowing as little about the Marabar as before. Like Aziz, she is "further than ever from discovering what, if anything, was extraordinary about the Marabar Caves" (A.69/P.92). She has, nevertheless, encountered someone closer to the spirit of India than anyone else she has met so far. But it is Professor Godbole's song, the call to Krishna, that is most important in terms of the two English-women's spiritual development.

The song, which the Professor unexpectedly performs just when the social tensions of the party are at breaking point, is the most explicit expression of the novel's motif of mankind's call on God. In it he places himself "in the position of a milkmaiden" (A.72/P.96) and calls to Lord Krishna. He explains afterwards:

> I say to Shri Krishna: 'Come! Come to me only.' The God refuses to come. I grow humble and say: 'Do not come to me only. Multiply yourself into a hundred Krishnas, and let one go to each of my hundred companions, but one, O Lord of the Universe, come to me.' He refuses to come. (A.72/P.96)

In reply to Mrs Moore's hope that Krishna "comes in some other song", Godbole insists enigmatically on the god's failure to respond: "'Oh no, He refuses to come,' repeated Godbole, perhaps not understanding her question. 'I say to Him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come.'" (A.72/P.96).

His song, nevertheless, has some effect. The call to God, in itself a failure, has created a moment of lyrical beauty in which the social disharmony of the tea-party is dispelled: "Ronny's steps had died away, and there was a moment of absolute silence. No ripple disturbed the water, no leaf stirred" (A.72/P.96).

But it is the long-term effect of the song, the way it affects Mrs Moore and Adela Quested, that is of greater significance. It may, in fact, be seen as a minor climax in their spiritual relations with India, one which anticipates and contributes to the major and decisive one in the Marabar Caves. The song results in an intensification of the vague feelings of unease which their surroundings have aroused in them before, and is itself a dramatisation of those disturbing elements. The "maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none intelligible" (A.72/P.95) is like India, and the effect on the women is the same. Later, when they travel to the Marabar, we are told: "Ever since Professor Godbole had sung his queer little song, they had lived more or less inside cocoons" (A.125/P.145). And even later than this, after the trial, when Adela tries to explain her actions to Fielding, she tells him that she had been unwell since the time of the tea-party:

> I enjoyed the singing...but just about then a sort of sadness began that I couldn't detect at the time...no, nothing as solid as sadness: living at half pressure expresses it best. Half pressure. I remember going on to polo with Mr Heaslop at the Maidan. Various other things happened - it doesn't matter what, but I was under par for all of them. I was certainly in that state when I saw the caves... [ellipsis mine]. (A.228/P.240)

As Adela realises, the effects of the song are immediately apparent. They find dramatic expression in the events following the tea-party. Both

Adela and Mrs Moore are cross and tetchy as Ronny drives them away. And when Adela and Ronny go on to watch polo her mood develops into something more than irritation with his insensitivity. Even as she tries to discuss her difficulties with him she is vaguely troubled by a sense of futility. That Godbole's song is somehow connected with this feeling is clear from the language. She thinks that "there seemed no point in being disagreeable to him and formulating her complaints against his character at this hour of the day, which was evening....(A.75/P.98); and Professor Godbole's "explanation" of his song was that it is "composed in a raga appropriate to the present hour, <u>which is the evening</u>" [my emphasis] (A.72/P.96).

Adela tries to address the problem of her relationship with Ronny, but she is unable to deal with it in the rational, coherent manner to which she is accustomed. Instead she is aware of a profound meaninglessness in everything: within the space of three pages the word "nothing" occurs five times in her thoughts or speech. Even the final breakdown of their relationship seems of little importance:

> Her ordeal was over, but she felt it should have been more painful and longer. Adela will not marry Ronny. It seemed slipping away like a dream. (A.76/P.99)

She has a sense of anticlimax, "feeling that a profound and passionate speech ought to have been delivered by one or both of them" (A.77/P.100).

This mood of general futility occurs again when they go for a drive in the Nawab Bahadur's car:

> The car made a burring noise and rushed along a chaussée that ran upon an embankment above melancholy fields. Trees of a poor quality bordered the road, indeed the whole scene was inferior, and suggested that the countryside was too vast to admit of excellence. In vain did each item in it call out, 'Come, come.' There was not enough god to go round. The two young people conversed feebly and felt unimportant. (A.79/P.102-103)

This is quite unlike the exquisite scenery of earlier chapters, and far from inspiring the beholders with feelings of mystic elation, it implies a universal nullity. The ironic reference to nature's call to God returns us to Godbole's song, and its resemblances to India as a whole become clearer. Both are distinguished by their complexity, their amorphous, undifferentiated quality, and the effect of both is disturbing and strange. Paradoxically, the very vastness of India implies its meaninglessness. There is too much of everything for anything to mean much at all. The manageable unity that Mrs Moore thought she had found, has completely disappeared by now; instead the

sinister elements which had undercut that optimism are asserting themselves.

Another reminder of the song at this time comes in the form of the green bird which Ronny and Adela are unable to identify. Professor Godbole's song was "the song of an unknown bird" (A.72/P.95) and this bird shares its elusive quality. It is a symbol of the India which cannot be categorized, and which resists any attempt by humans to control or impose order upon it. It serves to emphasise Adela's growing sense of alienation from her environment. It causes both her and Ronny to become obscurely aware of the futility of themselves and of their aborted relationship. Mankind dwindles into insignificance amid the formlessness of India.

> The bird in question dived into the dome of the tree. It was of no importance, yet they would have liked to identify it, it would somehow have solaced their hearts. But nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else. (A.77-78/P.101)

All these vague forebodings reach a climax when the Nawab Bahadur's car collides with an unidentified creature which, like the little green bird, defies classification. However, Mrs Moore's later intuition that it might have been a ghost, although never explicitly endorsed by the narrator, anticipates the Nawab's belief that it was the spirit of a man whom he had accidentally killed and who "continued to wait in an unspeakable form, close to the scene of his death" (A.90/P.113). Forster neither confirms nor denies the possibility of a supernatural force; the suggestion is made, and the reader is left to draw his own conclusion, albeit from evidence strongly in favour of it.

The car accident is another of those sinister undertones which have challenged both Mrs Moore's Christian mysticism and Adela's hopes of somehow discovering India. It hints at supernatural forces beyond human control and comprehension, and which cannot be accommodated in any easy vision of the universe.

Adela does not realise the implications of the accident. Rather it brings out all her rational, practical qualities; she and Ronny are united again by their sensible response to the incident, and consequently their relationship is re-established. But it is only a "spurious unity" based on their insufficient understanding. The account of their reaction to the accident is very suggestive, highlighting the contrast between the chaos of India and the Westerners' attempts to impose order and coherence on it as they "muddled about in the dust" (A.81/P.104).

It is left to Mrs Moore to guess at the true nature of that external force.

But Adela retains her sense of futility. She and Ronny become engaged again, but

> Neither had forseen such a consequence. She had meant to revert to her former condition of important and cultivated uncertainty, but it had passed out of her reach at its appropriate hour. Unlike the green bird or the hairy animal, she was labelled now. She felt humiliated again, for she deprecated labels, and she felt too that there should have been another scene between her lover and herself at this point, something dramatic and lengthy. He was pleased instead of distressed, he was surprised, but he had really nothing to say. What indeed is there to say? To be or not to be married, that was the question, and they had decided it in the affirmative. (A.85-86/P.109)

The immediate effect of the song on Mrs Moore is not examined in the same detail, but her behaviour indicates that she has been affected by it. She is irritable and short-tempered during the drive home; and later, when Ronny and Adela return to tell her that they have become engaged, she is strangely vague. She does "not at first grasp what was required of her", and her feelings about the marriage exhibit the same sense of obligation rather than spontaneity. Her first thought is for herself: she needs to remind herself "of all that a happy marriage means" (A.86/P.109). Even then her thoughts soon revert to herself and the inconveniences she has suffered that day. Her love for humanity is giving way to apathy and selfishness. At the tea-party she had been alarmed at the idea of India being a muddle rather than a mystery. This and Professor Godbole's song, with its call to a god who neglects to come, together with the numerous trivial but frustrating incidents which beset the day's activities, have had the effect of undermining the benevolent view of life which she held before. Her faith in an ordered universe, in a God who rewards the faithful, and in the value of human relationships, never very sure since her arrival in India, has received a decisive knock from the symptoms of universal disorder and incoherence she perceives, a muddle that seems to extend even into the realms of the divine.

That Mrs Moore is herself obscurely aware of the cause of her discontentment is clear from her conversation with Adela that evening. She acquiesces in her state in a way that Adela, with her tendency to self-examination, cannot. Mrs Moore tries to reassure her future daughter-in-law:

> 'I wouldn't worry,' she said. 'It's partly the odd surroundings; you and I keep on attending to trifles instead of what's important; we are what the people here call "now".'
>
> 'You mean that my bothers are mixed up with India?'
>
> 'India's - ' She stopped. (A.89/P.112)

The words she leaves unspoken are surely "a muddle" — the possibility that

had filled her with apprehension earlier that day, and which she has since begun to suspect to be true.

The account of the day which has been so tiring and so disturbing for the two women is brought to an end with the narrator's commentary. He confirms and objectifies their experiences: the day's

> rough desiccated surface acquired as it receded a definite outline, as India itself might, could it be viewed from the moon. Presently the players went to bed, but not before other people had woken up elsewhere, people whose emotions they could not share, and whose existence they ignored. (A.91/P.114)

Here is that sense of the unmanageability of India, its chaotic muddle, and the impossibility of anyone being able to embrace it all in one vision, which has confronted Mrs Moore and Adela. But even more significant than this, is the way in which the narrator goes on to describe the approach of the Hot Weather:

> Never tranquil, never perfectly dark, the night wore itself away, distinguished from other nights by two or three blasts of wind, which seemed to fall perpendicularly out of the sky and to bounce back into it, hard and compact, leaving no freshness behind them: the Hot Weather was approaching. (A.91/P.114)

Previously, Aziz has wondered at Mrs Moore coming to India "at this time of year, just as the cold weather is ending" (A.16/P.43). While that cold weather lasted India had seemed to her an attractive and comfortable place; her growing unease now finds its parallel in the change of season.

The sinister aspects of the Hot Weather are developed in some detail in Chapter 10, where many of the novel's thematic threads are also gathered together and developed. In the chapter before it, Aziz, ill in bed, had been visited by his friends. The focus then had been on the human, especially the ways in which individuals are divided from one another by racial and religious differences. Now, the narrator's focus changes in a way which makes humanity seem insignificant. The power of the sun reduces all mankind's pretensions to triviality. The visitors' talk is shown as inconclusive, and each man's individual importance disappears. They have to shelter from the sun's direct influence in order to "recover their self-esteem and the qualities that distinguished them from each other" (A.105/P.127). The mood of the chapter develops from the personification of the heat, which seems to have "leapt forward in the last hour", to the men's awareness "of a common burden, a vague threat which they called 'the bad weather coming'", to "April, herald of horrors", ending with an anticipation of the coming of the sun of the Hot Weather, a cruel ruler returning to his kingdom (A.105-106/P.126-27). The sun's lack of any beauty to compensate for his cruelty reminds us, by contrast,

of the beautiful India which Mrs Moore and Aziz experienced in the beginning of the novel. No such aesthetic romanticization will be possible with the sun: "Through excess of light, he failed to triumph, he also; in his yellowy-white overflow not only matter, but brightness itself lay drowned" (A.106/P.127). The sun is like India: its excess produces feelings of nullity; its "everything" is paradoxically "nothing". The beautiful visions had only been possible through exclusion and selectivity.

The final paragraph of the chapter recalls yet another motif: the call to God. The sun, so powerful, all-embracing and omnipresent might, at first glance, provide the longed-for unity. But it is clearly not so. The sun does not transcend the limitations of the material universe. It is as imperfect, limited and as much part of the universal muddle as the rest of creation:

> He was not the unattainable Friend, either of men or birds or other suns, he was not the eternal promise, the never-withdrawn suggestion that haunts our consciousness; he was merely a creature, like the rest, and so debarred from glory. (A.106/P.127)

Later in the novel, when the heat has increased "until existence had to be endured and crime punished with the thermometer at a hundred and twelve", the narrator returns to the significance of the sun during the Hot Weather:

> In Europe life retreats out of the cold, and exquisite fireside myths have resulted - Balder, Persephone - but here the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun, and no poetry adorns it, because disillusionment cannot be beautiful. Men yearn for poetry though they may not confess it; they desire that joy shall be graceful, and sorrow august, and infinity have a form, and India fails to accommodate them. The annual helter-skelter of April, when irritability and lust spread like a canker, is one of her comments on the orderly hopes of humanity. Fish manage better; fish, as the tanks dry, wriggle into the mud and wait for the rains to uncake them. But men try to be harmonious all the year round, and the results are occasionally disastrous. The triumphant machine of civilization may suddenly hitch and be immobilized into a car of stone, and at such moments the destiny of the English seems to resemble their predecessors'; who also entered the country with intent to refashion it, but were in the end worked into its pattern and covered with its dust. (A.201/P.214-15)

Here is Mrs Moore's problem encapsulated. She wishes to find poetry in India and in the universe; she expects to find order and coherence, meaning and certainty. But India fails to accommodate her: it cannot give her what she longs for, especially during the Hot Season. Like mankind generally, Mrs Moore tries to be harmonious all the year round. For her the results will certainly prove disastrous. She is ill-prepared for the disharmony, ultimately developing into evil, which has been sapping away her optimism.

The last chapter of "Mosque" seems to refute the sinister implications of Chapter 10. For once personal relations and the power of love appear to have triumphed. But the extreme fragility of the emotions aroused (by Aziz's gesture in showing Fielding his wife's photograph) is stressed. It is, as Fielding realises, a precious moment, a brief vision, as of flowers in the desert; yet he is equally aware of the human limitations that must reduce its effectiveness. He also recognises his own limits in the realms of human relationships. In his thoughts we witness finally his creator's rather saddened rationalization of the detachment to which his earlier characters had always tended. In A Passage to India, Forster had come to terms with the full implications of his own vision.

> 'I shall not really be intimate with this fellow,' Fielding thought, and then 'nor with anyone.' That was the corollary. And he had to confess that he really didn't mind, that he was content to help people, and like them as long as they didn't object, and if they objected pass on serenely. Experience can do much, and all that he had learned in England and Europe was an assistance to him, and helped him towards clarity, but clarity prevented him from experiencing something else. (A.109/P.129)

The conversation that follows Fielding's realisation, sincere and friendly as it is, is beset by misapprehension and imcomprehension. Little real communication takes place.

But it is the end of the chapter which most tellingly demonstrates the insubstantiality of the human values and hopes at which the characters have clutched throughout this first section of the novel. Aziz falls asleep "amid the happier memories of the last two hours":

> He passed into a region where these joys had no enemies but bloomed harmoniously in an eternal garden, or ran down watershoots of ribbed marble, or rose into domes whereunder were inscribed, black against white, the ninety-nine attributes of God. (A.113/P.133)

The escapism inherent in Aziz's religion and the world view that it implies are emphasised here. In view of the less happy moments we have just witnessed, the hopes that Aziz's dream offers become very slim indeed.

"Caves"

"Caves" begins in the same way as the first section did: with an introductory chapter in which the narrative voice, surveying the scene of action from an immense distance, directs the reader's attention to the major preoccu-

pations in the chapters that follow. The narrator seems quite godlike as he ranges over vast areas and periods of time in a way that reduces to insignificance the human action which has preceded and will follow his account.

The focus of his attention is the Marabar Hills. Their most remarkable feature is their "otherness". They are quite unlike anything else:

> There is something unspeakable in these outposts. They are like nothing else in the world, and a glimpse of them makes the breath catch. They rise abruptly, insanely, without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen. (A.116-17/P.137)

They are also unbelievably ancient, "older than anything in the world". They are a part of India, — in fact, of the earth — in its most primal state:

> No water has ever covered them, and the sun who has watched them for countless aeons may still discern in their outlines forms that were his before our globe was torn from his bosom. If flesh of the sun's flesh is to be touched anywhere, it is here, among the incredible antiquity of these hills. (A.116/P.137)

The caves predate anything remotely human. They defy mankind's categories and conceptions, his values and even his religious beliefs. By their very strangeness they resist any attempt by him to incorporate them into the systems of meaning which he constructs. "The caves", the narrator tells us, "are readily described" (A.117/P.138). Yet, paradoxically, the precise details which he then provides bring us no nearer to the essence of the Marabar Caves. It is useless, he implies, for mankind to attempt to understand them in his own terms. They are uniquely themselves.

> Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation - for they have one - does not depend upon human speech. It is as if the surrounding plain or the passing birds have taken upon themselves to exclaim 'Extraordinary!' and the word has taken root in the air, and been inhaled by mankind. (A.117/P.138)

Man is, if anything, an intruder in the Caves. Temporally, he is a modern upstart in comparison with their immeasurable antiquity: the image of the visitor who "arrives for his five minutes" (A.117/P.138) is a suggestion of this. But even by gaining access to the caves he reduces them: "The sides of the tunnel are left rough, they impinge as an afterthought upon the internal perfection. An entrance was necessary, so mankind made one" (A.118/P.139). The caves are entirely self-sufficient; they contain their meaning within themselves, without external reference. Forster tells us of caves untouched by man:

> Local report declares that these exceed in number those that can be visited, as the dead exceed the living - four hundred of them,

> four thousand or million. Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil. One of them is rumoured within the boulder that swings on the summit of the highest of the hills; a bubble-shaped cave that has neither ceiling nor floor, and mirrors its own darkness in every direction infinitely. If the boulder falls and smashes, the cave will smash too - empty as an Easter egg. (A.118/P.139)

The repeated assertion of their distance from all human qualities lends the caves a supernatural quality. They are, it becomes clear, a symbol of primal reality, of existence in its genesis. Of further significance is the way in which the Marabar caves gather together and encapsulate all the feelings which India as a whole has aroused in Adela and Mrs Moore. They exhibit the same paradoxical mixture of inclusiveness, excess, sameness and nihilism. They are extraordinary, so much so that it is as if "pilgrims, who generally seek the extraordinary had here found too much of it", and "even Buddha, who must have passed this way down to the Bo Tree of Gaya, shunned a renunciation more complete than his own, and has left no legend of struggle or victory in the Marabar" (A.117/P.137-38). They are also remarkably similar. At the same time, the word "nothing" is used of them repeatedly. The caves, like the natural world of India, are beyond human comprehension: they are too vast - in implication, if not in size - and too unusual to be grasped by the human mind: nothing, in fact, can be said of them at all. The way in which mankind becomes meaningless beside them is equally consistent with the mood of those earlier passages. The failure of human and divine relations also finds expression in the caves, symbolised by the two flames which "approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone". The moment is not, however, without hope: there is a brief moment when "the flames touch one another, kiss, expire". It is, nonetheless, like all such moments, transitory and fragile, and almost immediately the cave "is dark again, like all the caves" (A.117-18/P.138-39).[35]

The caves are India — as Adela and Mrs Moore have come to know it — in essence. And as India is a metaphor for the whole universe, the caves become a symbol for it too. What happens in the Marabar will have implications far beyond itself. It is to this place that the two women now journey for the most crucial stage in their "passage to India".

The expedition to the Marabar is planned and undertaken with an appropriate lack of enthusiasm. The result of a distorted rumour, and beset by innumerable difficulties, it seems doomed to failure from the very start: "Trouble after trouble encountered him [Aziz], because he had challenged the spirit of the Indian earth, which tries to keep men in compartments" (A.120/P.141). The

trip is organised and they meet at the station in an atmosphere which we have come to recognise as peculiarly Indian: a mixture of apathy and confusion. As the train journeys towards the Marabar (Fielding and Godbole having arrived late, are left behind), the Englishwomen, alone in the purdah carriage, experience again more intensely the feelings which have troubled them ever since their arrival in India, and more particularly since Godbole's "queer little song" (A.125/P.145).

Chapter 14 begins with the narrator's suggestion that such feelings are, in fact, part of a universal condition:

> Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence. (A.125/P.145)

Feelings of this kind are certainly being experienced by Mrs Moore and Adela except that, as was previously the case, "the elder lady accepted her own apathy, while the younger resented hers" (A.125/P.145).

Mrs Moore, not in the best of health, and obviously feeling her age, is nevertheless the better able of the two to articulate her mood:

> Mrs Moore pushed up the shutters and looked out. She had brought Ronny and Adela together by their mutual wish, but really she could not advise them further. She felt increasingly (vision or nightmare?) that, though people are important, the relations between them are not, and that in particular too much fuss has been made over marriage; centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man. And to-day she felt this with such force that it seemed itself a relationship, itself a person, who was trying to take hold of her hand. (A.127/P.147-48)

Such cynicism is especially shocking, coming as it does from the woman who shortly before had emphasised the importance of love and personal relations. Adela, feeling equally oppressed, is less aware of the nature of her discontent. In her rational way she tries to shake herself out of it:

> It was Adela's faith that the whole stream of events is important and interesting, and if she grew bored she blamed herself severely and compelled her lips to utter enthusiasms. This was the only insincerity in a character otherwise sincere, and it was indeed the intellectual protest of her youth. She was particularly vexed now because she was both in India and engaged to be married, which double event should have made every instant sublime. (A.125/P.145-46)

Sublimity is exactly what India seems now to lack. Rather it is characterised by undistinguished mediocrity. It resembles the train "half asleep, going nowhere in particular and with no passenger of importance in any of its carriages"; and as such it escapes Adela's rational understanding. Unlike

"the manageable future" it eludes precise definition and ordered coherence:

> India is the country, fields, fields, then hills, jungle, hills, and more fields. The branch-line stops, the road is only practicable for cars to a point, the bullock-carts lumber down the side-tracks, paths fray out into the cultivation, and disappear near a splash of red paint. How can the mind take hold of such a country? (A.128/P.148)

Even the sun fails to satisfy their expectations. Far from being "absolutely magnificent" as Adela anticipates, the sunrise is undistinguished and colourless. It inspires a profound feeling of nullity and disappointment:

> They awaited the miracle. But at the supreme moment, when night should have died and day lived, nothing occurred. It was as if virtue had failed in the celestial fount. The hues in the east decayed, the hills seemed dimmer though in fact better lit, and a profound disappointment entered with the morning breeze. Why, when the chamber was prepared, did the bridegroom not enter with trumpets and shawms, as humanity expects? The sun rose without splendour. (A.129/P149-50)

The religious diction and biblical allusion here make it clear that the scene is a variation on the motif of the call to God. The sun becomes a symbol of the deity who ignores the call of humanity, who neglects to fulfil human expectations. The moment epitomises the women's sense of alienation. Not only do they feel estranged from the human and natural worlds: the cosmos too has proved alien to the norms of humanity. And with this come implications of the impossibility of any communication with that intangible reality which lies beyond the perceivable universe, "that further distance... beyond colour" (A.3/P.32). Faced with this supreme desolation the women can only think nostalgically of "dearest Grasmere": "Romantic yet manageable, it sprang from a kindlier planet. Here an untidy plain stretched to the knees of the Marabar" (A.130/P.150).

Once they arrive at the Marabar station and set out for the caves, the atmosphere verges on nightmarish proportions. Certainly the scene is dreamlike as reality dissolves into illusion:

> As the elephant moved towards the hills (the pale sun had by this time saluted them to the base, and pencilled shadows down their creases), a new quality occurred, a spiritual silence which invaded more senses than the ear. Life went on as usual, but had no consequences, that is to say, sounds did not echo or thoughts develop. Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion. (A.132/P.152)

Thus Adela is unable to identify the white-washed mounds; branches appear to be snakes and then cannot be distinguished from them: "Nothing was explained, and yet there was no romance" (A.132/P.153).

The mood reaches its height when they arrive at the caves, the "extraordinary" quality of which is strongly emphasised:

> The stones plunged straight into the earth, like cliffs into the sea, and while Miss Quested was remarking on this, and saying that it was striking, the plain quietly disappeared, peeled off, so to speak, and nothing was to be seen on either side but the granite, very dead and quiet. The sky dominated as usual, but seemed unhealthily near, adhering like a ceiling to the summits of the precipices. It was as if the contents of the corridor had never been changed. (A.133/P.153)

Their confrontation with the caves themselves is delayed by a typical interlude in which the possibilities of human relationships and values are set up against the universal hostility which seems to threaten them. For the moment the expedition, planned by a young man in honour of two foreign women to whom he wishes to show hospitality, seems a success. Aziz reminds Mrs Moore of their first meeting in the mosque, and she is "suddenly vital and young" (A.134/P.155). They talk of the Moslem emperors of the past, their hospitality and their civilization, and the way in which Babur, who never betrayed a friend, laid down his own life for his son. Once again India seems comprehensible and attractive: Adela feels that Aziz is "again the oriental guide whom they appreciated" (A.136/P.156).

But, as before, the triumph of humanity is temporary and fragile. Adela, with admirable enthusiasm, praises the emperor Akbar's new religion which was to "embrace the whole of India" (A.136/P.156). Aziz's answer unintentionally reawakens a sense of nullity. He says to her:

> Miss Quested, fine but foolish. You keep your religion, I mine. That is the best. Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing, and that was Akbar's mistake. (A.136/P.156)

The human divisions return, and the unity tentatively suggested, is rejected. Yet ironically Aziz is unconsciously pointing to the one unity that India does seem to possess: nothingness.

When Adela tactlessly mentions her own particular problem, that of coming to terms with Anglo-India, the spell of intimacy is broken completely. All the old differences reappear, barriers of communication re-erect themselves, and the interlude is over: "her error broke up their conversation — their civilization it had almost been — which scattered like the petals of a desert flower, and left them in the middle of the hills" (A.137/P.157-58).

Rosecrance has drawn attention to the distance from which the narrator views the events that follow after this.[36] The change of perspective is start-

ling. From the human-centred scenes just discussed, the characters are suddenly reduced, both in their scale and in their humanity. Before the Marabar hills they seem to lose their individual identities and their power to act. Mankind itself becomes a transitory speck:

> The first cave was tolerably convenient. They skirted the puddle of water, and then climbed up over some unattractive stones, the sun crashing on their backs. Bending their heads, they disappeared one by one into the interior of the hills. The small black hole gaped where their varied forms and colours had momentarily functioned. They were sucked in like water down a drain. Bland and bald rose the precipices; bland and glutinous the sky that connected the precipices; solid and white, a Brahmany kite flapped between the rocks with a clumsiness that seemed intentional. Before man, with his itch for the seemly, had been born, the planet must have looked thus. The kite flapped away...Before birds, perhaps...And then the hole belched, and humanity returned. (A.138/P.158)

The travellers' spiritual journey has taken them back to the very sources of existence, to a prehuman world, one in which man is not the centre of his universe.

The deliberate casualness with which Mrs Moore's reaction to a Marabar cave is introduced, gives little indication of the significance of her experience. Mentioning only her physical discomfort at first, the narrator suggests the spiritual and psychological implications by degrees. It is the "terrifying echo" which gives the first hint of these. The echo in a Marabar cave, we are told, is "entirely devoid of distinction".

> Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or 'bou-oum', or 'ou-boum' - utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce 'boum'. (A.138-39/P.159)

Once out of the cave, the horror of the moment subsides, and Mrs Moore is able to think of her friendship with Aziz and remember "despite her fatigue, how very charming, how very good, he was, and how deeply she desired his happiness" (A.140/P.160). But when he and Adela leave her alone as they go on to the next cave, the vision returns in all its overwhelming terror. The calculated understatement through which her feelings are expressed does not hide the extent of their implications:

> Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur: 'Pathos, piety, courage - they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.' If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same - 'ou-boum'. If one had spoken with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and

> misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion and position, and however much they dodge or bluff - it would amount to the same, the serpent would descend and return to the ceiling. Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, but no one could romanticize the Marabar, because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accomodates them to mankind. (A.140-41/P.160-61)

The nightmare acquires even greater proportions as she comtemplates it. Christianity, the religion in which she had put her trust, crumbles before the nihilism of the Marabar:

> Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul, and the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realized that she didn't want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone, not even with God. (A.141/P.161)

Mrs Moore has reached here the nadir of her spiritual odyssey. The Marabar marks the culmination of those feelings which have undermined her Christian faith since the beginning of the novel. From the kindly old lady for whom love was a real force in human and divine relations, she has changed to this, destroyed by a reality which she cannot tolerate.

The nature of Adela's encounter with the Marabar is not dealt with in the same explicit detail. Rather, it is presented obliquely, and to a large extent it remains — frustratingly so for many readers — a mystery. In its effect, however, it is a translation of Mrs Moore's spiritual perceptions into action. Adela's accusation against Aziz is a rejection of personal relations, and the events it sets in motion are a confirmation of the evil that overwhelmed the other woman. It is through Adela's experience that Forster is able to dramatize the truths announced through Mrs Moore's vision.

When she and Aziz leave Mrs Moore to continue their "slightly tedious expedition" (A.142/P.161), Adela's thoughts are, as before, occupied with plans for the future. In her rational, organized way she attempts to deal with the problems facing her, her life in Anglo-India in particular:

> There were real difficulties here - Ronny's limitations and her own - but she enjoyed facing difficulties, and decided that if she could control her peevishness (always her weak point), and neither rail against Anglo-India nor succumb to it, their married life ought to be happy, and profitable. She mustn't be too theoretical; she would deal with each problem as it came up, and trust to Ronny's common sense and her own. Luckily, each had abundance of common sense and goodwill. (A.142-43/P.162)

The dry good sense of these musings is interrupted by the sight of a "double row of footholds" which reminds her of "the pattern traced in the dust by the

wheels of the Nawab Bahadur's car". This association awakens the realisation that Ronny and she do not really love each other. It is a subconscious recollection of the "spurious unity" and "the thrills so frequent in the animal kingdom" which had been their only link in the face of the alien chaos of the Indian countryside at the time of the accident. The engagement which had followed the drive, she now realises, was the consequence not of love but of the threat posed by the hostile universe surrounding them. "Vexed rather than appalled, she stood still, her eyes on the sparkling rock. There was esteem and animal contact at dusk, but the emotion that links them was absent" (A.143/P.163).

But she rejects the doubts and goes on, "her emotions well under control". Her approach to the problem remains rational. She continues to ponder it, considering Aziz's sexual attractions in a detached way, and asking him about his own marital status, thus unwittingly offending him, and causing him to plunge into one of the caves to recover his balance. It is at this stage that she too enters a cave and undergoes her own vision of horror. She goes in "thinking with half her mind 'Sight-seeing bores me' and wondering with the other half about marriage" (A.144/P.164).

The details of what happens to Adela only emerge slowly and indirectly. The unease which Fielding and Mrs Moore feel at her sudden departure for Chandrapore with Miss Derek (who brought Fielding in her motor-car) is confirmed when Aziz is arrested on their own return. Fielding learns the details of her accusation from Turton and McBryde: that Aziz followed Miss Quested into the cave and attempted to rape her, but that she managed to repulse him by hitting at him with her field-glasses, the strap of which he broke in the struggle. She had then run down the hill-side to Miss Derek.

That Adela's accusation is untrue is obvious from the start. Aziz has an alibi in the reader who has been presented with a detailed account of his actions since he left her. What in fact, did happen in the cave? After the trial, Adela and Fielding attempt to reason it out, but it remains a mystery, beyond their limited perceptions, and they are forced to leave the question unanswered. Forster himself chose not to know what happened to his character. He wrote to Dickinson in answer to the latter's query:

> In the cave it is <u>either</u> a man, or the supernatural, <u>or</u> an illusion. And even if I know! My writing mind therefore is a <u>blur</u> here - i.e. I will it to remain a blur, and to be uncertain, as I am of many facts in daily life. This isn't a philisophy of aesthetics. It's a particular trick I felt justified in trying because my theme was India. It sprang straight from my subject matter. I wouldn't have attempted it in other countries, which though they contain mysteries or muddles, manage to draw rings round them.[37]

Forster's typical — and here somewhat tiresome — whimsicality should act as a warning to readers not to repeat Adela's mistake by trying to rationalize the problem away, although as in all his fiction, Forster's subconscious intentions must remain a perennial source of possibilities and interest.

His reference to the muddle of India points, nevertheless, to a partial interpretation of Adela's experience. The Marabar cave, as a symbol for India and for the whole of the muddled universe, represents a challenge to Adela's rationality. Her attempts at ordering and controlling her life suddenly collapse under the pressure of the cave's primeval reality. The caves represent the primitive, subconscious forces that Adela habitually represses — more specifically her emotional and sexual identities.

Of all Forster's sexless young women, poor angular Adela with "practically no breasts" (A.111/P.131) is surely the most ascetic. Just as Aziz, of whom Fielding complains that his "emotions never seem in proportion to their objects" (A.241/P.253), acts only according to the dictates of his heart, so Adela is wholly governed by her head. Love and sexuality are for her things to be thought out, discussed and examined before reaching a reasoned and reasonable conclusion.

Such are her preoccupations when she enters the cave. It echoes her muddled emotions and turns them into a grotesque distortion of her conscious thoughts, turning love into rape. The echo reduces civilized human distinctions into a primitive sameness. Mrs Moore, who has undergone much the same kind of experience, later tells Adela cruelly: "And all this rubbish about love, love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the least difference...." (A.192/P.207). The narrator says elsewhere of Mrs Moore that "she was actually envious of Adela" and shows her again refusing to make distinctions:

> All this fuss over a frightened girl! Nothing had happened, 'and if it had,' she found herself thinking with the cynicism of a withered priestess, 'if it had, there are worse evils than love.' The unspeakable attempt presented itself to her as love: in a cave, in a church - Boum, it amounts to the same. (A.198/P.212-13)

Adela's "hallucination" is, finally, as will be seen to be the case with Mrs Moore's experience, both evil and enlightening. Its evil is indicated by the narrator's phrasing: such as the "unspeakable attempt" in the passage just quoted; and by the consequences it brings about. That her experience is also, in Forster's view, a glimpse of reality is borne out by the presentation of human relations in the novel. They are, almost without exception, doomed to failure. Human love — the mystic love of Professor Godbole is another matter entirely — is no longer the Forsterian ideal, to be striven after as the

embodiment of the good life. The reader, instead, is struck by the weakness of the words which refer to the positive aspects of human relationships: "kindness", "pleasant", "hospitality", "happiness".

It should now be clear that Adela's and Mrs Moore's visions in the cave contain nothing new. They are the culmination and dramatization of half-realised feelings which have occupied them for some time. In the words "Everything exists, nothing has value" lie the summation of all that India has suggested to their minds. It is a confirmation of the fear, originally expressed by the Christian missionaries, that the inclusiveness of India can only lead to meaningless nullity. "We must exclude someone from our gathering, or we shall be left with nothing" (A.32/P.58) had been the missionaries' reaction when confronted with the undifferentiated multiplicity of Indian life, and this, though neither understood, nor stated so explicitly, has been the response of the two English ladies to India. Confronted by the country in all its confusion, their Western world view has been threatened, undermined and finally destroyed, leaving — quite literally — nothing in its place.

But this does not entirely explain the Marabar caves. They are more than just another stage in a spiritual journey. Lying at the centre of the novel, they dominate its action and its meaning. Their own significance, however, remains elusive. They are the most perplexing of all Forster's symbols, and have perhaps inspired the most debate among critics.

In the opening chapter of "Caves", it is stressed that the Marabar Hills are before anything else "extraordinary", unlike anything else on earth or anything that mankind could possibly imagine. That they offer a way to the perception of reality, is also suggested at various times in the novel. The Marabar is "that eternal rock" (A.144/P.164) on which Adela is faced with the vital question of her relationship with Ronny; it is, for her again, at the trial, the "place of answer" (A.217/P.230). It can be the source of supernatural vision, an intimation of reality beyond the human. In the midst of the hysteria that overtakes the Anglo-Indian community after Aziz's arrest, Fielding dimly recognizes this when he sees the Marabar Hills from the Club verandah:

> At this distance and hour they leapt into beauty; they were Monsalvat, Valhalla, the towers of a cathedral, peopled with saints and heroes, and covered with flowers. What miscreant lurked in them, presently to be detected by the activities of the law? Who was the guide, and had he been found yet? What was the 'echo' of which the girl complained? He did not know, but presently he would know. Great is information, and she shall prevail. It was the last moment of the light, and as he gazed at the Marabar Hills they seemed to move graciously towards him like a queen, and their charm became the sky's. At

> the moment they vanished they were everywhere, the cool benediction of the night descended, the stars sparkled, and the whole universe was a hill. (A.181/P.197)

The half-perceived vision is one which defies Fielding's attempts at rationality. He is clearly in the presence of something far more mysterious than his agitated questioning after facts would allow. The imagery here is religious, anticipating a passage (often ignored by readers) which sets the caves on a par with other religious structures. Forster comments of Ronny Heaslop that "wherever he entered, mosque, cave or temple, he retained the spiritual outlook of the Fifth Form, and condemned as 'weakening' any attempt to understand them" (A.245/P.256). This, futher confirmed by the section division of the novel, makes it clear that the Marabar Caves are to be seen as potentially places of spiritual insight. In their physical characteristics we see, in addition, a repetition of the symbols of arch and echo through which the narrator previously suggested the universe and man's search for ultimate reality in it.

The moral significance of the caves remains, however, a puzzle, and must require some consideration before the full significance of Adela's and Mrs Moore's experiences can be fully understood. They were, we have established, granted in the caves some sort of insight into reality, into the nature of the universe. But were their visions good or evil, divine or demonic? Professor Godbole's "queer vague talk" (A.166/P.183) with Fielding, shortly after Aziz's arrest, provides a good starting point from which to examine this issue.

The Professor finds Fielding distracted and distressed by the day's events, yet is himself curiously unaffected by them. After "a speech which lacked both basis and conclusion, and floated through the air" (A.166/P.183), he asks if the expedition to the Marabar had been successful. To Fielding's incredulity he insists that he is quite aware of the "terrible catastrophe about Aziz" (A.167/P.184), but nonetheless dismisses the matter to turn to what is obviously uppermost in his mind: the problem of finding a name for the school which he intends starting in Central India. It is only on Fielding's insistence that he considers the question of Aziz's guilt. His response to it is as baffling as his previous disregard, and the reader is apt to share Fielding's need for solid ground.

Two important truths do, however, emerge from Godbole's comically enigmatic discourse on guilt. The first is the concept of universal involvement in all acts of good or evil. When Fielding attempts to equate the question "Is Aziz innocent or guilty?" with "Would he or would he not do such a thing?", Godbole points out the philosophical fallacy inherent in the equation. The first question he dismisses as of little interest. Questions of innocence

or guilt would seem to share the unreality of courts and evidence. Any decision arrived at through such a system would, in terms of Godbole's philosophy, be of only limited value, and ultimately irrelevant, since it would assume that the responsibility for any particular action can be ascribed to a specific person. Innocence and guilt are really meaningless terms since, Godbole says, "nothing can be performed in isolation. All perform a good action, when one is performed, and when an evil action is performed, all perform it". He goes on to extend this even further: "When evil occurs, it expresses the whole of the universe. Similarly when good occurs" (A.168-69/P.185-86).

For Godbole, the individual has very little significance. A person is no more than one part of a much larger whole — not only of the rest of humanity, but of the whole universe. Any action performed by one individual must, of necessity, implicate all others. This is merely another aspect of the inclusiveness characteristic of the Hindu vision. If all parts of the universe are so closely connected with each other to the extent that the action of one is equally the responsibility of the others, it follows that divine salvation must be offered to all as well.

But Godbole goes on to give the concept of universal good and evil a further dimension. Fielding, distracted and confused, thinks he is "preaching that evil and good are the same". He denies this and explains the relationship between the two:

> Oh no, excuse me once again. Good and evil are different, as their names imply. But, in my own humble opinion, they are both of them aspects of my Lord. He is present in the one, absent in the other, and the difference between presence and absence is great, as great as my feeble mind can grasp. Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, 'Come, come, come, come. (A.169/P.186)

Thus, not only are good and evil supra-personal concepts, in which individuals are willy-nilly involved: they also have divine implications. Good and evil are the outward manifestations of the presence or absence of God. All human activities are therefore somehow caught up in the divine, whether the actors realize it or not.[38]

In claiming that good and evil are complementary aspects of God, Professor Godbole emphasises the differences between "absence" and "non-existence". Evil indicates the absence of God, <u>not</u> the fact of his non-existence. Thus the call to God still has meaning, in spite of the evil which seems so absolute. Hope is still a possibility. It is this outlook which enables

Godbole to remain apparently indifferent to all that is happening around him. The evil then enveloping Chandrapore as Adela's experience in a Marabar Cave continues to have wider and wider repercussions, universal though it is, is also only temporary. At any moment it might be replaced by another aspect of God.

Such is Godbole's response to news of the Marabar disaster. Yet in Chapter 12, where the caves are described in detail, their moral neutrality seems to be emphasised. Of the unopened caves it is said:

> Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil. (A.118/P.139)

They are, we are told, "older than all spirit" (A.117/P.137). The caves appear, in other words, to predate even moral distinctions between good and evil: they simply "are", existing in and for themselves only.

Yet the experiences of Adela and Mrs Moore are obviously evil. Even if Mrs Moore is not entirely correct in her assessment of the nature of her vision — as I shall presently attempt to demonstrate — the consequences of the Marabar expedition make it clear that what they encountered in the Marabar was undoubtedly evil. Professor Godbole's hypothesis that "an evil action was performed in the Marabar Hills" (A.169/P.185) is never called into question. There are also sinister undertones in the narrator's account of what had happened when "the Marabar struck its gong".

> What had spoken to her [Mrs Moore] in that scoured-out cavity of the granite? What dwelt in the first of the caves? Something very old and very small. Before time, it was before space also. Something snub-nosed, incapable of generosity - the undying worm itself. (A.198/P.212)

How is this apparent inconsistency to be reconciled, if at all? Part of the answer lies in the concept of the seasonal cycle paralleling the flow of good and evil, the presence or absence of God. This, as we have seen, has already had some effect on Mrs Moore's spiritual life. The expedition to the Marabar, itself "flesh of the sun's flesh" (A.116/P.137), takes place during the Hot Weather. The oppressive effect of that season is apparent throughout the journey there, the time spent in the hills, and indeed for the rest of the "Caves" section when the consequences of the disaster work themselves out. The Hot Weather is shown to be a season inimical to man's physical comfort, his psychological ease and his spiritual well-being. As throughout the novel, Forster is here employing imagery drawn from the natural or physical world, and using it to suggest spiritual states.

Mrs Moore and Adela thus visit the Marabar under particularly unfavourable conditions. The hills and caves are in themselves morally neutral; it is the conditions under which they exist at that particular time which tend towards evil. It is worth noting here the way in which the Marabar appears quite different when viewed under different conditions. It seems gracious and beautiful in the evening when seen from the distance of the Club by Adela and Fielding (see A.119/P.139 and A181/P.197). To the conventional Anglo-Indians the hills appear innocuous and scenic at the most, and to the end their conception of the Marabar Caves remains inadequate and naively limited:

> The Marabar Caves had been a terrible strain on the local administration; they altered a good many lives and wrecked several careers, but they did not break up a continent or even dislocate a District. (A.225/P.238)

And Adela, imaginatively recreating the scene of the expedition at the trial, sees them in a completely new light, "all beautiful and significant, though she had been blind to it at the time" (A.216/P.230). All this is no more than a dramatisation of the relativity of truth implied in the opening chapter of the novel.

But it is not enough to say that Mrs Moore and Adela are the victims of arbitrary circumstances. They have been overtaken by a supernatural inflow of universal evil, or to put it another way, they have been caught up in an absence of God. At the same time, however, the evil also comes from within themselves, from their inability to perceive the true nature of the universe. The spiritual inadequacy of the two women has been shown up by their stay in India. The Marabar Caves then, serve as a touchstone against which they are measured. Their failure before reality generates evil.[39] This is suggested through one of the major images of A Passage to India: the echo.

Later in the novel, Fielding contemplates the state of the modern world: "Everything echoes now; there's no stopping the echo. The original sound may be harmless, but the echo is always evil" (A.264/P.272). His dim perception here, points to the nature of the women's experience. Adela and Mrs Moore behave in the way that they do as a result of hearing the echo in the cave — in other words, the sound produced as a result of their own voices making contact with the cave. The cave merely returns what it has been given.[40] The difference, however, lies in that it shows these original sounds in their true light: meaningless and undifferentiated in the face of all eternity and infinity, amounting to no more than a dull "bou-oum". When limited human beings, limited in their knowledge and understanding, come into contact with a featureless, depersonalised Infinity which they can neither

understand nor tolerate, evil is likely to occur. Not in themselves evil, they must ultimately generate evil — as is demonstrated by Mrs Moore's breakdown and by the social consequences of Adela's charge against Aziz. The latter also serves as dramatic confirmation of Godbole's contention that good and evil are universal conditions. As Fielding comes to recognize, "the evil was propagating in every direction, it seemed to have an existence of its own, apart from anything that was done or said by individuals" (A.178/P.194). As the whole of Chandrapore becomes involved in one way or another in the matter, Adela's original action in precipitating it becomes insignificant.[41]

Such, then, are the factors which led to Mrs Moore's vision of the fundamental futility of all existence. She becomes the "withered priestess" for whom this life and the next are equally meaningless, for whom all human activity amounts to no more than "different ways of evil" (A.195/P.210).

The chapters that follow the Marabar incident concentrate on the consequences of Adela's accusation against Aziz: his arrest, Fielding's interviews with McBryde, Hamidullah and Godbole, and the hysterical jingoism of Anglo-India. It is not until Chapter 22 that Mrs Moore appears again, and the change in her behaviour is, to say the least, remarkable. Her "Christian tenderness" (A.190/P.204) has left her, and she takes no interest in human affairs, least of all in Adela, who, ironically, has been depending on her old friend to help her. Her only interest is herself. The cave has shown her the meaninglessness of all things; she has only herself and her own sensations to fall back upon.

> 'Say, say, say,' said the old lady bitterly. 'As if anything can be said! I have spent my life in saying or in listening to sayings; I have listened too much. It is time I was left in peace. Not to die,' she added sourly. 'No doubt you expect me to die, but when I have seen you and Ronny married, and seen the other two and whether they want to be married - I'll retire then into a cave of my own.' (A.191/P.205)

Here is the grim conclusion of the escape motif which appears so persistently in Forster's fiction: the ultimate withdrawal from life, a cave of one's own in which to escape the muddle of the human world.

And it is the burden of being human that weighs so heavily on Mrs Moore now:

> 'My body, my miserable body,' she sighed. 'Why isn't it strong? Oh, why can't I walk away and be gone? Why can't I finish my duties and be gone? Why do I get headaches and puff when I walk? And all the time this to do and that to do and this to do in your way and that to do in her way, and everything sympathy and confusion and bearing one another's burdens. Why can't this be done

> and that be done in my way and they be done and I at peace? Why has anything to be done, I cannot see. Why all this marriage, marriage?...The human race would have become a single person centuries ago if marriage was any use. And all this rubbish about love, love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the least difference, and I held up from my business over such trifles!' (A.192/P.206-207)

Such trifles! We have come a long way from the hymn to life of the early novels. If Mrs Moore's sentiments echo those of her creator — and almost certainly they do, with some qualifications — Forster has indeed travelled far since he began his career as a novelist. Or rather he has at last found himself. The platonic strain, the yearning towards a disembodied existence free from muddle and mutability, always present in his writing, have finally found expression in the utterances of an old woman who has been forced to confront the void underlying all human activities. And her reaction, like his, is to withdraw.

To Mrs Moore life has become not only futile but unreal. Her lack of interest in events is accompanied by a complete detachment from them. She appears to Ronny and Adela to occupy a completely different plane of perception: "her mind seemed to move towards them from a great distance and out of darkness" (A.195/P.210). She is aware of both the evil and unreality of all things: existence is simultaneously horrifying and negligible. Her words to Adela point again to her progress from her initial faith in humanity and the universe generally, to this position of profound despair:

> 'I am not good, no, bad.' She spoke more calmly and resumed her cards, saying as she turned them up: 'A bad old woman, bad, bad, detestable. I used to be good with the children growing up, also I meet this young man in his mosque, I wanted him to be happy. Good, happy, small people. They do not exist, they were a dream.... (A.195/P.210)

The next chapter describes Mrs Moore's passage from the India which has proved her undoing. The narrator's comments here reinforce the impression her words gave before:

> She had come to that state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time - the twilight of the double vision in which so many elderly people are involved. If this world is not to our taste, well, at all events there is Heaven, Hell, Annihilation - one or other of those large things, that huge scenic background of stars, fires, blue or black air. All heroic endeavour, and all that is known as art, assumes that there is such a background, just as all practical endeavour, when the world is to our taste, assumes that the world is all. But in the twilight of the double vision a spiritual muddledom is set up for which no high-sounding words can be found; we can neither act nor refrain from action, we can neither ignore nor respect Infinity. (A.197-98/P.212)

Here then is the essence of her vision: everything is equally unimportant, unreal and evil.

That Adela and Mrs Moore, in finding evil and futility in the Marabar Caves, have perceived the reality of the universe is beyond question. The importance attached to the caves as sounding-boards for the real, the action of the novel, and authorial endorsement, all make this clear. But true though the vision was, it was incomplete; and this Mrs Moore herself begins to realise as she travels through India on her way home.

She leaves during a lull in the Hot Weather, and by night. "As she left Chandrapore the moon, full again, shone over the Ganges and touched the shrinking channels into threads of silver, then veered and looked into her window" (A.199/P.213). The imagery here is reminiscent of the first section of the novel. So too is Mrs Moore's glimpse at Asirgarh of a fortress beside which is a mosque. Under the more benevolent influences of the moon and the night, she regains some of her interest in mankind and his works. They seem to regain the solidity and permanence that the message of the Marabar has destroyed. Mrs Moore "watched the indestructible life of man and his changing faces, and the houses he has built for himself and God, and they appeared to her not in terms of her own trouble but as things to see" (A.199/P.213). Asirgarh puts meaning back into life for her. Her egocentric despair gives way to a disinterested hope in the abilities of man to define himself in his universe. "I have not seen the right places", she thinks, thus pointing to the merely relative truth of the Marabar. She realises again the multiplicitty of India, "the hundred Indias that passed each other in its streets" (A.200/P.214), none of which can claim to be the "real" India.

> The feet of the horses moved her on, and presently the boat sailed and thousands of cocoanut palms appeared all round the anchorage and climbed the hills to wave her farewell. 'So you thought an echo was India; you took the Marabar Caves as final?' they laughed. 'What have we in common with them, or they with Asirgarh? Good-bye!' (A.200/P.214)

These passages, so often ignored by critics, mark the beginning of what might be seen as the resurgence of good in the novel. It is a saving vision granted to Mrs Moore before her death, the next step in the spiritual journey which will end in her apotheosis into Esmiss Esmoor, a Hindu deity.

But before tracing the remainder of Mrs Moore's spiritual odyssey it is necessary to return once more to her Marabar Cave and attempt finally to place it in its full perspective. Her vision there, we have seen, was only partial. Her perception of an evil universe, although true, has been coloured both by the circumstances under which she visited the cave, and by her spiritual

insufficiencies. The recognition of evil forced upon her consciousness by India finally proved too much for her, and she was overwhelmed by it, unable to see anything beyond. At Asirgarh she then began the process of spiritual reintegration. Yet, in the horror of the Marabar as she saw it, are contained the seeds of perfect enlightenment such as Professor Godbole possesses.

Forster has said of Mrs Moore's experience in the cave that it is "a moment of negation", a vision "with its back turned".[42] His words point to the positive elements in Mrs Moore's vision — which might, perhaps be more accurately described as an "anti-vision". What Mrs Moore has experienced is a revelation of the unity that underlies the universe. She has perceived, to use Hindu terminology, the Brahma that lies beyond the Veil of Maya. She has recognised the unreality of the world of appearance, the insignificance and triviality of human affairs. She has also learnt that things are of equal value, nothing more important than another. In all this she resembles that mystic, Professor Godbole. But since she lacks his perspective on the dual nature of good and evil, her vision becomes a parody of the mystic experience.

Mrs Moore has, ironically enough, recaptured the cosmic unity which she had thought to have discovered when first she landed in India. Her feelings that "everything exists, nothing has value" (A.140/P.160) is not far from her earlier "sudden sense of unity, of kinship with the heavenly bodies" (A.24/P.51) and her unconscious identification with the wasp (A.29/P.55), the wasp which the Christian missionaries rejected from their scheme of salvation. It differs from these only in its negativity.[43]

Mrs Moore's experience is, then, negative, but also enlightening. The Marabar is, quite literally, the dark tunnel through which she must travel to her final salvation. The mystic awareness that characterises her from the very beginning of the novel ensures that she will glimpse, however imperfectly, the truth which Adela, the rationalist, is never able to see. Her reintegratio begins at Asirgarh, and is completed by the time of her death at sea.

We learn of Mrs Moore's death later in the novel. She dies and her body is committed to "yet another India — the Indian Ocean" (A.244/P.254). But the supernatural consequences are presented before this — at the trial of Dr Aziz.

In the course of the trial, Mrs Moore's name is unexpectedly introduced into the proceedings. It prompts an hysterical outburst of rage by Mahmoud Ali, a counsel for the defense and friend of Aziz. He claims that she had been smuggled out of the country "because she knew the truth" (A.213/P.227). Her name is taken up and repeated by the crowds:

> The tumult increased, the invocation of Mrs Moore continued, and people who did not know what the syllables meant repeated them like a charm. They became Indianized into Esmiss Esmoor, they were taken up in the street outside. In vain the Magistrate threatened and expelled. Until the magic exhausted itself, he was powerless. (A.214/P.227)

The seemingly casual references to a supernatural force — suggested by words such as "invocation", "charm" and "magic" — which overrides the power of the court are further developed in Turton's cynical remark that the Indians "get just like that over their religion" (A.214/P.227) and the narrator's comment that Ronny found it revolting "to hear his mother travestied into Esmiss Esmoor, a Hindu goddess" (A.214/P.228). The narrator also says of the conclusion of the uproar that it "was as if the prayer had been heard, and the relics exhibited" (A.215/P.228).

We should note the delicacy with which Forster suggests the apotheosis of Mrs Moore, an Englishwoman who has undergone a profound spiritual experience, into Esmiss Esmoor, a Hindu deity. He never explicitly states that her deification has taken place. Rather, evidence is merely reported, and the reader is left to interpret it in whichever way he chooses. He may, as some critics have done, read Mrs Moore's posthumous influence in purely humanistic terms, as the imaginative effect that the memory of her has on those who had known her during her lifetime; or he may see it in explicitly supernatural terms. The narrator does not commit himself to either interpretation. Anything implying the supernatural is presented as if metaphorically (as in "the magic" in the passage quoted above) or qualified with an "as if". Otherwise the reader is simply given an account of what has taken place. Nevertheless, the care with which the timing of the incident is recorded, points to confirmation of the crowd's deification of the missing witness. We later discover that Mrs Moore died soon after leaving Bombay, and so was already dead when her name was called in court. The narrator also says of her death:

> A ghost followed the ship up the Red Sea, but failed to enter the Mediterranean. Somewhere about Suez there is always a social change: the arrangements of Asia weaken and those of Europe begin to be felt, and during the transition Mrs Moore was shaken off. (A.244/P.255)

Dead by the time of the trial, a ghost closely associated with Asia, elevated to the status of goddess and later worshipped by the people for whom she always had an instinctive sympathy — all the evidence suggests that Mrs Moore has entered some other existence beyond the grave. As with Mrs Wilcox she continues to exert an influence on the living. She is invoked, and unlike Krishna in Professor Godbole's song, she does come. Das's ruling on her status as a witness consequently acquires an unintentional irony:

> 'An extraneous element is being introduced into the case,' said the Magistrate. 'I must repeat that as a witness Mrs Moore does not exist. Neither you, Mr Amritrao, nor, Mr McBryde, you, have any right to surmise what that lady would have said. She is not here, and consequently she can say nothing.' (A.215/P.229)

He is correct: as a witness Mrs Moore does not exist. But as Esmiss Esmoor she is there; and though she may say nothing, she is able to influence the proceedings in other ways. It is she who saves Dr Aziz.

Mrs Moore's supernatural presence has an immediate effect on Adela. Even during the chanting she feels better than before. When she comes to give her evidence, intending as ever "to tell the truth and nothing but the truth", this rational determination gives way to a strange passivity. She seems enveloped and sustained by some unknown power:

> A new and unknown sensation protected her, like magnificent armour. She didn't think what had happened, or even remember in the ordinary way of memory, but she returned to the Marabar Hills, and spoke from them across a sort of darkness to Mr McBryde. The fatal day recurred, in every detail, but now she was of it and not of it at the same time, and this double relation gave it indescribable splendour. (A.216/P.230)

It is under the influence of this vision — and it is made clear that this is what it is — that Adela is able to escape the muddle of which she has been a prisoner since the visit to the caves. She recognises the falsity of her accusation and so withdraws the charge.

In the confusion that follows, something "that she did not understand took hold of the girl and pulled her through. Though the vision was over, and she had returned to the insipidity of the world, she remembered what she had learned" (A.218-19/P.232). The withdrawal of the vision leaves her a shell: "She felt emptied, valueless; there was no more virtue in her" (A.220/P.234). Once again the novel has demonstrated individual human insufficiency. Adela, by herself, is unable to dispel the echo which haunts her: it needs the mystic intervention of Mrs Moore, who even as the disillusioned cynic, would not allow them "to torture him [Aziz] for what he never did" (A.195/P.210), and who later, freed from the earthly fetters that she had come to resent, brings about his salvation and Adela's enlightenment. After the trial, when Adela and Fielding are drawn against their will into the victorious procession, she is addressed by some as "Mrs Moore", and the narrator describes the two of them as "half gods, half guys" (A.222/P.235). Comic as these details are meant to be, they nevertheless suggest the supernatural indwelling which has led Adela to make her retraction. She temporarily partakes of Mrs Moore's divinity.

That evening, when Fielding and Adela have "the first of their numerous curious conversations" (A.227/P.239), they stumble towards understanding what has happened in the courtroom that day. Prompted by Fielding's use of the word "exorcise", Adela thinks of ghosts. They both reject the idea eventually, dismissing any possibility of life after death, a "triumph of rationalism" (A.229/P.241); yet Adela suddenly loses interest in the problems which they are attempting to solve in such rational terms. For once she seems to have more insight into the unseen than Fielding has. Significantly she connects ghosts with her friend Mrs Moore.

Mrs Moore's beneficent influence continues to have its effect after the trial, combatting the evil of the Marabar caves and ushering in the return of good. Aziz, not knowing of her death, answers Fielding's attempts to persuade him to let Adela off paying damages, by saying that he will consult Mrs Moore. But Fielding knows of her death. The description of his response here is especially significant: "Opening his eyes, and beholding thousands of stars, he could not reply, they silenced him." (A.241/P.252). The scene takes place after the Victory Banquet on the roof of the house belonging to Mr Zulfiqar (formerly the Nawab Bahadur). Earlier they have lain gazing up at these very stars:

> Exactly above their heads hung the constellation of the Lion, the disc of Regulus so large and bright that it resembled a tunnel, and when this fancy was accepted all the other stars seemed tunnels too. (A.238/P.249)

Throughout the novel stars are used to point to the world beyond the earthly. "Tunnels" are reminiscent of the entrance to a Marabar cave, another symbol of absolute reality. That these stars should "silence" Fielding, that they should dissuade him from asserting Mrs Moore's non-existence, points yet again to the transcendent realms into which, it seems, she has been translated by her death. Despite his attempts to avoid the embarrassing topic, Aziz is moved to remember her goodness to him in the past, and the way she had seemed to him to be present at the trial that morning. He, like Adela, had sensed the returned presence. The contrast between the two men's differing reactions to the old lady suggests the curious nature of her power for good. Aziz says of her: "I have seen her but three times, but I know she is an Oriental" — to which Fielding responds with some irritation:

> You are so fantastic... Miss Quested, you won't treat her generously; while over Mrs Moore there is this elaborate chivalry. Miss Quested anyhow behaved decently this morning, whereas the old lady never did anything for you at all, and it's pure conjecture that she would have come forward in your favour, it only rests on servants' gossip. (A.241/P253)

Fielding is correct. Even before her encounter with the Marabar, Mrs Moore's goodness is never of a remarkably active kind, and after it, her perception of the unreality of the world disinclines her for any action at all, whether for good or evil. Yet Aziz intuitively knows more than Fielding with his analytical rationalism can see. Her goodness is on a par with the mystic love of Professor Godbole, and indeed with the ineffable Absolute which both in their different ways perceive. Again like Mrs Wilcox in Howards End, Mrs Moore's virtues are of a kind not immediately translatable into the fields of action. When, later, Fielding succeeds in persuading Aziz to drop charges against Adela, having used Mrs Moore's memory to do so, similar sentiments are expressed:

> Whenever the question of compensation came up, he [Fielding] introduced the dead woman's name. Just as other propagandists invented her a tomb, so did he raise a questionable image of her in the heart of Aziz, saying nothing that he believed to be untrue, but producing something that was probably far from the truth. (A.249/P.259)

The scepticism here is filtered through Fielding's consciousness, but it serves to indicate the distance between the mystic nature of her goodness, and the expectations of the world. At the same time, however, Fielding's disbelief contributes to the delicate balance of assertiveness and non-committal irony with which Forster presents Mrs Moore's apotheosis.

The final comment by the narrator on the Esmiss Esmoor myth is perhaps the most definitive. Describing the cult which springs up in Chandrapore after her death, the "two distinct tombs containing Esmiss Esmoor's remains", and Mr McBryde's visit to them, the narrator comments on his reaction.

> 'There's propaganda behind all this,' he said, forgetting that a hundred years ago, when Europeans still made their home in the countryside and appealed to its imagination, they occasionally became local demons after death - not a whole god perhaps, but part of one, adding an epithet or gesture to what already existed, just as the gods contribute to the great gods, and they to the philosophic Brahm. (A.245/P.255)

Contrasting with the facetious irony in describing the tombs, and with McBryde's wholly mundane explanation, Forster's comment here points to a truth of Hinduism, one which will later be developed in some detail in the account of the festival at Mau. Like Lord Krishna himself, Esmiss Esmoor is one of the many "substitutes" and "imitations" through which mankind attempts to conceive of and point to the Inconceivable Reality, the Brahma who is simultaneously nothing and everything. The objective truth of an Englishwoman's transformation into a Hindu goddess is not really the issue at stake. Rather, what matters is that Mrs Moore, like the early European settlers and unlike the Anglo-

Indians, has been able to overcome the barriers of race and culture. She appeals to and becomes part of India through the transcending mystery of her goodness and love. She becomes a presiding spirit in India, in much the same way that Mrs Wilcox embodies the spirit of rural England. She becomes another of the steps through which mankind may aspire to the Divine. In completing her passage to India, Mrs Moore becomes one with India, and by implication one with the Universe, as has always been her wish. It has taken the horror of the Marabar and its apparent destruction to effect the transformation.

Esmiss Esmoor's intervention at the trial and afterwards, marks the inflow of good in the cyclical movement of good and evil. Yet her power is not sufficient to absorb all the evil which the Marabar has unleashed. Like the flies in Aziz's bungalow, evil continues to return (see A.267/P.275). It is for the salvation of Lord Krishna, celebrated at Mau, to complete the process and destroy the last residue of the Marabar.

"Temple"

Forster has said of the last section of the novel, "Temple":

> It was architecturally necessary. I needed a lump, or a Hindu temple if you like - a mountain standing up. It is well placed; and it gathers up some strings. But there ought to be more after it. The lump sticks out a little too much.[44]

"Temple" in fact, resembles the shorter endings of Howards End and The Longest Journey, and shares many of their characteristics, both good and bad. It does not, as Forster realised, perfectly blend with the rest of the novel. There remains a sense of disjunction and of a contrived, imposed ending. On the other hand, it does succeed, as he also points out, in gathering together many of the threads which have run throughout the book, and showing them in their full perspective. It is a Hindu temple standing at the end of A Passage to India, the culmination of its spiritual odyssey, where the search for God, if not resolved, is given moving and dramatic expression.

The section is set in "the mild airs of Mau" (A.287/P.292), an independent Hindu state in Central India where Godbole is now Minister of Education and Aziz is physician to the Rajah. It is also, significantly, the state in which Asirgarh, the place of Mrs Moore's reintergrating vision, is situated. Two years have elapsed since the incidents in Chandrapore, and it is the season of the Monsoons, "the best for three years" (A.288/P.293). Thus the seasonal

cycle has run its course. Rain has replaced the aridity of the Hot Season, and the sun itself has become "the friendly sun of the monsoons" (A.296/P.301). The mood is one of peace and serenity. Man seems able to live in harmony with nature and the environment:

> The signs of the contented Indian evening multiplied: frogs on all sides, cow-dung burning eternally; a flock of belated hornbills overhead, looking like winged skeletons as they flapped across the gloaming. There was death in the air, but not sadness; a compromise had been made between destiny and desire, and even the heart of man acquiesced. (A.297/P.302)

This passage, taken from the description of the scenery on Aziz's ride to the European Guest House where he will overcome his prejudice against the English and befriend Ralph Moore, is remarkable for its conflation of the moods of the first two sections of the novel. There is the peace of Mrs Moore's first vision of India, but there is also a hint of the Marabar's primal reality in the "winged skeletons" of the hornbills. The optimism of the Mosque and the nihilistic horror of the caves have found equilibrium in the serene acceptance of the universe by the Hindu temple. Man's desire for meaning and unity, and his equal awareness of the meaninglessness of his destiny, are no longer in conflict. That discrepancy — the awareness of which led to Mrs Moore's collapse — has been resolved. We are presented rather with the detached certainty of Professor Godbole who knows that good and evil are complementary aspects of the universe. Aziz, remembering Mrs Moore, wishes that she could be in India now. He expresses these feeling to Ralph.

> 'This is our monsoon, the best weather,' he said, while the lights of the procession waved as though embroidered on an agitated curtain. 'How I wish she could have seen them, our rains. Now is the time when all things are happy, young and old. They are happy out there with their savage noise, though we cannot follow them; the tanks are all full, so they dance, and this is India.' (A.302/P.306-307)

A Moslem, Aziz can hardly understand the Hindus and the festival to which he refers here. Yet even he is struck by the effect it has on the celebrants. In the course of the festival the Rajah has died. His death is however, kept secret "lest the glory of the festival were dimmed" (A.289/P.294).

> There were two claimants to the throne, unfortunately, who were in the palace now and suspected what had happened, yet they made no trouble, because religion is a living force to the Hindus, and can at certain moments fling down everything that is petty and temporary in their natures. The festival flowed on, wild and sincere, and all men loved each other, and avoided by instinct whatever could cause inconvenience or pain.
>
> Aziz could not understand this, any more than an average Christian could. He was puzzled that Mau should suddenly be purged from suspicion and self-seeking. Although he was an outsider, and excluded from their rites, they were always particularly charming to him at

> this time; he and his household received small courtesies and presents, just because he was outside. (A.294-95/P.299-300)

It is amid this atmosphere of love that universal salvation through Lord Krishna is announced. The bhakti which Godbole detects in Aziz's poem on internationality (see A.284/P.290) here finds dramatic expression in the worshippers' love for all creation and for God, and in the love of God for all creation.

Chapter 33 opens dramatically: "Some hundreds of miles westward of the Marabar Hills, and two years later in time, Professor Narayan Godbole stands in the presence of God" (A.274/P.281). The phrasing of the sentence emphasises the distance from those events of which the Marabar had been the focus; and at the same time it points to an antithetical link between them and the events which are about to unfold. The startling phrase "the presence of God" heightens the dramatic effect. To a large extent the whole "Temple" section is encapsulated in this opening sentence.[45]

As the chapter goes on to present the ceremony in the temple, "this approaching triumph of India", in all its muddle and tastelessness, one aspect in particular stands out, and returns us to almost the beginning of the novel: "God si love". Here is a muddled distortion of Mrs Moore's tentative words on God, man and the universe when she was confronted by the loveless complacency of Anglo-India. And she appears almost immediately after this, in the meditations of Professor Godbole, "an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days".

> Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by his spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction. (A.277/P.283)

In this mystic act of love Godbole is imitating God; his chance memory of Mrs Moore, along with a wasp and stone, becomes a symbolic confirmation of her salvation. She and her belief in the benevolence of God, having passed through the dark passage of the Marabar, have here re-emerged, garbled but triumphant. Professor Godbole's love has included her in the completed circle of salvation, along with "foreigners, birds, caves, railways, and the stars" (A.278/P.285). As in the Marabar vision, all distinctions have disappeared, but in a manner far different:

> Covered with grease and dust, Professor Godbole had once more

> developed the life of his spirit. He had, with increasing vividness, again seen Mrs Moore, and round her faintly clinging forms of trouble. He was a Brahman, she Christian, but it made no difference, it made no difference whether she was a trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal. It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of the God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to the God, 'Come, come, come, come.' (A.281/P.287)

It is in the inclusiveness implied in these passages that Forster finds Hinduism's superiority to the other religions he presents in the novel. Shri Krishna's salvation is for all aspects of the universe, human and non-human, animate and inanimate. Likewise, Professor Godbole's mystic love is not limited to fellow Hindus, or even to humans. It too strives to embrace all existence. The fact that he is unable to extend his love to the stone points not, as many critics have imagined,[46] to the limitations of his religion, but to his limitations as a human being, trying to live up to its ideals. Hinduism also incorporates aspects of existence ignored by other religions. It includes the merriment that "Christianity has shirked" (A.279/P.286). That it acknowledges all facets of human experience is humorously suggested in the narrator's description of the motley crowd of gods "who visited each other constantly, and owned numerous cows, and all the betel-leaf industry, besides having shares in the Asirgarh motor-omnibus" and who have "the time of their lives" (A.289/P.294) at the festival. Hinduism, in fact, acknowledges the existence of "the spot of filth without which the spirit cannot cohere" — symbolised in the procession by the band of unclean Sweepers, the "Despised and Rejected" (A.296/P.300).

This inclusive vision finds dramatic expression in the confusion, vulgarity and absurdity of the temple festival. Here the music alternates between the anthem invoking a saint and a waltz; objects are heaped on the altar, hiding the image of the god: nothing is certain, and everything seems calculated to increase the worshippers' bewilderment. Hinduism here suggests India itself in all its muddle and diversity: as such, Forster implies, it provides an appropriate expression of the country's longing for the divine — better than those religions which attempt to impose order and coherence on an essentially disordered universe.

The muddle of Hinduism, in fact, implies an admission of human limitations and the inability of mankind to comprehend — or even reach — the incomprehensible. Hinduism recognises its own limitations: it acknowledges the chaos of the humanly preceived universe, and the immense gap that must separate it from the divine which "transcends human processes" (A.274/P.281). Thus, significantly, the god is obscured by "the jumble of His own altar" (A.282/P.275).

Human attempts to celebrate or re-enact divine truths must fall far short of the reality they are meant to symbolise. The irony with which the narrator constantly deflates the intensity of an action in the temple ceremony, suggests not only his scepticism, but also the worshippers' own awareness of their human limitations. Thus Professor Godbole contemplates his own relative failure at putting into practice the power of love:

> 'One old Englishwoman and one little, little wasp,' he thought, as he stepped out of the temple into the gray of a pouring wet morning. 'It does not seem much, still it is more than I am myself.' (A.281/P.288)

To the outsider, Hinduism's approach to God appears no more than a muddle, even as India herself appears to be. The narrator remarks that "this approaching triumph of India was a muddle (as we call it), a frustration of reason and form" (A.275/P.282). But the worshippers in the temple see in it the various "imitations" and "substitutions" (A.280/P.287) all pointing to man's yearning desire to bridge the gap between himself and the Absolute. Of the climactic moment of the ceremony, the narrator comments that "the human spirit had tried by a desperate contortion to ravish the unknown, flinging down science and history in the struggle, yes, beauty herself" (A.278/P.285). As to its success he, the Western observer, remains sceptical: any assertion that man has reached the divine can only be expressed in limited human terms:

> But how, if there is such an event, can it be remembered afterwards? How can it be expressed in anything but itself? Not only from the unbeliever are mysteries hid, but the adept himself cannot retain them. He may think, if he chooses, that he has been with God, but as soon as he thinks it, it becomes history, and falls under the rules of time. (A.278/P.285)

One cannot even be certain what the experience itself entailed. Amidst the jumble of substitutions, all suggesting, however obliquely, some transcendent reality, it is difficult to separate levels of reality, to know where true substitution ends and the reality begins:

> No definite image survived; at the Birth it was questionable whether a silver doll or a mud village, or a silk napkin, or an intangible spirit, or a pious resolution, had been born. Perhaps all these things! Perhaps none! Perhaps all birth is an allegory! (A.280-81/P.287)

Yet, for all the earthly limitations that characterise the festival at Mau, it produces a remarkable, if temporary, unity. The individual elements of the muddle, seemingly so disjunct, form a unity which in some wonderful way transcends the limitations of each. Thus the worshippers are transformed by the loss of their identities:

> When the villagers broke cordon for a glimpse of the silver image, a most beautiful and radiant expression came into their faces, a beauty in which there was nothing personal, for it caused them all to resemble one another during the moment of its indwelling, and only when it was withdrawn did they revert to individual clods. (A.275/P.281-82)

The same is true of the many kinds of music, all played at the same time:

> Music there was, but from so many sources that the sum total was untrammelled. The braying banging crooning melted into a single mass which trailed round the palace before joining the thunder. (A.275/P.282)

Unity appears again in the universal love the singers evoke: "They loved all men, the whole universe, and scraps of their past, tiny splinters of detail, emerged for a moment to melt into the universal warmth" (A.276/P.283). Again, in the dance traditionally performed before the Rajah, "the music and the musicians swirled through the dark blue robes of the actors into their tinsel crowns, and all became one" (A.294/P.299).

This impulse to an individual-transcending unity is the consummation of the longing that has characterised the novel throughout. The attempt to reach God, although itself probably not successful, has engendered a unity among the worshippers, which is extended to the whole universe through their mystic love for it. Human beings begin to lose their significance as individuals. Thus Professor Godbole, remembering Mrs Moore, does not care "whether she was a trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal" (A.281/P.287). Her personal identity, her potential to exercise her individual will, do not strike him as very important; he sees her rather in terms of one of "the throng of soliciting images" (A.277/P.283) which chance brings to his mind. Her objective existence is not an issue of any importance. Godbole himself, at the moment of ecstasy, becomes strangely disembodied. One is, in both cases, reminded of Fielding's intuition earlier that "we exist not in ourselves, but in terms of each other's minds" (A.237/P.249).

Thus, in this dramatisation of some of the tenets of Hinduism, Forster shows that, in his own words, the festival is the scene in the cave "turned inside out"[47]. The negligibility of all things before an absolute reality, the loss of personality, the detachment from human preoccupations — all these formed part of Mrs Moore's horrifying recognition of universal evil. They appear here again, but in a far more positive light: as aspects of mankind's attempt to realise and to reach God. The "wild and beautiful young saint" who praises a god "without attributes — thus did she apprehend Him" (A.304/P.308) is indicating the reverse aspect of the Void. The Marabar Caves and the Temple are the two aspects, the one evil, the other good, of the transcending

unity for which Forster is searching in A Passage to India. And Mrs Moore's chance appearance in Godbole's thoughts while he is in a state of mystic ecstasy is a confirmation that her vision is ultimately a saving one; it also serves to suggest how universal evil is giving way to universal good.

But Mrs Moore is present in Mau in other forms too. She is "resurrected" in her children, Ralph and Stella, visiting Mau with Fielding. Aziz, discovering that Fielding has married, not, as he has thought, Adela Quested, but Stella Moore, the daughter of the woman he so revered, reacts at first with defensive scorn. But later, at home, he is "excited and happy":

> It had been an uneasy, uncanny moment when Mrs Moore's name was mentioned, stirring memories. 'Esmiss Esmoor...' - as though she was coming to help him. (A.293/P.298)

When, that evening, he encounters Ralph Moore again, the same memories are stirred up. After reading Fielding's letters, in a gesture of spiteful defiance, he strikes the Guest House piano in temper, producing a "remarkable noise". The sound alarms Ralph who has remained at home while the others have gone out on the tank to observe the festival procession:

> 'Oh, oh, who is that?' said a nervous and respectful voice; he [Aziz] could not remember where he had heard its tones before. Something moved in the twilight of an adjoining room. (A.298-99/P.303)

Aziz is, of course, being reminded of his first encounter with Mrs Moore in the mosque at Chandrapore.

Ralph's strange intuitiveness shows him to be truly the son of Mrs Moore, and before long Aziz, in spite of himself, forgets his hostility. He cannot however, forget the Marabar; but here he is interrupted by a power even greater than the spirit of Mrs Moore:

> Drowning his last words, all the guns of the State went off. A rocket from the jail garden gave the signal. The prisoner had been released, and was kissing the feet of the singers. Rose-leaves fall from the houses, sacred spices and cocoanut are brought forth...It was the halfway moment; the God had extended His temple, and paused exultantly. Mixed and confused in their passage, the rumours of salvation entered the Guest House.
> They were startled, and moved onto the porch, drawn by the sudden illumination. The bronze gun up on the fort kept flashing, the town was a blur of light, in which the house seemed dancing, and the palace waving little wings. The water below, the hills and sky above, were not involved as yet; there was still only a little light and song struggling among the shapeless lumps of the universe. (A.300-301/P.305)

This, presented in some of Forster's most dramatic and moving prose, is one of the high points of the festival. The prisoner, symbolic of all creation,

has been freed in a dramatic enactment of divine salvation. Aziz, himself once a prisoner, is moved to forget his antagonism, "focusing his heart on something more distant than the caves, something beautiful" (A.301/P.306). Then he speaks the words which complete the parallel with that earlier meeting:

> 'Then you are an Oriental.' He unclasped as he spoke, with a little shudder. Those words - he had said them to Mrs Moore in the mosque at the beginning of the cycle, from which, after so much suffering, he had got free. Never be friends with the English! Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. (A.301/P.306)

Here Aziz has recognised the cycle around which the events of the novel have arranged themselves: the perpetual return of love and goodness despite the disillusionment which must — perhaps inevitably — accompany them. And under the combined influence of Esmiss Esmoor and the salvation of Lord Krishna, he takes Ralph out on the tank, thus allowing that cycle to begin again.

It is from this vantage point that Aziz feels once more the power of the message of salvation:

> 'Radhakrishna Radhakrishna Radhakrishna Radhakrishna Krishnaradha,' went the chant, then suddenly changed, and in the interstice he heard, almost certainly, the syllables of salvation that had sounded during his trial at Chandrapore. (A.303/P.308)

The festival reaches its climax as the procession approaches the shore and prepares to "throw God away" in symbolic recognition of human weakness and the unattainability of the divine. As if in recognition of the significance of the act,

> high above them a wild tempest started, confined at first to the upper regions of the air. Gusts of wind mixed darkness and light, sheets of rain cut from the north, stopped, cut from the south, began rising from below, and across them struggled the singers, sounding every note but terror.... (A.304/P.309)

It is a magnificent evocation of cosmic involvement in the salvation of the universe; and it is in the midst of this that the two boats containing the four "outsiders" collide. It is Stella Moore who then instinctively reaches toward Aziz, and so precipitates the final movement that capsizes them.

> They plunged into the warm, shallow water, and rose struggling into a tornado of noise. The oars, the sacred tray, the letters of Ronny and Adela, broke loose and floated confusedly. Artillery was fired, drums beaten, the elephants trumpeted, and drowning all an immense peal of thunder, unaccompanied by lightning, cracked like a mallet on the dome. (A.305/P.310)

In a typically Forsterian baptism scene[48] they are united in a muddle of diverse and absurd objects. The spirit of Esmiss Esmoor and the festival have had their effect, uniting those divided by human misunderstandings.

The universality of evil has had its dramatic expression in the social consequences of Adela's charge against Aziz; here the forces of good result in the unification of characters previously estranged by evil. It amounts to a dramatisation of the salvation by Infinite Love in the form of Shri Krishna announced earlier. In both cases, Professor Godbole's assertion of universal participation in good and evil is endorsed. The noise that accompanies the overturning of the boats suggests both the earthly and the divine contexts in which the action has taken place, acknowledging and sanctioning the renewing baptism. When we learn later that the visit to Mau has improved the quality of Fielding's marriage, the fact only serves to confirm the power of the salvation.

The final expression of the unifying power of love and good comes in the last chapter, when, riding with Fielding, again his friend, Aziz produces a letter for Adela Quested in which he attempts to make up the differences remaining between them. He tells Fielding:

> I want to do kind actions all round and wipe out the wretched business of the Marabar for ever. I have been so disgracefully hasty, thinking you meant to get hold of my money: as bad a mistake as the cave itself. (A.308/P.311-12)

Stella Moore, possessing the intuitive understanding of her mother and her brother, also believes that "the Marabar is wiped out" (A.308/P.312), a belief which has found confirmation in the action of the novel.

But the period of good which has made this possible is not permanent, and must inevitably pass away as the seasonal cycle continues. The festival, itself imperfect and limited, ends with a closure of "the gates of salvation" (A.304/P.309). As Fielding and Aziz ride together now, they too realise that they must soon part. The Hindu salvation, all-embracing as it has been, is not enough to overcome human divisions. And even the unity which it offers to mankind must at the same time reduce humanity to powerless insignificance. Man is no more than another element among many others, hostile or merely indifferent to his claims:

> He [Aziz] paused, and the scenery, though it smiled, fell like a gravestone on any human hope. They cantered past a temple to Hanuman - God so loved the world that he took monkey's flesh upon him - and past a Saivite temple, which invited to lust, but under the semblance of eternity, its obscenities bearing no relation to those of our flesh and blood. They splashed through butterflies

> and frogs; great trees with leaves like plates rose among the brushwood. The divisions of daily life were returning, the shrine had almost shut. (A.311/P.315)

India will continue to keep men in compartments, and man will remain an alienated creature, always threatened by the void of meaninglessness. For Fielding, the rationalist, and Aziz, the Moslem, the longed-for unity is still an impossible dream. Yet the novel ends on a note of muted but prophetic hope, looking to the day when mankind will be united and at home in his universe. The earth and the sky, the human and the divine, seem now not to want it, but in another time and place it may be possible:

> they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said, 'No, not there.' (A.312/P.316) [49]

Conclusion

What, in conclusion, may we say of Forster and his vision in A Passage to India? Using the basic framework of Hindu thought as he encountered it in his visits to India, he has envisaged a view of the universe far exceeding the scope of any of his previous novels, one which reduces the human norm to triviality and unreality. He has looked down on humanity and its activities from an enormous height, encompassing it and all other forms of existence in one powerful vision. He has extended and transcended the bounds which had marked his previous scope of interest.

The novel is itself a testimony to the transcendent nature of his vision. Detached, self-contained, it is perhaps closer to the music which for Forster was the only pure art than to prose narrative. Its perfected style, structure, symbolism, recurring images and motifs give it a life of its own, free from earthly relations and associations. It possesses the expansiveness, the "opening out" quality of which he speaks in his lecture on rhythm in Aspects of the Novel. Great chords do begin to sound after we have read it, and we are led to an existence larger than all the individual incidents in it put together.[50]

Yet, as the analysis of the novel has revealed, it is not as straightforward as that. Throughout the novel, Forster alternates between vision and anti-vision, affirmation and negation, the message of the Temple and that of the Marabar. Both positions, he suggests, are equally valid, both to be taken into account in any understanding of a universe that is both good and evil.

But even in his presentation of the Good he oscillates between wholehearted approval and ironic detachment. Hinduism, through which he presents his affirmative vision, may, with its all-embracing salvation, its acceptance of human muddle and its sophisticated conception of the divine, provide an answer to humanity's needs. Its detached and wide-ranging outlook, its lack of emphasis on morality, its rejection of the world of appearance in favour of a transcendental reality and its ironic awareness of its own limitations — all offer a consoling and enlightening perspective on what seems to be the bewildering muddle of life. One part of Forster — the part which had been asserting itself more and more as his novelistic career unfolded — is attracted to this. But another part — the humanistic part — cannot help being struck by the absurdity, vulgarity and confusion to which such transcendence must lead. In becoming one with the universe, man must also lose himself in it, indistinguishable from everything else in it. The exclusive human norm of the Mosque and the Mediterranean becomes more attractive and reassuring in the face of such frightening inclusiveness. Having found the need for transcendence and the possibility of achieving it, Forster draws back. His feelings are perhaps similar to those of Fielding and Hamidullah on hearing of Mrs Moore's death:

> How indeed is it possible for one human being to be sorry for all the sadness that meets him on the face of the earth, for the pain that is endured not only by men, but by animals and plants, and perhaps by the stones? The soul is tired in a moment, and in fear of losing the little she does understand she retreats to the permanent lines which habit or chance have dictated, and suffers there. (A.235/P.247)

The novel ends on a fundamentally humanistic note: two friends riding together knowing that they must soon part.

But, for all this, Mrs Moore's spiritual journey is also Forster's. If at Asirgarh she can look on the works of man with appreciation and can later return in supernatural form to save an innocent man and reunite estranged friends, it is as one who has journeyed to the very limits of human experience and seen the void which underlies it all. If humanity is dwarfed by the Infinite and the eternal, its achievements, such as they are, also become all the more precious in the face of it.

Finally then, we have a glimpse of Forster, like Professor Godbole, infinitely detached but also infinitely compassionate, and perhaps endorsing the Hindu Das's words to Aziz:

> Excuse my mistakes, realize my limitations. Life is not easy as we know it on the earth. (A.256/P.265)

Notes

[1]E.M. Forster, A Passage to India, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol.6 (London: Edward Arnold, 1978); ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); editions hereafter designated by A. and P. respectively.

[2]"Three Countries", The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings,p.289.

[3]David Jones, "E.M. Forster on his Life and his Books", The Listener, 1 Jan. 1959,p.11.

[4]N.C. Chaudhuri, "Passage To and From India", Encounter, 2 (June 1954),19-24; Phyllis Bentley, "The Novels of E.M. Forster", College English, 9 (1948),349-56. For contemporary reaction to the novel, see Gardner (ed.), E.M. Forster: The Critical Heritage.

[5]Forster's first contact with India was, however, in 1906 when he met Syed Ross Masood who, he said in later years, "woke me up out of my suburban and academic life, showed me new horizons and a new civilization, and helped me towards the understanding of a continent". "Syed Ross Masood", Two Cheers for Democracy, A.285/P.300.

[6]The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings,p.13.

[7]The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings,p.14

[8]"To Forrest Reid", 2 February 1913, Letter 120, Selected Letters,I,187-88.

[9]Much of Forster's writing on India at this time and later, has been collected in Abinger Harvest; Two Cheers for Democracy; The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings; Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings, ed. G.H. Thomson (New York: Liveright, 1971); and "Indian Entries", Encounter, 18 (Jan. 1962), 20-27. For others, see especially editions of The Athenaeum and The Nation and the Athenaeum.

[10]"The Indian Mind", Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings,pp.207-8.

[11]"The Gods of India", Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings,pp.220-23.

[12]"The Mission of Hinduism", Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings,pp.224-27.

[13]"A Great Anglo-Indian", Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings,pp.211-15.

[14]See, for example, Elizabeth Ellem, "E.M. Forster's Arctic Summer", TLS, 21 Sept. 1973; Macaulay,p.153; R. Martin,p.136.

[15]"The Game of Life", Abinger Harvest (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976),pp.69-72.

[16]E.M. Forster, Alexandria: A History and a Guide (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968).

[17]E.M. Forster, Pharos and Pharillon (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961).

[18]"The Consolations of History", Abinger Harvest,pp.183-86.

[19]Alexandria: A History and a Guide,p.83.

[20]The Hill of Devi and Other Indian Writings,p.99.

[21]Stone, The Cave and the Mountain,p.279.

[22]In Dr Aziz we find elements of such athletic heroes as Gino and Stephen Wonham. Although the values that they represent no longer play so important a part in A Passage to India, this type continues to appear in varying degrees in such characters as Aziz, the man gathering water-chestnut who hears and understands Godbole's song, the punkah-wallah at the trial, the naked servitor at the Hindu ceremony, and generally in the "toiling ryot, whom some call the real India" (A.274/P.281).

[23]Kenneth Burke, "Social and Cosmic Mystery: A Passage to India", Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1966),p.227.

[24]There are many variations on the related motifs of the "call" or the "invitation". They range from the social to the divine. Many are also ironic parodies of the latter: for example, Heaslop's "call" to his servant Krishna (A.88/P.111).

[25]See Howards End, A.75/P.88.

[26]Forster's ambivalent attitude to Islam, as expressed both in the novel and in his other writings on India, should, however, be noted here. While he was aware of its spiritual limitations, it continued to appeal to Forster's humanistic instincts. The situation is best summarised in R. Martin's conclusion that "intellectually and aesthetically Forster can be understood to have a preference for Hinduism, whereas humanly and emotionally his sympathies tend towards Islam" (p.143).

[27]See the Notes to A Passage to India, A.346/P.337; originally from the Author's Notes to the Everyman edition.

[28]J.S. Martin,p.4.

[29]J.S. Martin,p.5.

[30]J.S. Martin,pp.7-8.

[31]Compare Barbara Hardy, The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel (London: The Athlone Press, 1964),p.76. Contrasting Mrs Moore with Mrs Wilcox, Hardy writes that in Mrs Moore "Forster creates a character who also depends on symbolic stature and fantastic action but whose virtues are properly enacted, so that we respond not to an idea but to an individual portrait".

[32]Compare E. Beaumont,p.43: "In a sense, Mrs Moore is a Mrs Wilcox who experiences India and the Marabar caves."

[33]McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.86.

[34]This view is endorsed by Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,pp.225-26.

[35]Compare Forster's description of the attempts at goodwill by those visiting Aziz when he is ill as "little ineffectual unquenchable flames" (A.98/P.120). The phrasing suggests the same mixture of hope and pessimism.

[36]See Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,pp.184-85.

[37]26 June, 1924; quoted in Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,II,125. In the same place Furbank points out that Forster later revised his opinion. In a letter to William Plomer he wrote: "I tried to show that India is an unexplainable muddle by introducing an unexplained muddle — Miss Quested's experience in the cave. When asked what happened there, I don't know. And you, expecting to show the untidiness of London, have left your book untidy. — Some fallacy, not a serious one, has seduced us both, some confusion between

the dish and the dinner".

[38]Compare Forster's letter to Mrs Aylward, quoted above p.126. Compare also his remark in "The Gods of India" that the promise of Hinduism "is not that a man shall see God, but that he shall be God. He is God already, but imperfectly grasps the mystery" (Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings, p.222).

[39]Compare, for example, Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,pp.185-86; and J.P. Levine, Creation and Criticism: A Passage to India (London: Chatto and Windus,1971),pp.177-78. Note also Godbole's enigmatic words to Fielding : the evil action in the Marabar Hills was, he suggests, "even performed by the lady herself" (A.169/P.186).

[40]Compare J.S. Martin,p.148, who says of the caves that their "value depends on what one brings into them". See also Gransden,p.94.

[41]One might equally detect universal involvement in the events leading up to the Marabar. Each incident in the novel is the logical consequence of one before it, each implies the many that contributed to its existence. Aziz would not have suggested the expedition to the Marabar if Fielding had not invited him to tea; Fielding would not have given a tea-party if he had not met the two women at the Bridge Party; the party had been suggested by Mr Turton because Adela wanted to see the "real India" — there is no point at which the infinite regression of responsibility can be stopped, and blame be assigned to any one person. All are involved in any action. Thus, any attempt to assign responsibility for the "evil action" committed in the cave is futile and absurd. Whether Adela was assaulted by some sort of evil spirit, or whether she suffered an hallucination, the ultimate responsibility lies with the whole universe.

[42]Angus Wilson, "A Conversation with E.M. Forster", Encounter, November 1957, p.54.

[43]For similar interpretations of Mrs Moore's Marabar experience, compare, for example: C.L. Sahni, Forster's A Passage to India: The Religious Dimension (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1981),pp.116-17; V.A. Shahane, E.M. Forster: A Study in Double Vision (New Delhi: Gulab Vazirani, 1975),p.108; W.Stone, The Cave and the Mountain,pp.331-32; Trilling,p.136; G.O. Allen, "Structure, Symbol, and Theme in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India", PMLA, 70 (1955),942; McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster,p.138.

[44]The Furbank/Haskell interview in Writers at Work,p.27.

[45]Forster's description of the ceremony in the temple is based on his facetious account of the Gokul Ashtami festival in The Hill of Devi. Although some of the tone of that earlier account remains, one is struck by the transformation of his initial impressions into profound and moving art.

[46]See, for example, Beer,p.146.

[47]Forster said this to the critic Alan Wilde. See A.Wilde, Art and Order, p.151.

[48]Water has, of course, been a symbol for rejuvenation throughout the novel. Compare the water imagery in "Mosque" and the Monsoon rains in this section, "Temple".

[49]The phrasing here is reminiscent of the point where the Hindu worshippers prepare "to throw God away", an action symbolic of "a passage not easy, not now, not here, not to be apprehended except when it is unattainable" (A.304/ P.309). The parallel suggests the impossibility of any union, either human

or divine, except fleetingly.

[50]See Aspects of the Novel,pp.149-50.

Chapter 6

Epilogue

A Passage to India was Forster's last novel. In the near half-century that remained of his life he never again published an original work of fiction.[1] As a journalist, social commentator, critic, biographer and thinker, he remained active; but despite his growing stature as a grand old man of English letters, as a novelist he had — publicly at least — reached the end of his career.

Explanations for this "long silence" have been numerous, coming both from the author himself and from critics of his work. In an interview with David Jones Forster suggested that one of the reasons why he stopped writing novels was that "the social aspect of the world changed so much".[2] In his comments in his Terminal Note to Maurice, he also draws attention to the increasing disappearance of the English countryside, the natural world in which he had found his inspiration and from which he had drawn his material.[3] Finally, Forster's homosexuality must also have played its part. Clearly, after 1924, he no longer felt himself able to write conventionally acceptable fiction dealing with love between men and women; and since publication of the explicitly homosexual fiction he did produce in that period was unthinkable, he preferred to remain silent.[4]

But aside from such external factors, one might guess from the unfolding pattern of Forster's novels that such an outcome was highly likely. After the vision of A Passage to India, would he really have been able to write another novel? This was a question which John Middleton Murry, with what in retrospect has proved to have been great perception, asked in 1924, after the novel's publication. Remarking the silence of fourteen years that was interrupted by A Passage to India, Murry goes on to write:

> I scarcely think it will be interrupted again. The planning of Mr. Forster's next novel should carry him well on to the unfamiliar side of the grave. It will take him, I imagine, a good deal more than fourteen years to find the word which will evoke a different echo from the primeval cave of Marabar: and I fancy (such is my faith in his intellectual honesty) that he will not speak again without the assurance of a different reply.[5]

Murry's review of the novel tends to over-emphasise its pessimistic aspect.

He is, nevertheless, correct in his recognition that Forster was approaching the limits of human expression.

But Forster did continue to write after 1924, and to publish his non-fiction of this later period. Of this work Rosecrance comments:

> After A Passage to India Forster the writer himself falls back on survival - on the humanistic efforts he portrayed ultimately as feeble and ineffective.[6]

He becomes in effect, she suggests, like his own character, Fielding, dependent upon the limited resources of "goodwill plus culture and intelligence" (A Passage to India, A.56/P.80).

Such essays as "What I Believe" and "Art for Art's Sake", with their mood of compromise, tolerance and reason, clearly illustrate this return to humanism. The search for a transcending unity, having reached its climax in the vision of A Passage to India, is abandoned for a more prosaic, makeshift existence, a stoical acceptance that the fragmentation of the modern world defines the limits of human knowledge and experience — a return to the humanism of Forster's earlier fiction, but without its ardent idealism.

But it is in the fiction, the homosexual stories posthumously published in The Life to Come and Other Stories[8] and Arctic Summer and Other Fiction,[9] that the reduction in Forster's vision is most apparent. As Rosecrance further suggests, it is in "their reversion to surface, their narrow concern with sexual pleasure and torment [that] these stories display Forster's artistic fragmentation after A Passage to India".[7]

The homosexual stories have often suffered from humourless and, one suspects, sexually prejudiced criticism. Many of them are light-hearted and do not pretend to any great depth of meaning: to expect more would be to make unreasonable and meaningless demands. One is nonetheless struck by the contrast that they all present to the rest of Forster's fiction in their deliberate superficiality, their wilful adherence to the surfaces of life. They represent a movement in his thinking "from surface conceived of as the limited and limiting prison of the self to the perception of it as the open ground of the self's sporadic but total fulfilment".[10] In these stories the theme of human incompletion and the sense of longing for a transcendent truth which had haunted Forster's writing before, have disappeared, to be replaced with a joyful acceptance of the human lot. But it is an achievement only possible through a drastic reduction of humanity. As Wilde points out:

> Man is not incarnated in his body; he is body, his sexual self, finally an object, a thing. At the last, it is a sad, pinched,

meager vision of life that The Life to Come expresses.[11]

The vision of life that Forster presents in the homosexual stories is perhaps best illustrated by the dialogue between Imber and the Abbess in "Little Imber". "Why do you visit us just now?" the woman asks the young man. "To fuck", he replies (Artic Summer,p.228) In the terse crudity of his answer we find the raison d'être of life as Forster's fiction after 1924 expresses it. The stories deal with what Sir Richard Conway, in "Arthur Snatchfold", designates the "smaller pleasures of life" (The Life to Come A.103/ P.134) — sporadic, fragmented sexual encounters which mean nothing beyond the brief physical pleasure that they bring. "Poking doesn't count" says Mirko in "What does it matter?" (The Life to Come, A.140/P.173); and indeed, sex here counts for nothing beyond itself. If, in the Italian novels — where the same sort of pagan libertinism had been celebrated — sexuality was obscured by mysticism and fastidiousness, in the homosexual stories it is starkly isolated True connection, the joining of the seen and the unseen, is as elusive as ever before.

At the same time however, this aggressive celebration of the joys of the flesh has a strong undercurrent of doubt to it. In these stories Forster has by no means escaped the nihilism of Mrs Moore's vision in the cave. Death and despair are constant companions to sex. Copulation is often accompanied by violence or sadism, and frequently followed by retribution, or more significantly, death. Death and sex are, in fact, indistinguishable in "Dr Woolacott", and closely related in "The Life to Come" and "The Other Boat" (all collected in The Life to Come). In these stories the moment of salvation is that of sexual climax; it is also that of death. Both sex and death provide an escape from a world that, if not hostile, is at least tedious and meaningless, a spiritual wasteland of human insufficiency.

One might in fact suggest that, given this treatment, the sexuality of the homosexual stories is, paradoxically, as much a part of Forster's inclination to a transcendence of humanity as his mysticism had ever been. It involves the same annihilation of human consciousness, whether in the form of a retreat into pure physicality, or an escape into death, the same desperate reaching towards detachment and isolation from the complexities of earthly life. The homosexual stories were written, as Wilde concludes, "not simply, as he [Forster] acknowledged, 'to excite [him]self' but for personal salvation";[12] they are the final anti-climactic working out of his longing for transcendent truth.

The human world as Forster sees it is, to the end, fragmented and chaotic. The vision in the cave is carried over into the homosexual stories. For all their apparent acceptance and even celebration of humanity and its capacity to

satisfy its needs, their vision is ultimately dark and despairing. In them Forster anticipates the trends of twentieth century fiction generally. We might, in conclusion, note the words of Martin Turnell. Speaking of E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, he comments:

> It may seem a far cry from these writers to the world of 'the absurd' of the Existentialists, or the sub-human world of the American 'tough' school like Hemingway and Henry Miller, but in reality it is not....When the world of Mr. Forster and Mrs. Woolf fell into ruin, man did indeed find himself in a world which was meaningless, which appeared 'absurd'.[13]

Notes

[1] I except here his two rural pageants, England's Pleasant Land (London: The Hogarth Press, 1940) and The Abinger Pageant (in Abinger Harvest,p.369).

[2] Jones,p.11.

[3] Terminal Note, Maurice, Arnold 240/P.221.

[4] See Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life,II,132. Furbank offers further discussion on the question of Forster's "silence" as a novelist.

[5] John Middleton Murry, "Bo-oum or Ou-boum?", Adelphi,II (July 1924),150-53. Reprinted in Gardner (ed.), The Critical Heritage,p.236.

[6] Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.243.

[7] Rosecrance, Forster's Narrative Vision,p.183.

[8] E.M. Forster, The Life to Come and Other Stories, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster, Vol.8 (London: Edward Arnold, 1972); ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); editions hereafter designated in the text by A. and P. respectively.

[9] E.M. Forster, Arctic Summer and Other Fiction, ed. Elizabeth Heine, The Abinger Edition of E.M. Forster,Vol.9 (London: Edward Arnold, 1980).

[10] Alan Wilde, "Depths and Surfaces: Dimensions of Forsterian Irony", English Literature in Transition,16 (1973),p.270.

[11] Wilde, "Depths and Surfaces",p.272.

[12] Wilde, "Depths and Surfaces",p.272.

[13] Martin Turnell, Modern Literature and Christian Faith (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961),pp.43-4.

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