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A LANGUAGE FOR THOUGHT

A LANGUAGE FOR THOUGHT:  
IRONY IN A ROOM WITH A VIEW,  
WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD,  
AND THE LONGEST JOURNEY

By

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## ABSTRACT

A study of irony in E.M. Forster's early novels, Where Angels Fear to Tread, The Longest Journey, and A Room with a View. Irony is seen as an aspect of thought, whose character is one of complex balance which is yet passionate. While Forster does use irony to undermine, he uses it more importantly as a piece of intellectual rhetoric which urges the essential merit of the idea whose weakness is explored.

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## PREFACE

In each of E.M. Forster's novels one or more of his characters is offered a 'symbolical moment'. In The Longest Journey, Rickie Elliot explains to Agnes Pembroke what this moment means:

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.<sup>1</sup>

Rickie's speech is occasioned by the news that Stephen Wonham is his half-brother; in the unpleasantness of the revelation, Rickie sees a challenge both to accept life as it is and to resist pretended feelings and pretended and more amenable facts.

In both the 'Italian' novels, Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with a View, the symbolical moment is violent. The death of Gino's baby in the earlier<sup>2</sup> novel results in a fight between Philip and Gino which promises to end in murder. Though not involved themselves, Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson, too, witness a murder in

Florence, in the later work. In both cases, violence as an intimate and inescapable fact of life bursts upon characters whose vision is an aesthetic one, and who see art as an alternative to life through which ordinary events and people are filtered and assessed.

For Margaret Schlegel, the central character in Howards End, the symbolical moment is less an incident than a person. Henry Wilcox and the ethics of the business world to which he belongs are anathema to Margaret and her sister Helen, whose lives of moneyed culture are a testimony to the Hellenist and Bloomsbury values of individual liberty and the supremacy of sincere personal relations. The novel does, however, have its symbolical moment, which occurs when Helen returns from Germany and her illegitimate pregnancy is revealed to Margaret and Henry. A moral decision is involved for each of them in as much as Helen is both unmarried and pregnant; but a larger moral decision exists for Henry, whose past behaviour with Jacky Bast has parallels with Helen's now. For him to recognize the parallels requires that his vision of life and morals include himself. Just as there is a distance and a distinction between oneself and life inherent in Philip's and Cecil's aesthetic views, so we see that this essentially solipsistic philosophy is shared by Henry.

The 'moment' challenges that view of a discrete universe, and in so doing establishes the inter-relationship of 'vision' with 'morality', in this larger sense. In A Passage to India, the central symbolical moment is the incident in the caves with Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested. The moment here is less a gateway to reality than a direct revelation or, more accurately, a 'reflection' of it, for the cave itself neither creates nor destroys, but only mirrors what it sees.

In most cases, more than one character experiences the moment of revelation, yet never do their interpretations of it coincide. In Monteriano's garish theatre where Lucia di Lammermoor is being performed, 'Italy' is revealed to Harriet, Philip and Caroline; yet the violent dislike of the first is matched by an equally violent enthusiasm in the second, while Caroline's approval is mingled with a recognition of the values of her own Sawston that find no expression here. Lucy's ambiguous mixture of conventionally expressed shock, with a sense of something having been revealed which she does not yet comprehend, is contrasted with George's sudden and passionate avowal to 'live' henceforth as a result of the murder in the piazza. The rupture between Margaret and Henry is the result of their fundamentally differing responses to the 'moment' of Helen's return;

and, while the caves incident drains Mrs. Moore of her commitment to life and to the living, it despatches Adela to the courtroom and the trial of Dr. Aziz. Each novel argues the supreme importance of the symbolical moment as the opportunity for the imagination to recognize and to accept those parts of life hitherto excluded from one's vision, and, in so doing, connect reason with emotion, passion with prose, and heart with head. Yet, the 'moment's' fallibility is such that its effect varies enormously from individual to individual, while its meaning for any one person may fluctuate substantially with time. Eventually it may be happily understood, as with Lucy Honeychurch; it may be understood, though almost ineffectually, as with Philip Herriton; or it may be consistently, variously, and ever more tragically misunderstood, as with Rickie Elliot.

The frailty of the moment's efficacy, of course, depends upon the character and circumstances of the one who experiences it, for in stating its importance Forster also explores its weaknesses.

His technique of undermining the categories he is in the act of establishing has received considerable critical attention. His "gifts in their variety and number tend to trip each other up. If he were less scrupulous,

less just, less sensitively aware of the different aspects of every case, he could, we feel, come down with greater force on one precise point".<sup>3</sup> So thought Virginia Woolf. The "clash of opposites",<sup>4</sup> which Peter Burra detects between "the world of conventional morality and a world more akin to Nature"; between the "'medieval' self-conscious life of culture and emancipated athletic honesty"; and "between the business life and the cultured life", becomes less strident as the respective novels develop, for Forster insists upon the weaknesses in the stronger case and finds virtues in the 'indefensible'. Types become individuals and similarities are discovered in 'opposites'.

Proportion without pusillanimity characterizes Forster's thought and it informs not only the development of each of his central figures, but the structure of the novels and the relationship between the symbolical moment and the ironic narrative stance. Margaret Schlegel's reflections on the respective attitudes of her sister and her fiancé, suggest why Forster begins the novels with clashing opposites, why these opposites are broken down by experience, and begin to explain the presence of irony in these 'symbolical moments'.

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.<sup>5</sup>

Forster's novels as a whole are characterized by their exploratory nature, their continual excursions. This is true in the literal sense that two of the works are set between Italy and England, a third in India, and the remaining pair, though both 'English', stress the importance of the genius loci of their several locations. The path of truth does not lie between the respective realms of the 'visible', over which the businessman rules, and the 'unseen', where the mystic is king; rather, it is characterized by aspects of both. 'Truth' rejects neither, but adopts discriminatingly from each realm.

In the 'continual excursions' characters will, on occasion, take a wrong turn: the symbolical moment is the only signpost, but it may be misread. Many of these misconstructions become apparent as events evolve, but Forster's use of irony within the moment itself is as a narrative

device which establishes a distance between narrator and character that allows the reader a dual perspective on the one experiencing the incident. However, the irony's negative, undermining function is subsidiary to its primary purposes of provoking the reader's engagement with the central character, and of persuading him of the importance of the symbolic moment itself and its message of 'connection'. The former of these aims is achieved relatively easily, for the irony is sympathetic and involved, not aloof and detached.

The latter is more complex. Here the irony is positive, or committed, and is directed 'against' the views the novel espouses. The value of an apparently opposite point of view is inherent in Margaret Schlegel's idea of truth, and inherent, also, in the very structure of all these novels based on clashes of opposites. The distinction Godbole offers between non-existence and non-presence, where the latter argues existence because of presence elsewhere, similarly operates around an antisyzygy. Irony in the symbolic moments is a part of this theme, perhaps its most persuasive part, for it demonstrates maturity and balance, not at the moment of passion, but as a characteristic of it.

The essays that follow are offered as a study of Forster's art in the light of the critical perspective briefly established above.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>E.M. Forster, The Longest Journey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 142.
- <sup>2</sup>Although Where Angels Fear to Tread was published in 1905, A Room with a View, though it did not appear until 1908, was conceived, and in part written, earlier.
- <sup>3</sup>Virginia Woolf, The Death of the Moth and other Essays (London: The Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 110.
- <sup>4</sup>Peter Burra, "The Novels of E.M. Forster", in The Nineteenth Century and After, CXVI (November, 1934), pp. 581-594.
- <sup>5</sup>E.M. Forster, Howards End (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), Abinger Edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, p. 192.

## CHAPTER I

### The Comedy of Wise Caution: A Room with a View

By common consent, A Room with a View is Forster's lightest, gayest, most romantic, and least ambitious work. It is viewed as a love story with a happy ending. In John Colmer's words, "it celebrates the victory of Love and Truth over 'Muddle'",<sup>1</sup> and nowhere does the victory seem so unequivocal. Like A Passage to India, however, though less obviously, A Room with a View does not conclude with the dramatic climax of events. It is with Charlotte Bartlett, rather than George and Lucy, that the novel closes, and just as the third section of Forster's last novel gives the reader cause to reconsider the function of Aziz's trial within the larger frame of the whole novel, so the final paragraphs of this novel, which dwell on Charlotte's cryptic behaviour, provide a context for the story of discovered and requited love. It is thus the relationship of the love story with its context, and not George and Lucy themselves, which forms the aesthetic structure of A Room with a View, and it is the relationship, indeed the interdependence, of Lucy and Charlotte which is the philosophical heart of this work.

While love and truth do triumph in this early piece as they do in none of the later novels, Forster's characteristic irony, which questions the validity of the categories he establishes while he is in the process of setting them up, functions here by examining individual moral complexity beneath apparently stock types. Forster's favourite theme, that of the undeveloped heart, is presented critically as well as optimistically, while the related themes of restriction and possibility, themselves aspects of the undeveloped heart, appear in the key metaphors of "path" and "type" rather in the manner that "plans" are used in Howards End. Each of A Room with a View's metaphors, a path through the countryside and a type amongst individuals, suggests something narrow and pre-established within something far larger and far more various. That, of course, is the pattern of Lucy's development, too, from suburban gentility to an acknowledgement of a greater and larger self within that restriction. But just as the philosophical metaphors of arch and sky and echo in A Passage to India, and Ansell's circle within a square within a circle in The Longest Journey, have their aesthetic counterparts in a structure involving leit motif; so also in this novel the sequence of something developed co-existing with something undeveloped does not conclude

with Lucy. Only when one understands the restriction out of which Lucy's possibilities come and on which they depend, does one appreciate the profundity of this comedy; for while none of Forster's other major fiction seems closer to Jane Austen than A Room with a View, the bleakness of the central, tragic irony which underpins the light comedy, places the work far more obviously beside The Longest Journey and A Passage to India.

The central function of irony in all Forster's major fiction is not to produce social comedy, but to suggest the existence of a not wholly invalid point of view opposed to that expressed with the narrator's endorsement; and to suggest, moreover, that opposites may in fact be aspects of the same thing. Godbole's Hindu philosophy is the obvious example of that latter function. In the other novels, then, irony is an integral part of the symbolical moment as the reader, rather than the character involved, experiences it. That is not so in this novel, in part because it concludes with the happy ending of a comedy — and this requires the central character to develop differently. In Where Angels Fear to Tread and The Longest Journey, the other two early novels, the central figure develops by fluctuating wildly between extremes of endorsement and rejection of what he

takes to be the revelation of the symbolical moment. Though uncertainty characterizes Lucy's responses, also, her development is linear: she moves towards an acknowledgement of the 'moment's' import where Philip Herriton and Rickie Elliot move around it. Thus, where disintegration marks The Longest Journey, making it a tragedy, the resolution at the close of A Room with a View distinguishes it as a comedy. (Where Angels Fear to Tread is really neither.) The technical difference lies in the use of irony in the symbolical moment. Rickie Elliot's tragedy is the result of his failure to understand the nature of the 'moments' afforded to him, 'moments' where irony is a characteristic of the idea as much as a device to distinguish Rickie's interpretation from that offered to the reader. As Lucy progresses towards understanding the significance of the scene by the Arno after the murder, and George's two kisses, so the comedy possesses no irony in its symbolical moments, for the reader's and Lucy's views of these incidents eventually coincide.

The complexity of vision, however, is no less in the comedy. The moral realism at the centre of every Forster novel is the interrelationship of good and evil. His method appears at first to be that of the allegorist, but soon reveals itself as an exploration of good within evil and evil

as a part of good, rather than a clash of the two. In A Room with a View, this theme is expressed in individual characters who reveal unused potential, or unexpected intolerance; whose potential is, and can only be, realized at the moment when the opportunity to express it is lost; or who can only reveal their potential in terms of others by confessing their own failure. It is expressed, also, in parallel experiences of characters who are faced with some revelation which is not amenable to their respective modi vivendi, and in the discrepancy between their responses. All these uses of irony in this novel are familiar to readers of Forster's other major fiction, and if they can be shown to be present in this work too, then we need must praise this comedy as we do the more obviously sombre novels.

A Room with a View turns on characters who surprise<sup>2</sup> the reader. Cecil's response to Lucy's news that she cannot marry him is neither pompous outrage nor the contrition of mere acceptance of a fait accompli; her reasons are a "revelation" to him of his true self, and in a state of moral shock he accepts them as such. The limited vision of his aestheticism seems destroyed by this revelation, for "from a Leonardo she had become a living woman, with mysteries and forces of her own, with qualities that

even eluded art".<sup>3</sup> The challenge of the unsuspected and the unwanted confronts Mr. Beebe, too, when he finds Mr. Emerson and Lucy in his book-lined study and the old man announces Lucy's love for George. Throughout the novel, he has appeared sympathetic towards Lucy and has been the only character to perceive the significance of her style at the piano. Now, however, the news makes him despise Lucy and he is described as looking "inhuman" by the image of him as "a long black column".<sup>4</sup> Charlotte's reversal is at once the most unexpected, the most important, and the most equivocal. Unlike Cecil and Mr. Beebe, we witness no 'transformation', for Charlotte's turnabout is seen only by the effect it produces, and even then we may judge of it only through George's interpretation at the close of the novel that she had hoped all along that they might marry. Even a minor character such as Mr. Eager can surprise the reader with his praise of such qualities as "innate sympathy ... quickness to perceive good in others... (and) vision of the brotherhood of man"<sup>5</sup> which he singles out in Saint Francis; while of Giotto he can reflect:

How little, we feel, avails knowledge and technical cleverness against a man who truly feels!<sup>6</sup>

Because the patterns of experience for the first three of these characters have significant similarities,

Forster can draw parallels which allow explicit comparisons. Most immediately, the apparent reversals suggest an unexpected complexity about the respective figures, but the relationship each has to ideas enables Forster to explore the intolerance which exists within a tolerance based on philosophy, as Mr. Beebe's is; the scope for self-criticism that lodges in Cecil's priggishness; and the possibilities for heroism and tragedy that are to be found in Charlotte's stuffy propriety. These ideas become art because of the assiduous and deft preparation Forster gives them before they are revealed in action when the symbolical moment is offered.

We first meet Mr. Beebe shortly after the novel opens, where he attempts to present Mr. Emerson's offer (of his own and his son's rooms, which have views, in exchange for Charlotte's and Lucy's) in rather a different light than Charlotte herself views the matter. To Miss Bartlett, the manner of Mr. Emerson's proposition, let alone its impropriety, is sufficient to preclude even the possibility of acceptance. Into this polarized scene of brutal, blunt generosity with stiff, prim gentility, Mr. Beebe arrives, and with a manner which is hesitant and gentle, attempts to say something on Mr. Emerson's behalf to Charlotte. His comments on the old man seem as tolerant as they are perceptive, for he is able

to judge others by their own standards rather than applying his rigidly to them. Where Charlotte assumes a design in Mr. Emerson's offer of "trying to become better acquainted with them before they got in the swim",<sup>7</sup> Mr. Beebe recognizes that the old man's mind works more simply: "He has rooms he does not value, and he thinks you would value them".<sup>8</sup> This introduction appears to announce Mr. Beebe as one of Forster's flexible-minded characters: characters who are able to recognize worth in people and in places with which they are unfamiliar and which do not conform to ordinary standards, yet who retain sufficient balance that their enthusiasm is not the intoxicated sort which discards the values of their own world wholeheartedly. In the other 'Italian' novel, Caroline Abbott is such a figure.

Here, however, the terms of Mr. Beebe's tolerance suggest something else as well. He is speaking of Mr. Emerson in the following passage:

"I think he is; nice and tiresome. I differ from him on almost every point of any importance, and so, I expect — I may say I hope — you will differ. But his is a type one disagrees with rather than deplores. When he first came here he not unnaturally put people's backs up. He has no tact and no manners — I don't mean by that that he has bad manners — and he will not keep his opinions to himself. We nearly complained about him to our depressing Signora, but I am glad to say we thought better of it." <sup>9</sup>

While it appears that Mr. Beebe is able to distinguish character rather more subtly than Charlotte, the basis of his judgements is what he calls the "type". The word appears again and again in the novels where it is something of a touchstone for distinguishing the supple mind from the classifying one. Suppleness one finds here in one of the little old ladies at the Pension Bertolini who remarks:

"About old Mr. Emerson — I hardly know. No, he is not tactful; yet, have you noticed that there are people who do things which are most indelicate, and yet at the same time — beautiful?" 10

In the single word "type", however, there is a hint of something quite different in Mr. Beebe.

The classifying mind is itself orderly and creates an orderly picture of the world for itself. In A Passage to India, the British are seen to create, and successfully operate, a civil order which Forster is far from being wholly unsympathetic towards. The predicament of Ronny Heaslop, the City Magistrate, who has to decide on the less false of two untrue accounts each time he hears a case in court, is seen as a task which is as necessary as it is thankless. But order requires classification, and when one classifies individuals they may become no more than types. Yet, to acknowledge individual complexity fully precludes one's use of the

type, for one's business then is with the distinctions between people, rather than the respects in which they are alike. In the context of Forster's oeuvre, these are the complex philosophical resonances which are set up by the word "type" in this early speech of Mr. Beebe's.

The incident over the rooms concludes when Charlotte, with icy civility, condescends to accept the Emersons' offer. Mr. Beebe is then free to leave the scene which he does, when, "looking rather thoughtfully at the two cousins, he retired to his own room, to write up his philosophic diary".<sup>11</sup> The observation seems innocuous enough, yet, when related to the novel's pervasive concerns with detachment and engagement with life, Mr. Beebe's tolerance appears to be derived from detachment. As Cecil's perspective is aesthetic, so Mr. Beebe's is philosophic: such knowledge as the cleric may accrue from his philosophy will help him understand, and so tolerate, people and ideas that a less educated mind will possibly dismiss. Yet this knowledge, it seems, is gained only by observing life instead of being involved within it. This idea, and the surprising parallel with Cecil and all the minor figures, such as the other clergyman, who distance themselves from life, is only intimated at this early stage, yet the manner is not 'tentative', despite the number of

commentators who favour the term. That the expression is undemonstrative is not to say that it is unsure; rather, the delicacy of the manner matches the subtlety of the ironic fact that tolerance and snobbery may be less distinct than they appear; and that what seems to be imaginative sympathy, may be consequent on a view which holds life as an object.

In these first exchanges which involve Mr. Beebe, Forster broaches aspects of the character which are fully apparent only at the end of the novel when his asceticism, or medievalism as the work would term it, is revealed by his reception of the news of Lucy's love for George. His philosophy is seen as a 'medieval' quality and links him to Cecil and to Mr. Eager who share another 'medieval' quality, aestheticism. The narrowness of his view is implied in his use of the word "type", with all its inferences, and this metaphor links him with Miss Lavish.

That lady burst upon the genteel Pension Bertolini tea tables with the exclamation:

"Prato! They must go to Prato. That place is too sweetly squalid for words. I love it; I revel in shaking off the trammels of respectability, as you know." 12

On the shifting sands of Forster's ironic narration, one of the few observations one might venture with some confidence,

is that any figure who brashly announces his or her character to those willing to listen, is in some danger of being revealed as someone rather different. Not only does Miss Lavish betray her self-consciousness here (another 'medieval' quality), but also her dilettantism in the oxymoron "sweetly squalid". When she and Lucy lose their way en route to Santa Croce, Lucy's actual joy at what they see around them, despite their predicament, is contrasted with Miss Lavish's protestations that they must not consult Baedeker, but "simply drift".<sup>13</sup> Lucy does exactly that and lingers in raptures, "but Miss Lavish, with a shriek of dismay, dragged her forward, declaring that they were out of their path now by at least a mile".<sup>14</sup>

The ironies of the scene are delightful and the humour wry. Forster's use of the word "path", however, is similar to his use of "type" with Mr. Beebe, or, as earlier indicated, "plans" with Aunt Juley in Howards End. The physical restriction of a path, with all Italy before them, provides an image of Miss Lavish's narrowness and suggests her connection with Mr. Beebe. All these figures, then, Cecil, Mr. Beebe, Mr. Eager and Miss Lavish, are 'medieval'. The subtle and various ways in which connections are implied among them all, provide a web of inter-relationships which, on one level,

offers a philosophical contrast with the Emersons. This system of echoes linking these four figures, however, extends to Charlotte and Lucy as well: in the early part of the novel, there is little to suggest Charlotte should be viewed as anything but 'medieval', and though Lucy's piano playing and her unvoiced thoughts, to which the reader is privy, each imply something greater, her repeated refusal to accept what is offered her in successive symbolical moments, suggests that she has elected to follow the same path as Charlotte.

As well as stressing the philosophical contrast with the Emersons, then, these echoes discover similarities in a substantial number of characters. Whereas the pattern of tragedy isolates the central figure, as with Rickie Elliot, this structure reveals the likenesses between Lucy and the other figures. It is essential that one appreciate the nature of this comic structure if the significance of the relationship between Charlotte and Lucy is to be grasped; and also, if one is to understand the function of the symbolical moment in A Room with a View.

As in Forster's other major fiction, the central character in A Room with a View is confronted by a series of incidents which Forster calls symbolical moments. Again,

the 'moments' in this novel offer Lucy Honeychurch a glimpse of some profound truth which appears alien to her values, but which, in fact, only incorporates the ethics of her own outward life and the beliefs which are buried within her, beliefs of which she may not even be aware. Inherent in all the symbolical moments is a sense of connection and of completion.

The language of the symbolical moment in this novel, however, differs from the others because Lucy's development is unique amongst that of Forster's central characters. None of the symbolical moments produces a violent reaction within her, though she is disturbed, of course; nor does she fluctuate in her interpretations of them as do the other early figures, Philip Herriton and Rickie Elliot. She feels outraged with herself for behaving so intimately (in her terms) after the murder in the piazza, and with George on the occasions of his kisses, but her manner has the tone of conventionality about it. One feels that she expresses what she senses is expected of her, and does so in the absence of any certainty as to her real feelings. While the symbolical moments in each of the novels explores the buried life within a character, the treatment which the moments receive here makes the Arnoldian comparison clearer than ever.

Beneath what Lucy says she feels, her only response is one of doubt. The pattern is close to Arnold's "Below the surface-stream".

Below the surface-stream, shallow and light,  
Of what we say we feel - below the stream,  
As light, of what we think we feel - there flows  
With noiseless current strong, obscure and deep  
The central stream of what we feel indeed.<sup>15</sup>

Lucy's development is always towards the discovery of her "central stream". To others, and on occasion to herself, she expressed sentiments which, perhaps even as she says them, she senses are false. The revelation of what she feels indeed comes much later.

There is no place in this comic development, which moves towards resolution, for the function which irony serves in the other novels' symbolical moments of discriminating between the significance for the character concerned, and the actual significance of the moment; for whereas the tragic sense is consequent upon error, Lucy's comic success is the result of understanding. In this comic structure, irony discovers comparisons between seemingly disparate figures and reveals tragic potential as an aspect of comic success.

The symbolical significance of the clash between Miss Bartlett and the Emersons is first intimated during the

opening scene in the Pension Bertolini:

He did not look at the ladies as he spoke, but his voice was perplexed and sorrowful. Lucy, too, was 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.<sup>17</sup>

Again, when Lucy tries to undo some of Charlotte's cool civility by bowing towards the Emersons as she is leaving the dining room, the narration stresses a significance in the incident beyond the mere facts themselves:

The father did not see it; the son acknowledged it, not by another bow, but by raising his eyebrows and smiling; he seemed to be smiling across something. She hastened after her cousin, who had already disappeared through the curtains - curtains which smote one in the face, and seemed heavy with more than cloth.<sup>18</sup>

Here, then, is the idea of the symbolical moment, but it is introduced rather abruptly, and there is about the tone the anxiety of inexperience.

The first of the symbolical moments is the murder in the piazza, and here the handling is more assured. The scene is introduced laconically, for great moments seldom coincide with great events. Having witnessed the murder, Lucy

notices George nearby:

Mr. George Emerson happened to be a few paces away, looking at her across the spot where the man had been. How very odd! Across something. Even as she caught sight of him he grew dim; the palace itself grew dim, swayed above her, fell onto her softly, slowly, noiselessly, and the sky fell with it.

She thought: "Oh, what have I done?"

"Oh, what have I done?" she murmured, and opened her eyes.

George Emerson still looked at her, but not across anything. 19

The sense of something which cannot be articulated dividing Lucy from George, which the early exchange established, seems to disappear here. For George, at any rate, that appears to be what has happened. Lucy's murmur, "Oh what have I done?", by its incongruity, suggests that she is aware of a significance in her behaviour after the murder, but cannot yet understand what it is. In doubt, she clutches at the familiar, so that when George proffers a hand, which seems to imply more than mere help in standing, Lucy's language is severely correct:

"How very kind you have been! I might have hurt myself falling. But now I am very well. I can go alone, thank you." 20

The symbolic hand is still offered, however, and, perhaps to escape the awkwardness, Lucy suddenly recalls the photographs of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus", two Giorgiones, and others

which she has newly bought. She asks George if he would mind fetching them. The request is made in the anxiety created by her uncertainty as to the significance of her response to these events, and Forster subtly reveals their import as a result of Lucy's state of mind. The dead man's blood stains the photographs of paintings; life intrudes into art; Italy as an actual and present existence announces itself to those who would see only its past.

Perhaps the symbolism is a little insistent. Lucy's response, however, is evoked far more deftly. George, she feels, does not behave chivalrously; he cannot complete her half-stated and embarrassing request that he tell no one of her behaviour; he does not know how to avert "his eyes from her nakedness like the knight in the beautiful picture."<sup>21</sup> He will not be a man in art, but only one in life.

Lucy's discomfort at witnessing the murder is compounded by her own behaviour afterwards, and by George's refusal to behave as one ought to. Her language becomes still more formal:

"Well, thank you so much", she repeated.  
 "How quickly these accidents do happen, and  
 then one returns to the old life!" <sup>22</sup>

Still George will not accept the formula, and the incident and the chapter conclude in a succinct conjunction of each

of the scene's emblems:

Leaning her elbows on the parapet, she contemplated the River Arno, whose roar was suggesting some unexpected melody to her ears.<sup>23</sup>

Lucy's position against the parapet recalls the moment when she discovered herself and George in just this position, and the congruence made her uneasy, for she saw in their "identity of position...eternal comradeship".<sup>24</sup> It was into the river that George threw the stained photographs, and her contemplation of the same river here implies a contemplation of the significance of that act. Out of this consideration, an unexpected melody is released, and one thinks immediately of Lucy's piano playing and the suggestion Mr. Beebe finds in it of a Lucy as yet imprisoned.

The symbols and metaphors which attach to Lucy's behaviour together suggest present doubts in her mind, and imply possible future developments. Her own language, on the other hand, is progressively more conventional as the scene develops, and whereas the metaphoric language compares her with George, or suggests renunciation, or passion, her own words recall Charlotte's.

Mr. Emerson's abrupt offer of rooms in the novel's opening scene presents Charlotte with something of the same challenge of the unknown which Lucy encounters in the piazza.

Like Lucy, Miss Bartlett cannot cope:

... she assumed a dazed expression when he spoke to her, and then said: "A view? Oh, a view! How delightful a view is!" 25

When Mr. Emerson persists in his offer, Miss Bartlett seeks the haven of formality:

"Thank you very much indeed; that is out of the question."

"Why?" said the old man with both fists on the table.

"Because it is quite out of the question, thank you." 26

There is, of course, nothing in this first scene to suggest that Miss Bartlett shares any of the doubts which disturb Lucy later, but the similarity of their respective reactions as they find expression in language, is the first intimation that the relationship between Lucy and Miss Bartlett may not just be that of cousins.

In one sense, we might say that the language which is used to evoke the scene simultaneously undermines Lucy's public response to it, for there is an obvious discrepancy between the eagerly cheerful tone of her words "and then one returns to the old life!", and her inner doubt. To that extent, the presentation is ironic. But it is an entirely different type of irony to that used in the tragic novels. Irony, as it is used in the symbolical moments of The Longest Journey, say, undermines by distinguishing between Rickie's

interpretation of the kiss between Gerald and Agnes, and the actual significance it has. The reader's consequent knowledge of the character's error is the source of the tragic sense. In The Longest Journey, irony tells the reader something of which the central character is ignorant, but which is understood by those around him; in A Room with a View, the reverse happens: irony informs the reader about something of which the central character is already aware — her own doubt — but which is unknown to others. Whereas irony in The Longest Journey isolates Rickie in his own ignorance, in A Room with a View it suggests points of comparison between Lucy and those near her.

A discrepancy between what Lucy intends to say and what her listener hears causes the second of the symbolical moments. Having eventually arrived at the intended spot on the hillside above the Val d' Arno, the passengers on Mr. Eager's outing dispose themselves variously, to debate the exact nature of George Emerson's position in 'the railway', or to discover the precise location of Alessio Baldovinetti's easel nearly five hundred years previously. Defeated by the invincible combination of Miss Bartlett's eager self-sacrifice, and Miss Lavish's provision of a mere two mackintosh squares on which the three ladies have to dispose themselves, Lucy takes herself off to seek out Mr. Beebe and Mr. Eager.

As the two men have already wandered off together, Lucy is obliged to ask their Italian driver to take her to them. For her to ask where the two clergymen are, however, necessitates a command of Italian rather in excess of Lucy's own, and she is reduced to demanding: "Dove buoni uomini?"<sup>27</sup> With the uncanny intuition Forster ascribes to his Italians, the boy decides that he knows very well who the good men are, and leads Lucy off towards the Emersons. The irony of Lucy's stumbling, ambiguous Italian, returns us to the theme of a language which betrays what it is created to conceal.

The Italian driver only discovers George for Lucy, and he is alone. With his task complete, the boy leaves them alone together.

From her feet the ground sloped sharply into 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.

Standing at its brink, like a swimmer who prepares, was the good man. But he was not the good man that she had expected, and he was alone.

George had turned at the sound of her arrival. For a moment he contemplated her, as one who had fallen out of heaven. He saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in the blue waves. The bushes above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her.

Before she could speak, almost before she could feel, a voice called, "Lucy! Lucy! Lucy!"

The silence of life had been broken by Miss Bartlett, who stood brown against the view.<sup>28</sup>

Forster establishes the significance of this 'moment' rather more deftly than did the blood-stained photographs of the piazza scene. Purely by association, the image of water, which is presented in rather a torrential way itself, suggests the same purification and purgation which the River Arno did earlier. Colour is used to support this metaphor: the pervasive blueness of the hillside is contrasted with Miss Bartlett "who stood brown against the view". Mr. Beebe is later described as "a long black column",<sup>29</sup> and in both instances Forster uses colour as a characteristic of his figure. One might say that each character is seen as the colour personified.

The language of the conventional response which Lucy used after the earlier 'moment', reappears here, but this time from Charlotte. The similarity of diction once again suggests a parallel between the two ladies, and Miss Bartlett's dominance here, which takes the form of organizing Lucy's own response, suggests that Lucy's own condition is one Charlotte experienced herself at Lucy's age. Lucy, it appears, is being directed along the path Charlotte herself has taken.

George's second kiss is, in a sense, the result of his first, for it is occasioned by Miss Lavish's translation of it into art (if one may so style her novel). Again, Miss Bartlett is involved: it is she who told Miss Lavish what happened above the Val d' Arno. Having exposed her cousin's betrayal of confidence, Lucy will not rely on her on this occasion as she did after George's previous kiss, and resolves to act herself this time. Miss Bartlett, it would seem, has been gossiping like an old maid. As soon as Lucy resolves to act herself, however, Charlotte's behaviour appears more complicated:

"Very well", said Lucy, with an angry gesture.  
 "No one will help me. I will speak to him myself." And immediately she realized that this was what her cousin had intended all along.<sup>30</sup>

As Miss Bartlett orchestrated Lucy's previous response, so she does so once again, this time less directly. Whereas one felt certain about Charlotte, and recognized Lucy's doubts previously, Miss Bartlett's manner now seems ambiguous, and Lucy, it seems, grows more assured. The contest within Lucy, says Forster, is "between the real and the pretended",<sup>31</sup> but, as she gives a more confident voice to her 'pretended' feelings, Miss Bartlett, it appears, may contain a similar dichotomy.

Forster makes the superficial parallel between Lucy and Charlotte still more explicit after Lucy rejects George:

It did not do to think, nor, for the matter of that, to feel. She gave up trying to understand herself, and joined the vast armies of the benighted, who follow neither the heart nor the brain, and march to their destiny by catchwords. The armies are full of pleasant and pious folk. But they have yielded to the only enemy that matters — the enemy within. They have sinned against passion and truth, and vain will be their strife after virtue. As the years pass, they are censured. Their pleasantries and their piety show cracks, their wit becomes cynicism, their unselfishness hypocrisy; they feel and produce discomfort wherever they go. They have sinned against Eros and against Pallas Athene, and not by any heavenly intervention, but by the ordinary course of nature, those allied deities will be avenged.

Lucy entered this army when she pretended to George that she did not love him, and pretended to Cecil that she loved no one. The night received her, as it had received Miss Bartlett thirty years before.<sup>32</sup>

Yet, the central irony of the novel is that it is Charlotte who engineers Lucy's redemption. It is effected by Mr. Emerson, but it is Charlotte who arranges their meeting, and Charlotte who has been working towards the moment for some time. The path Lucy seems set on after breaking off her engagement to Cecil and rebuking George's advances, is the same one Charlotte herself has followed; but Charlotte reveals that she too has a 'central stream' and acts upon it. Whether she does so consciously or not we never learn, but

to bring about Lucy's happiness she has to concede her own unhappiness, and so from a stock type Forster creates a tragic figure. Because of the similarities in Charlotte's and Lucy's developments, the elder cousin's life is presented as a parallel to Lucy's own, and in this comic structure one is left with the sense that Lucy's happiness is the result of frail chance rather than the irresistible Fate which George sees in events. Within the buoyant narration is the tragic note that Lucy's happiness exists only because Charlotte acknowledges and is resigned to the fact that the path of her own life is an unhappy one, but that within that acquiescence she is militantly opposed to it as a state of being and will save others from it.

Such, then, is Forster's comic irony. Never again does he structure a novel around such a mode of irony which relates rather than isolates. Where Angels Fear to Tread, the other 'Italian' novel, uses irony to discover moral complexity in the same way that it is used with Charlotte, but where Lucy is compared, Philip Herriton is isolated.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Colmer, E.M. Forster: the personal voice (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup>Surprise is the quality Forster isolates in Aspects of the Novel to distinguish between so-called 'round' and 'flat' characters:

The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is flat pretending to be round.

<sup>3</sup>E.M. Forster, A Room with a View (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), Abinger Edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Matthew Arnold, "Below the surface stream".

<sup>16</sup>In both "Below the surface stream" and "The Buried Life", Arnold uses the image of an undercurrent to suggest the buried self, and it is interesting that Forster should also use water as a recurring motif in each of this novel's symbolical moments.

<sup>17</sup>op.cit., p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-68.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

## CHAPTER II

### Self as Actor and Spectator: Where Angels Fear to Tread

I concluded the previous chapter with a distinction between the functions of irony in relation to the central characters of Forster's two 'Italian' novels, A Room with a View and Where Angels Fear to Tread. Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the uses of irony in the latter work, one needs to examine a presumption in the comparison I suggest: that Where Angels Fear to Tread does, in fact, have a central figure.

The first four chapters form approximately one third of the novel's bulk, and if one judges from them, then Lilia is the only possible figure that one might call central. However, her abruptly-presented sudden death sets the novel on a different tack. Certainly the opening of chapter five reads more like the beginning of a novel than an integrated change in perspective:

At the time of Lilia's death Philip Herriton was just twenty-four years of age — indeed, the news reached Sawston on his birthday. He was a tall, weakly-built young man, whose clothes had to be judiciously padded on the shoulder in order to make him pass muster. His

face was plain rather than not, and there was a curious mixture in it of good and bad. He had a fine forehead and a good large nose, and both observation and sympathy were in his eyes. But below the nose and eyes all was confusion, and those people who believe that destiny resides in the mouth and chin shook their heads when they looked at him.<sup>1</sup>

The link between the new beginning and the previous chapters is Lilia's baby, whose birth caused his mother's death. For the remainder of the novel, attention centres on Gino, Caroline, Philip, and, to a lesser extent, Harriet, with Mrs. Herriton in the background.

Of these, both Caroline and Philip may lay claim to a central status: both undergo a fundamental reversal in their attitudes towards the world as a result of their respective symbolical moments, yet for Caroline, the 'moment' is an unironic, direct revelation of reality; for Philip, though the message is no less clear, the reception is muffled, the effect inconclusive, and the presentation, ironic. Forster himself saw Philip as the central consciousness. In a letter to R.C. Trevelyan on 28 October 1905 he said: "The object of the book is the improvement of Philip, and I really did want the improvement to be a surprise".<sup>2</sup>

Although the description of Philip cited above is the first detailed one to appear in the novel, it is not an announcement of his first appearance. Perhaps it is a little

reminiscent of the familiar habit amongst nineteenth century novelists publishing their work in serial form: characters absent from a substantial number of the immediately preceding pages were re-introduced at length because a considerable time may have elapsed since the reader last heard of this or that character, and he may not immediately recognize him. Though, of course, there is nothing of the time-gap which the Victorian novelists often faced, Philip's first appearance was sufficiently unimpressive at the time that the later, lengthy description is needed.

The novel opens on the platform at Charing Cross from where Lilia is setting off for Italy. Philip Herriton is advising her:

"Remember," he concluded, "that it is only by going off the track that you get to know the country. See the little towns — Gubbio, Pienza, Cortona, San Gimignano, Monteriano. And don't let me beg you, go with that awful tourist idea that Italy's only a museum of antiquities and art. Love and understand the Italians, for the people are more marvellous than the land." 3

His words are more prophetic than he realizes, for Lilia quite literally falls in love with an Italian when she visits the last of the small towns on Philip's Sawston itinerary and goes so far off the habitual Sawston tracks as to marry him. This seemingly conventional farewell appears, in retrospect,

to be the beginning of the novel's plot. But Philip's words also reveal a good deal about himself. The breadth of knowledge and sympathy expressed here is untypical both of the Herriton family and Sawston itself, and we soon appreciate that self-conscious unconventionality is part of Philip's flattering view of himself. Much of the novel affords us the opportunity to test how far Philip follows his own injunctions to see Italians rather than Italy and, more generally, to be involved in life rather than look at art. Already, however, the narrator provides a context, for Philip is said to have "flooded her with a final stream of advice and injunctions".<sup>4</sup> With foresight one thinks of Lucy's anxiety at being Baedeker-less in Santa Croce, and of Margaret's silent response to Mrs. Munt's insistence on providing her nieces with plans of campaign for the future:

Her [Margaret's] thought drew being from the obscure borderland. She could not explain in so many words, but she felt that those who prepare for all the emergencies of life beforehand may equip themselves at the expense of joy. It is necessary to prepare for an examination, or a dinner-party, or a possible fall in the price of stock; those who attempt human relations must adopt another method, or fail.<sup>5</sup>

In Where Angels Fear to Tread, this favourite Forsterian theme of the complex merits and failings of planned and spontaneous actions, is introduced in the guise

of shallow dilettanteism:

And Philip, whom the idea of Italy always intoxicated, had started again, telling her of the supreme moments of her coming journey — the Campanile of Airolo, which would burst on her when she emerged from the St. Gotthard tunnel, presaging the future; the view of the Ticino and Lago Maggiore as the train climbed the slopes of Monte Ceneri; the view of Lugano, the view of Como — Italy gathering thick around her now — the arrival at her first resting-place, when, after long driving through dark and dirty streets, she should at last behold, amid the roar of trams and the glare of arc lamps, the buttresses of the cathedral of Milan.

"Handkerchiefs and collars," screamed Harriet, "in my inlaid box! I've lent you my inlaid box."<sup>6</sup>

Harriet's mundane reminder to the departing Lilia is itself an ironic comment on Philip's overblown language, but it is equally important to notice that Philip's words receive an unstressed narrative comment in the introductory clause which distinguishes that it is "the idea of Italy" which "always intoxicated" Philip. The metaphor of drunkenness reappears in the opera scene; here the narration mimics and undermines Philip's love of Italy by mooting the discrepancy between the idea and the actual: one of the clearest characteristics which we see of Italy is its unpredictability, so that Philip's cosy predictions at once betray his real ignorance of the land he describes, while intimating his compliance with a need felt by many of Forster's characters to discover order in the world.

Though Philip all but disappears from the novel for the first four chapters, the unemphatic, seemingly casual introduction distinguishes him as the work's central consciousness, though, as we shall see, his position in the structure of the novel is quite distinct from that of Rickie Elliot in The Longest Journey, or Lucy Honeychurch in A Room with a View. His 'improvement' is developed around three symbolical moments, each of which is more dramatic, more visionary, and more revisionary than its predecessor. These are the demythologising of Italy, the scene in Monteriano's theatre when Lucia di Lammermoor is being performed, and finally that other operatic scene when Philip returns to Gino's flat and the bereaved father attempts to murder his baby's murderer.

The first of these 'moments' occurs in the first third of the novel, and it is Philip's only substantial appearance in these chapters. The news of Lilia's proposed marriage reaches Mrs. Herriton by an insultingly circuitous route, and her response is to despatch her son to Italy in hopes of preventing the match which, in her eyes, would insult the memory of her deceased son, Lilia's first husband, as well as shaming the remaining Herritons. For two reasons Philip greets the prospect of an Italian trip with something less than unbridled enthusiasm. First, "it was the first

time he had had anything to do".<sup>7</sup> That is, Italy is no longer an 'idea', but rather a place of action. Thus it is that he "departed for Italy reluctantly, as for something commonplace or dull".<sup>8</sup> The second reason becomes apparent only after his arrival in Monteriano. There he meets Caroline who confesses, with a mixture of embarrassed shame and proud defiance, that Gino is the son of a dentist. More threateningly than ever, Philip's idea of Italy and Italy itself are being forced together.

Philip gave a cry of personal disgust and pain. He shuddered all over, and edged away from his companion. A dentist! A dentist in 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.<sup>9</sup>

Philip's reported speech itself reveals the unworldliness and snobbery behind his self-conscious unconventionality. Monteriano is "fairyland", without a present existence; one sees, ironically, that his own attitude is just that "tourist idea that Italy's only a museum of antiquities and art" which he implored Lilia to resist. Yet, in the chopped logic of ever more unrelated subordinate clauses and the tone of

frantic anxiety they create, there is the suggestion of impending disillusionment reinforced by the narrator's intrusion at the end of the paragraph which emphasizes that Philip's fears were for himself, not Lilia.

Unconsciously, Philip's own words provide an undercutting commentary on his meaning, and they do so within a narrative context that is itself ironic. There are no fixed poles, however; echoing out from the examination of Sawston and Italy within Philip is an appraisal of the places themselves that is complex in its contradictions. Perhaps the first intimation that the relationship between the two places is more complicated than that of hero and victim, comes with Gino's response to Philip's offer of one thousand lire to break off the engagement with Lilia. From avarice to insolence, from politeness to stupidity and to cunning, Gino's face alters to betray his jostling responses. In the end his sense of the ridiculous triumphs and he bursts out laughing: Philip's offer is too late: Gino and Lilia are already married. If only Sawston in the person of Philip could offer to buy a man off from love then only Italy and Gino could remember "with shame how he had once regretted his inability to accept the thousand lire that Philip Herriton offered him in exchange for her [Lilia]. It would.

have been a short-sighted bargain" for "she was even richer than he expected".<sup>10</sup> In Italy "one may enjoy that exquisite luxury of socialism — that true socialism which is based not on equality of income or character, but on the equality of manners". But "the brotherhood of man...is accomplished at the expense of the sisterhood of women".<sup>11</sup> Gino would rather his wife "should visit nowhere rather than visit wrongly".<sup>12</sup> The words might be Mrs. Herriton's, except that she would know where was 'right' and where was 'wrong' so that in Sawston Lilia would never have suffered the agony of utter neglect and solitude which she endures in Monteriano's fraternal freedom.

Yet Lilia is also concerned with propriety. She is horrified at her husband's associating with "low-class" men, and urges him to remember his "position".<sup>13</sup> Again we seem to hear the voice of Mrs. Herriton. Lilia and her mother-in-law may draw the line between "low-class" and respectable in different places, but for both such a division exists. As in A Room with a View, then, so irony here discovers occult similarities where differences are more obvious, and in so doing reveals the inadequacy of simple judgements. To return to Philip, the influences of Sawston and Italy upon him are far from simple.

The first dramatic clash of these influences comes in Monteriano's garish theatre, "done up, in the tints of the beetroot and the tomato".<sup>14</sup> Philip, Caroline, and Harriet are there to hear Lucia di Lammermoor. The theatre itself "spraddled and swaggered with the best of them",<sup>15</sup> Yet it is no less Italian than the Sistine itself. The audience is no more refined than the décor, and Harriet, "fretful and insular",<sup>16</sup> knows exactly what she thinks of their "tappings and drumming"<sup>17</sup> in time with the music:

Harriet, meanwhile, had been coughing ominously at the drop-scene, which presently rose on the grounds of Ravenswood, and the chorus of Scotch retainers burst into cry. The audience accompanied with tappings and drummings, swaying in the melody like corn in the wind. Harriet, though she did not care for music, knew how to listen to it. She uttered an acid "Shish!"<sup>18</sup>

Harriet's correctness, based on form without feeling, is ironically undermined by the natural simile for the audience, who were "swaying in the melody like corn in the wind". Caroline and Philip, by contrast, seem to sway with the rest of the audience, and when Lucia returns a bouquet to the stalls, not only is the unfortunate Harriet struck by it, but a billet-doux tumbles out into her lap. Harriet leaves in high dudgeon; Philip, "drunk with excitement",<sup>19</sup> plunges through the audience to return the bouquet to the "innamorado".<sup>20</sup>

The young man turns out to be Gino. The meeting is a reunion whose tone is set by Gino's warm, enthusiastic greetings to "Fra Filippo".<sup>21</sup> In the box Philip is introduced to Gino's friends, "tradesmen's sons perhaps they were, or medical students, or solicitors' clerks, or sons of other dentists. There is no knowing who is who in Italy. The guest of the evening was a private soldier. He shared the honour now with Philip".<sup>22</sup> So boisterous are these introductions that "the audience began to hiss",<sup>23</sup> much as Harriet herself had tried to quieten the Italians. Philip, it would seem, has become more Italian than the Italians. Apparently he has undergone a transformation.

In fact, as the narration persuades us, he has altered scarcely at all. Sitting in the stalls,

he saw a charming picture, [my emphasis] as charming a picture as he had seen for years — the hot red theatre; outside the theatre, towers and dark gates and medieval walls; beyond the walls, olive-trees in the starlight and white winding roads and fireflies and untroubled dust; . . . <sup>24</sup>

The same dichotomy between life pictured and life lived, and between "a museum of antiquities and art" and Italy, persists in Philip's mind. Again, too, there is the same tumbling of clauses joined by 'and'. Later, he asks Caroline:

"Don't you like it at all?" he asked her. "Most awfully." And by this bald interchange they convinced each other that Romance was here. <sup>25</sup>

The irony of the narrative comment, emphasized by the capital letter, is destructive by itself. In addition, of course, it refers us back to Philip's initial fear when he first heard of Gino's existence: the fear "that Romance might die".<sup>26</sup> The allusion provides a context wherein we see Philip's discovery of Romance is within his own need rather than in Italy. He has neither disabused himself of Romance, nor has he come to understand Gino: Gino has simply been accommodated within its borders. Such a solipsistic failure to recognize otherness is one we meet again and again in Forster's fiction.

The ironic questioning of Philip's revision is completed by images of drunkenness and enchantment:

The audience sounded drunk, and even Caroline, who never took a drop, was swaying oddly. Violent waves of excitement, all arising from very little, went sweeping round the theatre.<sup>27</sup>

He [Philip] was drunk with excitement. The heat, the fatigue and the enjoyment had mounted to his head.<sup>28</sup>

---he [Philip] would be enchanted by the kind, cheerful voices, the laughter that was never vapid, and the light caress of the arm across his back.<sup>29</sup>

On one level, Forster's use of irony throughout the scene is for the purposes of social comedy when the suburban, middle-class English venture 'to the continent'. But this neither precludes nor is at odds with its other functions of under-

mining Philip's self-assurance, and exploring the misconceptions that may accompany the vision which is bestowed on a fallible individual. That the vision does not always vouchsafe the truth, in as much as its meaning and the interpretation put upon it may differ, does not, of course, imply that it is worthless. Interestingly, it is Caroline alone here who is able to tolerate the Italians' behaviour without a renunciation of her own values:

"It is tiresome," murmured Miss Abbott; "but perhaps it isn't for us to interfere."<sup>30</sup>

In this symbolical moment, then, irony implies a distinction between the visionary moment itself and what it offers, and the visionary person. In A Room with a View, though Lucy Honeychurch did not at first grasp the significance, or the 'meaning', of her symbolical moments, she did appreciate that she did not understand. Out of the wisdom of knowing one's own ignorance true learning comes. By contrast, Philip is seen not merely to misinterpret this symbolical moment, but to be unaware and unwary of other possible meanings. Thus, where Lucy's development promises to be the comic one towards resolution, we see here the tragic potential within Philip, and it is Caroline's qualified approval of the audience, treated unironically, which leads directly to the 'moment' of true understanding

when she goes to see Gino the following morning.

She sets off with the intention of pre-empting Philip's visit later the same day, with the hope of recovering the baby by, and presumably for, herself. As Philip twice sets off for Italy with a plan and twice fails, so Caroline's plans and arguments are defeated, not by reason, but by something less tangible which one might call circumstance, or perhaps character, or even life. Previously, the baby has existed as a social lever which, in Mrs. Herriton's eyes, is being used against her; as a moral cause, for Harriet; as a way of righting an earlier wrong, for Caroline; and as a nuisance which might be made the source of some amusement, for Philip. Only when Caroline confronts the baby itself is its actual existence made apparent to her:

The baby gave a piercing yell.

"Oh, do take care!" begged Miss Abbott. "You are squeezing it."

"It is nothing. If he cries silently then you may be frightened. He thinks I am going to wash him, and he is quite right."

"Wash him!" she cried. "You? Here?" The homely piece of news seemed to shatter all her plans. She had spent a long half-hour in elaborate approaches, in high moral attacks; she had neither frightened her enemy nor made him angry, nor interfered with the least detail of his domestic life.<sup>31</sup>

After Philip returned from the evening in the theatre, he excused his failure to make use of the meeting with Gino

by saying that he "got taken by surprise".<sup>32</sup> Caroline similarly fails, but instead of excusing it, recognizes the cause of the failure, and admits the justness of that cause:

This cruel, vicious fellow knew of strange refinements. 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 or wrong.<sup>33</sup>

It is this "homage to the complexity of life"<sup>34</sup> which is at the heart of the novel's philosophical concerns. Caroline attains this understanding in a symbolical moment which is unironic and directly revelatory. The occasion for Philip comes near the end of the novel, when he returns to Monteriano to tell Gino of his son's death.

Forster prepares for the novel's dramatic climax with two important scenes involving Philip. The first is an exchange with Harriet where he is called upon to defend Miss Abbott. Philip himself feels no annoyance with Caroline's behaviour:

He was not angry with her, for he was quite indifferent to the outcome of their expedition. He was only extremely interested.<sup>35</sup>

The exchange with his sister seems to demonstrate only Harriet's rant and Philip's reason. Yet, there is something

of Mr. Beebe about Philip's tone here. His uninvolved interest in Caroline's development recalls all the images and instances of spectating we have already seen, and leads us directly into the second of these key scenes, this time between Philip and Caroline.

In response to Miss Abbott's demand, Philip explains what action he proposes to recover the baby:

"This afternoon I have another interview."  
"It will come to nothing. Well?"  
"Then another. If that fails I shall wire home for instructions. I dare say we may fail altogether, but we shall fail honourably."<sup>36</sup>

Caroline, however, sees through the sham which Philip himself does not realize he is acting out:

"To come out of the thing as well as you can!  
Is that all you are after?"<sup>37</sup>

The challenge, of course, is to live morally not prudently. It has always been the former which has guided Caroline. It was misguided when it advised her to promote the marriage of Lilia and Gino, and it was still more in error when it urged her to make amends for that mistake by recovering the baby from Gino and from Italy. The moral course, or rather, the course prompted by moral considerations, may be both misguided and harmful, yet it is seen as the only one which offers even the possibility of distinguishing others from the self.

Philip's anxiety to save face is just the quality which has coerced Mrs. Herriton into seeking the baby in the first place. Both mother and son, then, are concerned only with the self: Mrs. Herriton with her social respectability; Philip with the cherished conception he holds of himself. Harriet and Caroline, on the other hand, both care. One may be an obtuse, blunt-headed caring which obtains only in the context of a perfect absence of imagination, but it is prompted by disinterested belief. Caroline's, though it stumbles at first, settles on right reason eventually. Once again, the narration unemphatically discovers certain unexpected similarities, and it is in this context that we approach the final scenes.

Many have found the "fight-scene", as one might term it, unhappily melodramatic. Harriet, having kidnapped Gino's son, is leaving Monteriano with the unknowing Philip when their coach collides with Caroline's, ideologically as well as physically, and in the resulting crash the child is killed. As with Lilia's death earlier, the narration is brutally abrupt and laconic, providing no reason beyond the physical one for the death. With his arm broken, Philip leaves the scene of the accident to tell Gino what has happened and the ensuing scene in Gino's house is the climax of all the novel's concerns.

For Philip, there is nothing symbolical about the torture he suffers as Gino stalks and finally captures his victim. Incensed, Gino carefully, systematically, and with horrifying precision and knowledge, sets about exacting his revenge on the man who murdered his child. Philip's life is spared only by the arrival of Caroline whose unexplained, perhaps inexplicable, influence, as good as it is irresistible, not only saves Philip's life but reconciles the two men. Her action needs to be understood symbolically, rather as we understand the intuitive wisdom of the two elderly ladies in Howards End and A Passage to India. Yet, the setting, as we have said, is unquestionably realistic and we have to believe Caroline's action and its effects possible in the real world, too. But the clash of media is not unprepared for: the same melodrama which disturbs some readers provides an operatic context for Caroline's entry. In addition, whatever disquiet one may feel about the marriage of modes in this scene, it is unique, whereas both Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore function almost entirely at a symbolic level within a realistic context.

For Philip, it is the scene wherein life forces itself upon his observing mind. The aesthete, who saw himself sitting in the audience while the spectacle of life

was played out before him, finds his theatre crashing down about him. The 'message' of the novel, in so far as any work of art has one, is not the rugby club celebration of the physical life as the only real one; rather, it is Forster's familiar method of highlighting the inadequacies of one code by confronting it with another which, by itself, is no more complete an answer than the first, but which nevertheless cannot be neglected, for it is there. It is a Socratic technique in as much as it instructs by asking questions, and its intention is as didactic. That reasonableness is an aspect of Forster's didacticism does not make it any the less didactic.

Pain is not life, but it is of life. Gino takes pleasure in inflicting agony on another human being, and it is more than revenge. If he simply wanted to take Philip's life in payment for that of his son, he could have accomplished it easily and long before Miss Abbott arrived. He does want to murder Philip, but that will come in time. His first purpose is to make him suffer, and thus it is that he releases Philip's windpipe just as the victim is on the point of suffocation, only to renew the attack on the broken arm. If one says that there is something sadistic in Gino's behaviour, that is not to say he is a sadist, and in that distinction lies the important point about the place of violence, even

cruelty in life. Gino's cruelty may be real, but is momentary, and its cause lies in passion and in love. This violence is but the corollary to love. Mrs. Herriton, of course, could never inflict physical pain on another person, yet there is cruelty in her also. Beside the petty unselfishnesses which Caroline sees in Sawston, there are the casual cruelties of indifference and pride which allow Mrs. Herriton to act towards the baby with only her own considerations in mind. It is against this permanent and unyielding cruelty of Mrs. Herriton that we are presented with Gino's evanescent sadism, and it is the inevitable presence of hate within a passion great enough to love that Philip has revealed to him in this symbolical moment.<sup>38</sup>

This ideal of a union between passion and reason, spontaneity and consideration, which one finds throughout Forster's fiction, may be seen as an exploration of the limitations and difficulties involved in Arnold's familiar plea to see life steadily and see it whole. The danger of passive wisdom of which Arnold was also conscious is suggested by Caroline to Philip:

"Oh, what's the use of your fairmindedness if you never decide for yourself? Anyone gets hold of you and makes you do what they want. And you see through them and laugh at them - and do it. It's not enough to see clearly; I'm muddle-headed and stupid, and not worth a quarter of you, but I have tried to do what

seemed right at the time. And you — your brain and your insight are splendid. But when you see what's right you're too idle to do it. You told me once that we shall be judged by our intentions, not by our accomplishments. I thought it a grand remark. But we must intend to accomplish — not sit intending on a chair.<sup>39</sup>

If one is disappointed that Forster does not allow his hero to adopt this wisdom wholeheartedly and in so doing marry Caroline, perhaps one is a little more sentimental than the author; but perhaps, too, one has not grasped the manner that one might call committed irony, which no more allows him to be sanguine over his own ideals than anyone else's. The symbolical moment does, of course, deeply affect Philip, but not as one might have expected. To some, this typically Forsterian ending, which is heralded with a fanfare but fails to produce a scene of triumph, illustrates exactly the doubtful union of poetic vision with social realism. It may be unconvincing for a character such as Philip to learn as Caroline does from the novel's events, yet, the persuasive force of the imaginative truth embodied in the struggle with Gino is diminished by its failure to produce a solid and enduring effect.

Such clean lines are not for Forster, however, and his criteria for success are not only more sympathetic and

more worldly, but ultimately more persuasive, because his manner is less naively simple in its oppositions, for they are couched in an irony which criticizes and so suggests maturity. Though Philip can never live the sensuous, passionate life of Gino, though he cannot have the commitment to life that Italy symbolizes, something, perhaps important, perhaps not, has happened to him. For the first time Philip possesses the imaginative ability to understand the life of the actor and not merely see it in terms of the spectator. And, with a cogent and final allusion to his thoughts for himself when the news of Lilia's marriage reached England, he now greets the far more personally disappointing revelation of Caroline's love for Gino, and not himself, with real and great sympathy:

In that terrible discovery Philip managed to think not of himself but of her. He did not lament. He did not even speak to her kindly, for he saw that she could not stand it. A flippant reply was what she asked and needed — something flippant and a little cynical. And indeed it was the only reply he could trust himself to make.<sup>40</sup>

One reason why Philip achieves without succeeding is the route he takes to the wisdom he gains:

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 had never traversed any path at all, had commended them dispassionately to his friend.<sup>41</sup>

This same phrase — "he had reached love by the spiritual path" — reappears in Forster's next novel, The Longest Journey, which takes up this concern with the ways to wisdom.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>E.M. Forster, Where Angels Fear to Tread (London: Edward Arnold), Abinger Edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, p. 54.
- <sup>2</sup>The letter is reproduced in the Abinger Edition of the novel as part of appendix a, p. 149.
- <sup>3</sup>op.cit., p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup>E.M. Forster, Howards End (London: Edward Arnold), Abinger Edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, pp. 57-58.
- <sup>6</sup>op.cit., p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 32.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 46.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 35.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 93.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 93.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 93.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 94.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 94.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 93-94.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>38</sup>It is perhaps useful to compare Forster's remarks on force in What I Believe with this section:

...all the great creative actions, all the decent human relations, occur during the intervals when force has not managed to come out to the front. These intervals are what matter. I want them to

be as frequent and as lengthy as possible, and I call them 'civilization'. Some people idealise force and pull it into the foreground and worship it, instead of keeping it in the background as long as possible. I think that they make a mistake, and I think that their opposites, the mystics, err even more when they declare that force does not exist. I believe that it exists and that one of our jobs is to prevent it from getting out of its box.

<sup>39</sup>op.cit., p. 120.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-142

### CHAPTER III

#### Paths to Wisdom: The Longest Journey

The Longest Journey completes the first phase of Forster's writing. As we have seen, the central character of A Room with a View begins the novel in a condition of uncertainty but develops towards, and by the close attains, one of understanding. The function of irony in the comic structure is to suggest complexity and undermine shallow judgements by discovering unexpected similarities between apparently disparate figures. As the novel progresses, then, characters become more closely related to other figures and less isolated. Where Angels Fear to Tread also breaks down the antagonistic opposites with which the novel begins to reveal not-so-recondite similarities, but the development of its central character is less easily defined. He begins with some mistaken certainties which he exchanges for other mistaken certainties during the novel, and only eventually does he interpret correctly the revelation of truths embodied in the symbolical moments. Though we may see similarities in Lucy's and Philip's final conditions, then, the paths they take to their respective states are wholly different,

for Philip's early development has a tragic potential.

Irony provides a context wherein Philip's early interpretations of the symbolical moment are seen to be mistaken, and his confidence further isolates him in error. Rickie is also isolated by a narrative irony which shows his false interpretations of the symbolical moments offered him, but the structure of this work differs from that of the two 'Italian' novels, and in a sense completes their pattern into what now appears as one coherent development. The structure of A Room with a View is comic; that of Where Angels Fear to Tread, tragi-comic; and now we have one of the few attempts by a modern novelist to write a tragedy. The Longest Journey is Forster's most autobiographical and his most lyrical novel, and Rickie Elliot is by far his finest creation — indeed, is perhaps the only one of his figures about whom one profoundly cares. Yet, far from being bedevilled by that familiar problem in a significantly autobiographical novel of insufficient distance between author and character, at the heart of this work are Rickie's misconceptions as they are established by narrative, ironic distance. While undoubtedly a less assured and controlled piece of craftsmanship than A Passage to India, it is the only one of his novels that could be said to rank alongside it, and Lionel Trilling's now familiar

judgement that it is, in fact, the finest of all the works is not obviously mistaken.

The Longest Journey is, perhaps, the central core of Forster's fiction. A fundamental idea in each of the novels is what is here called the "Primal Curse, which is not — as the Authorized Version suggests — the knowledge of good and evil, but the knowledge of good-and-evil."<sup>1</sup> One irony of the felix culpa is that those who lack a sense of good within evil and evil within good, are often better able to act. Harriet in Where Angels Fear to Tread is one example. The knowledge of good-and-evil may, and often does, involve self-knowledge, but here again the path to wisdom is not clear: self-knowledge may institute self-consciousness, which leads to inhibitions that may in turn encourage the easier path of spectating on life, while passing witty comments on its more excessive follies. Forster offers abundant variations on the figure; both the clergymen in A Room with a View, Miss Lavish, and, in complicated ways, Charlotte and Lucy also; Sawston in both Where Angels Fear to Tread and The Longest Journey is a symbol of this attitude and its figures exemplify the range of responses possible within such a stance; the business ethos of Henry and Charles Wilcox in Howards End, and the so-called Anglo-Indians<sup>2</sup> in A Passage to India, are each deve-

lopments of this idea in that a partial view of the nature of life is taken.

The knowledge of good-and-evil may, however, educate, teaching a respect for made-to-measure reason and a contempt for ready-to-wear cant. It may teach the value and rarity of the symbolical moment as the gateway through which reason unites with imagination in a vision, but it cannot ensure that the visionary will accurately interpret what is offered him. It is here that we find Rickie Elliot in Forster's scheme of characters. With Margaret Schlegel in Howards End, he is the most self-aware of all the central characters. He is neither an intellectual like Ansell, nor an intuitive visionary like Ruth Wilcox or Mrs. Moore: he is fallen and fallible man whose tragedy is not the result of a single flaw in his character, but is due as much to his virtues as his failings. With only a brief denial, Rickie retains his belief in the existence of right and wrong - his belief that the cow is there - throughout the novel, and it is his noble desire "to acknowledge each man accurately"<sup>3</sup> that is the philosophical centre of this work and the tragic irony of Rickie's life.

As with the other novels which we have already looked at, the central character of this work is set in a

schematized frame of figures. On one hand there is a group whose affinities are easily recognized. It is composed of Agnes and Herbert Pembroke, Mrs. Failing, and, as little more than shadows, the Silts. All these characters are, or become, related to Rickie, and between them they create an existence which is characterized by the "habit of taking life with a laugh — as if it is a pill!"<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Failing will be deliberately and infuriatingly cryptic so that she may manufacture anxieties and control relationships in a manner which treats life and the living as a chess board and pieces. What Mrs. Herriton would do under coercion Mrs. Failing will do for amusement. The second part of Rickie's reflection on his aunt quoted above, alludes to Herbert Pembroke.

Early in the novel, Rickie inquires of him whether Agnes and Gerald are to be married in the near future:

'Oh no!' whispered Mr. Pembroke, shutting his eyes, as if Rickie had made some terrible faux pas. 'It will be a very long engagement. He must make his way first. I have seen such endless misery result from people marrying before they have made their way.'

'Yes. That is so,' said Rickie despondently, thinking of the Silts.

'It's a sad unpalatable truth,' said Mr. Pembroke, thinking that the despondency might be personal, 'but one must accept it. My sister and Gerald, I am thankful to say, have accepted it, though naturally it has been a little pill.'<sup>5</sup>

Later, when Rickie himself is engaged to Agnes, Herbert

writes of his sister's new fiancé that "the dear boy is not nearly as wealthy as he supposed; having no tastes, and hardly any expenses, he used to talk as if he was a millionaire. He must at least double his income before they can dream of more intimate ties. This has been a bitter pill, but I am glad to say that they have accepted it bravely."<sup>6</sup> Like the Miss Bartlett of the earlier parts of A Room with a View who "presented to the girl [Lucy] 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"<sup>7</sup>, so Herbert Pembroke, in thoughtlessness and ignorance but not selfishly or maliciously, does the same here. It is the most insidious form of what Aunt Juley calls 'plans' and what Lucy calls 'rehearsing life'.

Such, then, is the Sawston group of figures against which Rickie is set. The other group is symbolized by the other two parts of this tripartite work: Cambridge and Wiltshire. At Cambridge Rickie finds fraternity and frankness: 'talk' comes easily in this atmosphere and the comparative ease with which he can relate the painful tale of his parents' unhappy marriage and his mother's tragic death, is contrasted

later with the sham words and silences of his marriage. There is intellectual talk, also, and Cambridge provides Rickie with ideals developed in an atmosphere of healthy iconoclasm and rigorous thought. From Cambridge comes the novel's Shelleyan title, and the concern about the value of friendship, the difficulties of individual liberty where there are 'doctrines' and 'great sects', and the nature of love as a universal, not an excluding, power:

"True Love in this differs from gold and clay,  
 That to divide is not to take away.  
 Love is like understanding, that grows bright,  
 Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,  
 Imagination! which from earth and sky,  
 And from the depths of human fantasy,  
 As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills  
 The Universe with glorious beams, and kills  
 Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow  
 Of its reverberated lightning. Narrow  
 The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,  
 The life that wears, the spirit that creates  
 One object, and one form, and builds thereby  
 A sepulchre for its eternity."<sup>8</sup>

Even from a single stanza one sees how much of Shelley's impassioned manner informs The Longest Journey.

Stewart Ansell is more symbol than representative of this world. A philosopher and an intellectual, he might be a figure from Romantic drama with an acuteness of perception and a frankness of expression that is as accurate as it is embarrassing and improbable. He is honest enough not to be ashamed or to attempt to hide his own brilliance, but the

absence of any bitterness when he fails to win his Cambridge fellowship shows him to be neither proud nor arrogant, for to him, achievement and success are not always at one. The other principal figure in the second group is Stephen Wonham. He could hardly be more different from Ansell:

He [Stephen] was scarcely a fashionable horseman. He was not even graceful. But he rode as a living man, though Rickie was too much bored to notice it. Not a muscle in him was idle, not a muscle working hard. When he returned from a gallop his limbs were still unsatisfied and his manners still irritable. He did not know that he was ill: he knew nothing about himself at all.<sup>9</sup>

Stephen does not simply lack Ansell's powers of deductive reasoning, but his actions and his life come nearer than any of Forster's figures to untutored spontaneity. Both literally and metaphorically, he asks of everyone no more than he has given them, but he will not accept anything less. He has never considered, nor could he set down, what he thinks right and what wrong, yet he too is a moral philosopher and all his important actions are determined by this moral sense. He is aware only of the world, not of himself, and so he can neither spectate nor be selfish. It is in this moral frame, then, that Forster situates Rickie Elliot.

By temperament Rickie ought to be of the second group. The reason that he is not is one of the central concerns of the novel:

'Did it ever 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? If this never struck you, let it strike you now.' <sup>10</sup>

These words are spoken by Ansell to Rickie while they are still at Cambridge together, and both the man and the place teach Rickie the importance of the imagination as the path to wisdom, as it is the higher and more arduous path to love.

Love, say orderly people, can be fallen into by two methods: (1) through the desires; (2) through the imagination. And if the orderly people are English, they add that (1) is the inferior method, and characteristic of the South. It is inferior. Yet those who pursue it at all events know what they want; they are not puzzling to themselves or ludicrous to others; they do not take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea before walking to the registry office; they cannot breed a tragedy quite like Rickie's.<sup>11</sup>

In as much as love, as it is seen here, is a perception received in one of two ways, it may be compared with Ansell's view above on reality and unreality as perception manifests them in the mind. Rickie, like Philip Herriton<sup>11</sup>, attempts the spiritual path to love; but though conscious of the supreme importance of the imagination, he lacks the discipline and control of Ansell's reason or Stephen's intuition, so that his perception is always a 'diseased product' and not an

accurate representation. Accordingly, Rickie is treated passionately, even heroically, for he values and attempts to follow the greater path of the imagination despite his comparatively poor equipment; but he is also treated ironically, for his visions are misconceptions.

It is in the symbolical moments that these tragic misconceptions are most dramatically presented. The first of these occurs when Rickie returns to the garden he has just left to collect the sandwiches he has forgotten.

Gerald and Agnes were locked in each other's arms.<sup>13</sup>

This simple sentence forms the entire paragraph. The prominence it thus has, has two purposes: this single clause fully describes what is actually taking place when Rickie arrives, and so no more is said in this paragraph; the very baldness of the description is an ironic comment on the volume and enraptured tone of the language which immediately follows this statement, and which describes Rickie's interpretation:

He looked only for a moment, but the sight burnt into his brain.<sup>14</sup>

That Rickie looks only instantaneously suggests that his understanding is more a revelation, grasped complete, than a mundane interpretation. Thus, individuality disappears to be

replaced by generic names and by types: Gerald becomes "the man" and is characterized by strength; Agnes becomes "the woman" who is characterized by frailty and delicacy. The distinction of expression is also gone. Deprived of individuality, they are presented as archetypes of lovers in a garden that has known no Fall and therefore no time. They are thus passion untainted by lust — "gods of pure flame were born in them"<sup>15</sup> — yet though ravished, still chaste: "and then he was looking at pinnacles of virgin snow."<sup>16</sup> Further religious imagery reinforces both the lovers' sanctity and their existence outside the bounds of time:

They invaded his being and lit lamps at unsuspected shrines.<sup>17</sup>

Music flowed past him like a river. He stood at the springs of creation and heard the primal monotony. Then an obscure instrument gave out a little phrase. The river continued unheeding. The phrase was repeated, and a listener might know it was a fragment of the Tune of tunes.<sup>18</sup>

In full unison was Love born, flame of flame, flushing the dark river beneath him and the virgin snows above. His wings were infinite, his youth eternal; the sun was a jewel on his finger as he passed it in benediction over the world.<sup>19</sup>

...they approached, priest and high priestess<sup>20</sup>

...they had gone into heaven and nothing could get them out of it.<sup>21</sup>

... in time to come when the gates of heaven had shut, some faint radiance, some echo of wisdom might remain with him outside.<sup>22</sup>

All this is set against "Gerald and Agnes were locked in each other's arms." The very language which describes Rickie's perception, derived from a diseased imagination, at once undermines it by suggesting it is but a series of "images" which "riot". Insubstantiality and lack of control are further implied by cliché ("it shone with mysterious beauty, like some star") and hyperbole ("Brighter they glowed till gods of pure flame were born in them"). It would be a mistake, though, to see the heightened tone as only ironic. It is that, but our own age's disquiet with purple passages may mean that writing like this does not travel well; yet it should also warn us against hasty judgments. That Forster also intends a genuinely heroic tone is suggested by the paragraph which closes the episode:

It was the merest accident that Rickie had not been disgusted. But this he could not know.<sup>23</sup>

If one sees the language of the revelation as solely ironic, then this prosaic paragraph is indecorous: adding nothing to the toppled, overblown diction of what has gone before, this superfluous paragraph mars by its insistence.

Alternatively, one might read the sudden changes from an ornate to a familiar diction, and from voluble expansiveness to brevity, as suggesting a change in attitude too: there needs must be a positive side to the purple prose

for this paragraph to have any function. The irony, in fact, embodies heroism, but it also suggests tragic foreboding, for one sees here that Rickie's conception of love is an image in his mind which he seeks in reality.

As a footnote to the episode some four chapters later, Rickie receives a letter of thanks from Agnes for his comfort and for his understanding at the time of Gerald's death. After allowing himself Sibylline and Blakean comparisons for his correspondent,

...he indulged in a vision. He saw it reach the outer air and beat against the low ceiling of clouds. The clouds were too strong for it; but in them was one chink, revealing one star, and through this the smoke escaped into the light of stars innumerable. Then — but the vision failed, and the voice of science whispered that all smoke remains on earth in the form of smuts, and is troublesome to Mrs. Aberdeen. <sup>24</sup>

The closing comment, at once down-to-earth and whimsical, of course deflates the vision, but it does so without really damaging the visionary who, though he is gently mocked, is clearly held in affection.

The 'moment' of seeing Gerald and Agnes kissing is made symbolical by Rickie. It is not, of itself, a symbolical moment. The first of these comes with Mrs. Failing's malicious revelation to Rickie that Stephen is his half-brother. Whether she is being characteristically coy or not we never

learn, but Rickie's aunt fails to mention which parent he and Stephen have in common. Rickie makes two assumptions: that his father 'went wrong', as he later puts it; and that Stephen must be told the truth. Rickie cannot ignore the knowledge, nor pretend to himself or others that it is not so. In contrast, Agnes's impulse is prudent. The unwanted brother in this novel is in some respects like the unwanted baby in Where Angels Fear to Tread, but the same opposition of morality and prudence appears in a still more complicated situation here. Not only is Mrs. Herriton's anxiety to bring Gino's baby to England unlikely to better the child's life, but her motives for so acting are, quite simply, selfishly disreputable. Agnes's similar diquiet about the social effect, this time of a bastard brother, is presented more sympathetically, for there is a sense in which Stephen would be no worse off were he to remain ignorant of his relationship to Rickie. Agnes's course of action, or inaction, may be prompted by a similar snobbery to Mrs. Herriton's, but it does not involve uprooting another's life — indeed, it would seek to maintain the status quo — so that any simple moral stance is made rather less easy in this novel. It is this worldly prudence which Rickie confronts with his ideal of acknowledging truth.

After Mrs. Failing has blurted out the secret, Agnes speaks with her alone and the two agree to be silent about the whole business henceforward. Agnes greets her husband with the happy news, but is bewildered by his response:

'Why hasn't she told him?' [Stephen]  
 'Because she [Mrs. Failing] has come to her senses.'  
 'But she can't behave to people like that. She must tell him.'  
 'Why?'  
 'Because he must be told such a real thing.'  
 'Such a real thing?' the girl echoed, screwing up her forehead. 'But — but you don't mean you're glad about it?'  
 His head bowed over the letter. 'My God — no! But it's a real thing. She must tell him.'<sup>25</sup>

This dialogue perfectly juxtaposes two mutually incompatible modes of living. The attempt at communication completely fails because the same word has a quite different meaning for Rickie and his wife. To Agnes, the word "real" means "desirable". Reality is created, it does not exist independently. The cow does not exist. Rickie, however, knows it is there and rightly recognizes that this is one of the very few opportunities he will ever have to acknowledge it:

'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.'<sup>26</sup>

Rickie differs from Agnes in his belief that one must accept what is, and not make of it what one would have it be. In his own milieu, such an endeavour is heroic. The irony, out of which the tragedy develops, is that in his attempt to "acknowledge each man accurately"<sup>27</sup> Rickie sees, and reconciles himself to, Stephen as his father's son and as such a living, continuing emblem of a hated parent. He is blind, as blind as Agnes, to Stephen as a man. As with the kiss, it is an idea which Rickie sees, and once again the idea is mistaken.

Forster's technique here might be compared to Jane Austen's. Rickie's ideal, to "acknowledge each man accurately", is clearly one which has authorial approval. Yet, it remains unrealized in the novel. The reason for this is that there may be just the misconception in perception of an object which we have been discussing. Perception, then, is the real subject and not the value, or otherwise, of the ideal itself. The word which Jane Austen used was 'prejudice', as she adopted the idea from Locke, but both writers are clearly discussing the difficulty of distinguishing truth from prejudiced, well-intentioned misapprehension.

The dramatic, perhaps melodramatic, culmination of the novel comes in the scene at the school assembly, when

Ansell announces to the school that Rickie has a half-brother, and announces to Rickie that Stephen is his mother's, not his father's, child. As with the fight between Gino and Philip, or Leonard Bast's murder in Howards End, Forster produces a scene of revelation here which is quite unrealistic. Realism, however, is not his intention. Ansell is described thus:

He put one foot on a chair and held his arms over the quivering room. He seemed transfigured into a Hebrew prophet passionate for satire and the truth.<sup>28</sup>

Once again we have an operatic scene whose truth does not lie in its correspondence to 'life', but in its internal, thematic coherence.

Ten days after this scene, Stephen returns to Dunwood House insensibly drunk. To Rickie, "the son of his mother had come back, to forgive him, as she would have done, to live with him as she had planned."<sup>29</sup> As his father's son, Rickie cast Stephen out. As his mother's son, he will love him. As in the comedies, irony here discovers unexpected similarities, for just as Stephen represents something to Rickie, something which obscures Stephen himself, so to Herbert, the drunken man whom he helps Rickie to carry into the spare room is "a man of scandal."<sup>30</sup> As for Rickie, the immortality he saw in the lovers' kiss in the garden, and that insatiable need of so many of Forster's characters to hedge spontaneity with plans,

both appear in the newly optimistic Rickie:

'Let me die out. She [his mother] will continue', he murmured, and in making plans for Stephen's happiness, fell asleep.<sup>31</sup>

These symbols have accrued such significance during the development of the novel that we scarcely need the complacent one of the final narrative comment before Rickie sees Stephen the following morning, to realize that this new bubble will be pricked also:

Secure of his victory, he took the portrait of their mother in his hand and walked leisurely upstairs.<sup>32</sup>

When he arrived "Rickie scarcely knew him."<sup>33</sup> Stephen quickly recognizes that it is not he who is now loved that was so recently loathed, for he was not altered. Stephen's fury does seem to shake Rickie into realizing that he has abused his brother:

The man [Stephen] was right. He [Rickie] did not love him, even as he had never hated him. In either passion he had degraded him to be a symbol for the vanished past.<sup>34</sup>

As in King Lear, it is after the moments of most hope that the moments of most bitter disappointment occur in this novel.

This is the last occasion when Rickie seems on the point of genuinely acknowledging Stephen, and by implication reality as it is, but the moment is immediately followed by Stephen's call to Rickie to leave Agnes and join him. Outside Rickie's house, Stephen stands in the suburb which is "wrapped in a

cloud, not of its own making",<sup>35</sup> and from the mist he beckons.

Rickie loses sight of him and hears only a voice :

The words were kind; yet it was not for their sake that Rickie plunged into the inpalpable 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.<sup>36</sup>

In the groping figure, walking into the unseen with only a fashioned vision of what is there, more full of hope than understanding, we have the pitiable symbol of Rickie's tragedy. Lacking Ansell's intellect or Stephen's spontaneity and instinct, the world is wrapped in the unintelligibility of a cloud to Rickie, through which meaning can only be guessed at. At the heart of his tragedy is his noble, determined belief in the existence of a real world and not just a second-hand one.

But the image which the voice of Stephen creates is, to Rickie, indistinguishable from the man himself, so that Stephen's broken promise to abstain from drinking while visiting Mrs. Failing, becomes a breach of a sacred trust and a blasphemy against a seemingly living memory. His death is as inevitable as his errors, but no less poignant for that.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>E.M. Forster, The Longest Journey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 175.

<sup>2</sup>Forster uses the term Anglo-Indian, with a pejorative nuance, to mean one of the British in India. In fact this is a popular misusage. An Anglo-Indian was the child of mixed Indian and British parents who often suffered the scorn of both races.

<sup>3</sup>op.cit., p. 142.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 105

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>7</sup>E.M. Forster, A Room with a View (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), Abinger Edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, pp. 78-79.

<sup>8</sup>P.B. Shelley, Epipsychidion ll 160-173.

<sup>9</sup>op.cit., p. 115.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>12</sup>See Where Angels Fear to Tread pp. 141-142: "Well, I don't. And I don't understand you" ff.

<sup>13</sup>op.cit., p. 45.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 45

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 45

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

## EPILOGUE

E.M. Forster knew the language of middle-class, suburban England very well. Most of his commentators remark on the accuracy of both vocabulary and cadence in characters such as Mrs. Herriton, Major Callendar, and the Pembrokes. On occasion, however, the language he employs may be quite the reverse: heightened, melodramatic and violently impassioned. Many view these alterations as lapses, or indecorous blunders spoiling the overall tone. Forster is clearly capable of writing socially realistic prose in dialogues, but it is equally clear that although irony is often to be found in his melodramatically elevated diction, its purpose is never a simple debunking one. Indeed, allied with its more positive functions, there may be a generally heroic intention in the language.

The apparent improbabilities of language are matched by frank manipulations of plot. A Passage to India is Forster's most dramatic work, yet the drama concludes some hundred pages before the novel does. Anyone who reads Howards End for the story, if he has not lost interest earlier, must laugh to scorn the extravagant improbabilities of the

scene where Leonard Bast is murdered by Charles Wilcox.

There are characters in any of the novels whose lives, manners and ideas, are, at first sight anyway, subjects for the language of social satire. Yet, even the most immediately objectionable of them is set in a schema. This sense of character as a mere component in something larger is dissatisfying to some. The comparative aesthetic unimportance of the individual is further emphasized by the sudden deaths, cursorily presented, in each of the novels. The deaths of Lilia, Gino's baby, Gerald Dawes, Leonard Bast, Ruth Wilcox and Mrs. Moore, suggest that Forster's stage is nearly as cluttered with corpses as Shakespeare's is; yet most of these deaths have little importance to the plot, and Forster's presentation of them is casual and abrupt. Having served his or her function, it would seem, the character is killed off.

It may be said, as a last defence, that the novels are replete with comic scenes where Forster's skill with middle-class diction is seen at its most entertaining. This is undeniably so; yet, these scenes are but exchanges, and the larger scenes — and by that I mean 'settings' — all have symbolical significances. Each has a genius loci, and it is this setting, surely, which is of far more importance to the respective novels. Italy and Sawston in Where Angels

Fear to Tread; Italy and England in A Room with a View; Cambridge, Sawston and Wiltshire in The Longest Journey; Howards End itself in the novel of that name; and India in A Passage to India: in every case setting is a character as well as a location. Comparatively, then, the 'scenes' of Turtons and Burtons and Herritons have little importance beyond themselves.

Two conclusions from this seem obvious: Forster is not interested in plot, and he is not interested in character. Not in themselves, at any rate. However, it will not suffice to say what these novels are not, and we must also attempt some positive statements.

I have resorted to the word 'operatic' on a number of occasions in this thesis to describe the language a character uses, the tone of a scene, or the relationship of one part to the whole. Literally, there is music in each of the novels. The greatest tour de force, of course, is the famous opening to the fifth chapter of Howards End which takes place at a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Lucy Honeychurch is also fond of Beethoven and plays both him and Schubert on the piano. Lucia di Lammermoor brings Philip and Gino together in Where Angels Fear to Tread; Mrs. Failing turns into Aunt Em'ly in Stephen's ribald song, while Rickie

Elliot sees Agnes in Wagnerian terms.<sup>1</sup> Professor Godbole chants in the first section of A Passage to India when leaving Fielding's house, and that novel concludes with Godbole chanting once again at the Hindu festival.

The structures of Forster's novels are also musical. There are a number of leading motifs, or leitmotifs, which form at once the philosophical heart of the novels and their structural principle. The symbolical moment is obviously the most important of these, but music itself, as we see, is also used, as are books, art, and violence. Aziz approvingly notes that Fielding's books are not ranged coldly on shelves in the English manner. Mr. Beebe's study is garrisoned with regiments of books lining the walls from floor to ceiling with their sombre garbs. Cecil responds to Lucy, and Philip to Caroline, as works of art, while Agnes is associated with the Rhine maidens for Rickie. Music is used to suggest a life beneath Lucy's lifelessness; but more often the wrong use of art, where it is confused with life, is used to symbolize the lack of any commitment to life. Violence, on the other hand, directly or indirectly, is associated with reality. The fight between Philip and Gino, the murder in the piazza in A Room with a View, Stephen Wonham and Ansell wrestling on the lawn, Charles's murder of Leonard, Aziz's athletic

tussle with the subaltern on the polo field: in each case violence proffers the opportunity to connect. Contrasted with this is misleading, imagined violence: George Emerson's advances are described as attacks; Adela's belief that she was assaulted in the cave.

Each of Forster's novels, then, may be viewed purely as an aesthetic structure. But, as with all art, form is a function of meaning. Plot is discarded, or made ridiculous by quite deliberate melodrama. Character is a function within a structure, a point of view, complex in itself, but whose aesthetic value and its intellectual one can be seen only within a larger pattern. The patterns themselves, with their component parts, are the intellectual fabric of the novels.

To return now to the question of language with which we began, it is obvious that Forster's use of irony as a device in social comedy is its least important aspect. The greater success of irony is its aptitude as a formal medium for Forster's thought. The nature of the elements, in the intellectual pattern of the novels, is examined and revised by the pattern itself. The alliance of worldliness with sympathy and tolerance is expressed by an irony which, because it suggests the opposite point of view to that stated,

implies firstly the weakness of any single position and thus the value of tolerance; but secondly, it serves as a rhetorical device in an exploratory argument. Because irony is used to demonstrate the narrator's sense of the existence and worth of speciously conflicting points of view, it persuades the reader of the narrator's own balance. And balance, of course, is the characteristic uniting Forster's thought and his form.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>E.M. Forster, The Longest Journey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 21-22.

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