

"FANTASY" AND "PROPHECY" IN E.M. FORSTER

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E.M. FORSTER

By

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ABSTRACT

In Aspects of the Novel, Forster discusses the function and importance of "fantasy" and "prophecy", fictional elements that play an essential role in his own works. The object of this study is to provide a definition of these two terms, and to apply them to an evaluation of Forster's two most renowned novels--Howards End and A Passage to India.

For My Parents

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I

INTRODUCTION

1.

The rich and complex nature of Forster's fiction has stimulated numerous critical commentaries which substantially add to the novelist's fascination. Seeking a fair appraisal of Forster's art, many scholars turn to Aspects of the Novel (1927), a series of lectures prepared by the novelist to discuss the various ways of exploring as well as judging the works of his fellow writers --and implicitly his own. But oddly, though critics frequently employ these diverse approaches as touchstones for Forster's own novels, two significant "aspects"-- "fantasy" and "prophecy"--have not received the close and careful consideration that they deserve. Thus, the object of this study is to provide a definition of these two terms and to apply them to Forster's career, with particular attention to his two most acclaimed novels --Howards End (1910) and A Passage to India (1924).

That the two terms, "fantasy" and "prophecy" have failed to receive due attention is partly Forster's fault. He cites one literary example after another without, however, adequately explaining his underlying terminology. His nebulous conception in fact constitutes the

chief blemish of Aspects of the Novel, a critical work often praised for its wit and panache. Consequently, scholars' notions of "fantasy" and "prophecy" widely diverge. It is then both requisite and beneficial to peruse Forster's illustrations in conjunction with critics' interpretations to attain a full comprehension of these two fictional elements.

"Fantasy," writes Forster, "implies the supernatural," and it may be expressed by the introduction of gods (Fauns and Dryads), ghosts, angels, monkeys, monsters, midgets, witches into ordinary life, "or the introduction of ordinary men into no man's land, the future, the past, the interior of the earth, the fourth dimension; or divings into and dividings of personality [slips of the memory, verbal coincidences and puns]; or finally the device of parody or adaptation."¹ Indeed, his short stories and novels are replete with these "numinous" instances, and W. Gilomen's effort to enumerate them is admirable. In doing so, however, he neglects to ask, in an article intended to shed light on "fantasy", the simple yet vital question of its purpose and function.² Let us now attempt to remedy his omission.

2.

In Aspects of the Novel, Forster begins his discussion of the two terms with the following hazy though oft-quoted passage:

There is more in the novel than time or people or logic or any of the derivatives, more even than Fate. And by 'more' I do not mean something that excludes these aspects nor something that includes them, embraces them. I mean something that cuts across them like a bar of light, that is intimately connected with them at one place and patiently illumines all their problems, and at another place shoots over or through them as if they did not exist. We shall give that bar of light two names, fantasy and prophecy.³

Though censuring the novelist for failing to elucidate his definition of "fantasy", Rudolf B. Schmerl finds that Forster's chapter on "fantasy" "illuminates almost all its relevant elements".⁴ And he deduces from these components that "fantasy" consists in what "contradicts our experience, not the limited experience we can attain as individuals, but the totality of our knowledge of what our culture regards as real",⁵ and that its aim is to allow the author opportunities for satire or didacticism.⁶ Wilfred Stone states in the more precise terms of Freudian criticism that "fantasy", as a literary phenomenon, is a neat record of an imaginary achievement--"the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfied reality".⁷ Further, calling Forster's short stories "pure fantasies",⁸ he concludes his discussion of the tales thus: "Forster had outgrown the puerility implicit in the form, and it was time for him to be moving on."⁹ There is, of course, a certain truth in both these arguments. But since they are largely rooted in the commentators' individual hypotheses and critical attitudes rather than Forster's own, their validity is questionable. And Sena Jeter Naslund's objection to Stone

seems just, for indeed the novelist's "interest in fantasy persisted and matured".¹⁰ Yet strangely, in his endeavour to demonstrate that "the prophetic and philosophical ambience of A Passage to India" is developed through "fantasy", Naslund overlooks the main function of the latter form: nowhere in his analysis does he clearly indicate why Forster selects this particular mode to present his metaphysics.¹¹ James McConkey is more direct and helpful in this respect. "Fantasy", he expounds, is a device by which the writer achieves the creation of a backdrop distinct from phenomenal reality, "a mythology suitable to contain, to suggest, his own values".¹² Thus, in plain terms, this special technique supplies the author with a symbolic framework which parallels and reinforces his thematic intent. Still, the method requires thorough scrutiny.

A close view of Forster's chapter on "fantasy" discovers that the term does not solely represent what defies reason but denotes the welding of the real and the supernatural. Hence, he says: "The power of fantasy penetrates into every corner of the universe, but not into the forces that govern it--the stars that are the brain of heaven, the army of unalterable law, remain untouched...."¹³ Elsewhere in his journalistic writings, the novelist adds that he likes the idea of "fantasy", of muddling up the "actual and the impossible until the reader isn't sure which is which."¹⁴ The significance of this genre is at least two-fold. Its

peculiarity, which often demands that the reader make an additional adjustment, enables the writer both to surprise and delight.¹⁵ But more importantly, epitomizing the spiritual, the ideal, it offers the artist the objective distance from which to perceive the absurdities and imperfections of reality. Sometimes, "fantasy" assumes a close relationship with the setting, characters and action of the plot, and is straightforwardly employed to uncover men's deficiencies, "to illumine all their problems", as manifested in Forster's "The Curate's Friend" (1907).¹⁶ Embedded in this tale is a short story ironically told by a clergyman to dramatize his humanistic principles. The protagonist's aspirations--merely to appear congenial and to tend his daily duty as a priest--subtly betray his superficiality. The turning point of his life occurs in his chance meeting with a faun, which induces him to recognize the intrinsic value of love and passion, a quality generally overlooked or ignored in a society full of deceit and conventionality. But in some cases, "fantasy" works independently, bearing no apparent connection with "time or people or logic", playing "through them as if they did not exist", the result being that it intensifies the welter of existence, notably in "The Other Side of the Hedge" (1904). This story describes a boy's discovery of a utopia exemplifying the spontaneity and freedom absent in a generation plagued by the monotony and pettiness of mechanization and materialism. Mainly

"fantasy" is a literary technique distinguished by its double vision, its direct or indirect presentation of two different worlds--the visible and the visionary--the contrast between which invariably exposes human folly. Such an effect also manifests itself in novels that Forster judges as belonging to this form, especially Sterne's Tristram Shandy (1760-67), wherein "Muddle is almost incarnate" and Joyce's Ulysses (1922), a modern parallel to Homer's Odyssey. Altogether, embodying a union of "the kingdoms of magic and common sense",¹⁷ of moral criticism and humour, "fantasy" provides the mythology, the symbolic structure compatible and consistent with the novelist's trenchant vision of human experience.

Still, we need to be fairly scrupulous and stringent in our application of what is really a rather broad and abstract theory. Although many "fantastic" novels are discussed in Aspects as parodies or adaptations--Ulysses is a prime example--Forster's postulation that Joseph Andrews (1742) fits the "fantastic" mode is perhaps too arbitrary. Indeed, the latter novel originated from Fielding's wish to parody Richardson's Pamela (1740-41); its author "begins by playing the fool in a Richardsonian world and ends by being serious in a world of his own".¹⁸ Yet, Forster does not seem to realize that the world delineated in both of these works is an attempt at a realistic portrayal of eighteenth century English society. Thus, "fantasy" and social

satire are not always interchangeable. A facile acceptance of Forster's definition is inexpedient and unprofitable.

3.

Forster's definition of "prophecy" is no less abstruse. Construed far from its ordinary meaning, it serves neither as an agent of "foretelling the future" nor as "an appeal for righteousness".¹⁹ Rather, it is a music-like quality, "an accent in the novelist's voice"; its theme is "the universe, or something universal", and may "imply any of the faiths that have haunted humanity--Christianity, Buddhism, dualism, Satanism, or the mere raising of human love and hatred to such a power that their normal receptacles no longer contain them...."²⁰ Understandably, such an arcane description elicits disparate scholarly responses. W. Gilomen and Edwin Nierenberg are alike in their misunderstanding of "prophecy". The former simply assumes it to be the novelist's central message, his persistent opposition of "reality" and "sham".²¹ Similarly, despite his sensible analysis of the Forsterian theme of friendship and human brotherhood, the latter fails to perceive that "prophecy" is quintessentially a literary technique. Naslund correctly points out that critics "usually reduce prophecy to theme in terms of patterns of imagery".²² But in identifying this aesthetic style with a "tone of voice" expressing Forster's spiritual vision, he omits to specify precisely the manner in which the novelist conveys this moral percept-

ion. His ready espousal of Forster's terminology that the prophet "sings" does not help to clarify the issue.²³ Stone takes "prophecy" to be the "bardic influence" that conjointly works with Forster's comic strain to attain a "noumenal" vision, to "realize the spirit embedded in [the phenomenal world]", the effect of which "argues the compatibility of human and absolute values, and provides meeting-places for the dualisms of his esthetics and his art".²⁴ Stone's explication is unflinchingly elaborate and learned, but also egregiously contrived and ponderous, causing us to wonder how germane his theory is to Forster's notion of "prophecy". McConkey is equally shaky in suggesting that "prophecy" is the representation of a mythology based on "a mingling of physical reality with some universal element", and that the "prophetic" writer does so not by making a direct statement about the world he conceives, but by merging both his characters and readers into it "through the power of his voice", through the mystical quality of that voice and the accent it possesses.²⁵ Here the critic gives little indication as to the true nature, cause and effect of Forster's term. These questions, crucial to our understanding of "prophecy", become our immediate concern.

We can best understand "prophecy" by considering it in association with its kin--"fantasy". The enlivening spirit of these two modes is prominent in Forster's description: "As I said of the fantasist, [the prophet] manip-

ulates a beam of light which occasionally touches the object so sedulously dusted by the hand of common sense, and renders them more vivid than they can ever be in domesticity."²⁶ Yet, the two perform their roles in significantly different ways. The one shocks by introducing the improbable; the other does so in terms of "the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction".²⁷ The prophet's lyrical turn is rooted in the nature of the material he wishes to convey. By and large, "prophecy" is a superior style to "fantasy". The latter illumines, but in a limited fashion (i.e., it "glances about").²⁸ Though it graphically unfolds man's inadequacy by juxtaposing the spheres of the actual and the ideal, it lacks a comprehensive view of humanity, of its value and position in the universe. The former, composed in an even remoter emotional state than "fantasy", tends towards an unifying vision (i.e. it "reaches back"):²⁹ it endeavours to express the novelist's outlook on life by portraying the relationship between the mortal world and the infinite, between human experience and its larger ramifications. Like "fantasy", the "prophetic" spirit sometimes expresses itself in the landscape, characters and their interactions, as evident in the impact of Aziz's arrest (for attempted rape) on Fielding in A Passage to India. The episode depicts Fielding's view of the Marabar Hills, the spot where the incident occurs, which leads to the schoolmaster's questioning of his personal

achievement as a human being, and his realization of human vulnerability and puniness. At other times, this revelatory force assumes dominance in the foreground, rendering the people and events almost irrelevant. Mrs. Moore's departure from Chandrapore in A Passage is illustrative. The scene of Asirgarh imparts to her the expansiveness of India, hinting that her judgement of existence based on the Marabar incident is not final. Such a mystical landscape also bespeaks the awesomeness of the elemental domain, and consequently man's partial understanding, his incapability of fully comprehending the ultimate reality.

It is thus obvious that poetic representation chimes in with the nature of "prophecy", a serious and lofty form which often incurs the reader's "humility"--his respect--and the "suspension of the sense of humour".³⁰ Even more remarkably, it serves as a forceful medium prompting the reader's intuitive identification of the writer's universal perspective, eliciting "the sensation of sinking into a transparent globe and seeing our experience floating far above us on its surface, tiny, remote, yet ours".³¹ This subtle influence, emanating from the novelist's comprehensive vision, his attempt to capture a glimpse of the purpose of life through exploring beyond physical reality to the transcendental realm, is a rare gift claimed by very few writers. In Aspects, Forster extensively alludes to Dostoyevsky, who shows us that "unity through love and pity"

occurs in a region in fiction "which can only be implied"³² and Melville, who demonstrates his conception of evil by reaching straight back, "after the initial roughness of his realism", "into the universal, to a blackness and sadness so transcending our own that they are undistinguishable from glory".³³ Hardy and Conrad do not make the grade for, despite their poetic language, they are too moralistic; they cast limiting philosophical "reflections on life and things", a role incongruous with the prophet's nature.³⁴ And in this sense, they are inferior to Lawrence who, apart from his moments of didacticism, is able to evoke the individuality and vitality of existence by "irradiating nature from within".³⁵ Predominantly, "prophecy" provides the means by which the novelist creates a symbolic network, a mythology eliciting the reader's instinctive grasp of his world vision through poetic communication.

4.

Critics have acknowledged Forster's stylistic evolution--his shift from the "fantastic" mode to the "prophetic". This development, however, does not imply that he composes two altogether different types of novels, but that he gradually emphasizes the latter perspective more than the former in his works. His short stories and pre-war novels (save for Howards End) are basically "fantastic". Yet, the "prophetic" strain latent in Forster's early fictional writings reveals itself more and more and develops

into a dominant force in A Passage to India. Further, we see in this post-war novel not the elimination of "fantasy", but its maturation. Prior to A Passage--particularly in the tales--this magical force figures almost obtrusively (commonly in the shape of a deity or some paradise), serving as a corrective to the defectiveness of society; it is superficially edifying but more often didactic. Dramatized in a more realistic context, "fantasy" takes on a more subtle guise in A Passage, integrating with "prophecy" to present Forster's ontological perception. By way of this numinous influence, the novelist handily discloses the relationship between the human sphere and the transcendent reality.

Though less sophisticated, the early novels prepare for the complexity of Forster's masterpiece--A Passage to India. A brief view of them is thus worthwhile. With its theme of homosexual love, subject matter broadly different from that of the other novels, Maurice (1914, first published 1970) remains outside the province of our discussion. And though, in order of publication, A Room with a View (1908) is Forster's third novel, it is perhaps the earliest conceptually, since the novelist drafted a large part of it in 1903.³⁶ For this reason, we shall begin our survey with this comedy.

Widely regarded as the sunniest and most light-hearted of Forster's novels, A Room with a View shares the theme of love and truth with many of the tales such as "The Curate's Friend", "The Eternal Moment" (1905) and "The

Story of the Siren" (1920). The novel centres upon Lucy Honeychurch's struggle to perceive the import of marriage through her choice of George Emerson over Cecil Vyse, her preference of passion and spontaneity to intellectual snobbery and conventional morality, values which her lovers embody respectively. Of course, what deepens the books' enchantment is, as both Stone and Lionel Trilling indicate, the "prophetic" element that lurks behind its simple, exhilarating story.³⁷ Lucy's ultimate discovery of her true feelings for George ensures her spiritual salvation; it rescues her from the danger of damnation in the form of celibacy, from yielding to the "armies of the benighted" that "have sinned against passion and truth".³⁸

But for all its gaiety and brightness, A Room with a View is not wholly satisfying. Its major problem lies in Forster's handling of the relationship between Lucy and George, a connection on which the meaning of the novel rests. The novelist's criticism of his age--his unmasking of the superficiality and smugness of modern English society--mostly constructed around the interplay between Cecil and Lucy, emerges emphatically in the book. His timidity (evidenced by the embarrassed kiss he offers Lucy a few days after their engagement), his intolerance (shown in the superior attitude he holds towards Lucy's mother and her friends) and his misconception of culture and art (implied in his complacent confession to Freddy, his fiancée's broth-

er, that he is an academic rather than an athlete)--all exemplify Cecil's "asceticism", his self-defensiveness, sham respectability and sterile pedantry. The dissolution of the betrothal symbolizes Lucy's final resolution to combat the "vices" corresponding to an essentially bourgeois culture, a repressive system of which Cecil is a victim. Conversely, Forster's ideal of sincerity and understanding, of the enlightenment and freedom of the soul, based on the union of Lucy and George, only barely registers. We do learn of George's vibrancy and candour--but only meagrely. For the novelist fails to develop his characters and action to the fullest effect. George's divulging of his love for Lucy is a case in point:

'You say Mr. Vyse wants me to listen to him, Mr. Emerson. Pardon me for suggesting that you have caught the habit.'

And he took the shoddy reproof and touched into immortality. He said:

'Yes, I have,' and sank down as if suddenly weary. 'I'm the same kind of brute at bottom. This desire to govern a woman--it lies very deep, and men and women must fight it together before they shall enter the Garden. But I do love you--surely in a better way than he does.' He thought. 'Yes--really in a better way. I want you to have your own thoughts even when I hold you in my arms.' He stretched them towards her. 'Lucy, be quick--there's no time for us to talk now--come to me as you came in the spring, and afterwards I will be gentle and explain. I have cared for you since that man died. I cannot live without you. "No good," I thought: "she is marrying someone else"; but I meet you again when all the world is glorious water and sun. As you came through the wood I saw that nothing else mattered. I called. I wanted to live and have my chance of joy.'

For an individual desperately trying to dissuade his love

from committing herself to his rival, George is commendably articulate and persuasive. Yet, he is decidedly too fluent, too discriminating to be spontaneous. Highly admonitory and somewhat overwrought, the passage represents George as not so much an ardent lover as an earnest preacher promulgating the faith of Eros and Pallas Athene. In general, the attachment between Lucy and George is, in Leavis' words, "stated but not convincingly conveyed".⁴⁰ And Forster's realism--his assessment of modern civilization--jars with his symbolism--his conception of an orderly and meaningful existence. A Room with a View is rather callowly fantastic.

Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) is somewhat more subtle. In theme, it runs close to A Room, celebrating the naturalness and creativity of passion, of elemental love, as opposed to the rigidity and mechanicalness of a prudish morality. The dichotomy between appearance and reality, the vital conflict upon which A Room is structured, is similarly portrayed in Angels, only this time Cecil--the epitome of the English middle-class mentality--is supplanted by the Herritons of Sawston, and George--the image of an impassioned spirit of an "Italian" temperament--is superseded by Gino of Monteriano. Primarily, Where Angels Fear to Tread is a story of the growth of Caroline Abbott and Philip Herriton, as well as their quest through disillusioning and stultifying experience to the achievement of self-knowledge.

In so far as the realization of the novelist's thematic purpose is concerned, Angels is more effective than A Room. The tension between truthfulness and hypocrisy, dramatized through the juxtaposition of Sawston and Monteriano, surfaces sharply in the novel. The inhibitive and enervating effect of the Sawstonian culture is subtly evoked through the Herritons' warped sensibility. It finds expression in Philip's priggishness--his general scorn of the people and things around him--and in his mother's "petty unselfishness"--her complacency and dogged adherence to decorum evidenced in her ludicrous attempt to retrieve the child of Gino, to whom Lilia, her late daughter-in-law, was married. In much the same way he manages A Room, Forster furnishes Angels, principally a comedy of manners, with a philosophical dimension--only more overtly and even brutally. The danger of modern alienation acutely betrays itself in the insensitivity and bigotry of Harriet, Philip's sister, who becomes the agent of death in executing her mother's plan to "rescue"--or kidnap--her nephew from Gino. Like A Room, Angels dips into the larger concern of the principle of existence, of spiritual rebirth.

The world of Monteriano, the antithesis of Sawston, is equally well-painted. We appreciate this home of passion and vitality mainly through our perception of Gino, and particularly his relationship with Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott, Lilia's crony determined to discharge her

moral obligation by bringing the Italian's baby to England to be properly reared. Surely, Gino succeeds better than George Emerson, his counterpart in A Room, in performing his symbolic role; his deeds are believable for they are no pure, unworldly achievements but those of a human being graced with a divine gift. Beyond the façade of his crassness and vulgarity lies a fervent, glowing young man capable of profound love. Upon the news of his son's death, he releases his rage by thrashing Philip, who assumes responsibility for the whole accident. Yet, he gives way to compassion and forbearance, in response to Caroline's reminder of the inanity of his cruel revenge. The tenderness which Caroline has previously discerned in him as he bathed his son again surges forth, inducing his reconciliation with Philip. Altogether, Gino has a great impact on both of these English characters:

The peril was over at last. A great sob shook the whole body, another followed, and then he gave a piercing cry of woe, and stumbled towards Miss Abbott like a child and clung to her.

All through the day Miss Abbott had seemed to Philip like a goddess, and more than ever did she seem so now....Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty....Her hands were folded round the sufferer, stroking him lightly, for even a goddess can do no more than that. And it seemed fitting, too, that she should bend her head and touch his forehead with her lips.

Philip looked away, as he sometimes looked away from the great pictures where visible forms suddenly become inadequate for the things they have shown to us. He was happy; he was assured that there was greatness in the world. There came to him an earnest desire to be good through the example of this good woman. He would try henceforward to be worthy of the

things she had revealed. Quietly, without hysterical prayers or banging of drums, he underwent conversion. He was saved.

The scene underlines Caroline's spiritual transfiguration, which would have been impossible without her meeting Gino. Their association, culminating in her realization that the Italian is actually a loving father, serves to remove her from the bounds of parochial Sawston to embrace the emotional vitality characteristic of Monteriano. No longer a receiver but a giver, Caroline here matures and becomes in Philip's eyes a charitable goddess. This metamorphosis affirms Philip's spiritual regeneration. The vision of Caroline's goodness marks his change from apathy to a deep awareness of the purpose of life. The characters' growth in understanding, arising out of their affiliation with Gino, connotes Forster's lucid integration of the real and the symbolic. For the most part, Where Angels Fear to Tread is credible "fantasy".

Weighed against Forster's Italian novels, The Longest Journey (1907) is incontestably more ambitious. The Forsterian concept of "reality"--the notion of self-fulfillment--again becomes the central preoccupation of what is commonly considered the novelist's most autobiographical book. In demonstrating this principle, both A Room and Angels partake of a conflict, which expresses itself in the form of a search toward the distinction between falsity and truthfulness, the choice of light (a view) over darkness

(a room), sentiment (of fools) over impersonality (of angels). The Longest Journey not only embodies this process, but seeks to explore its implications. "Reality" in this book thus assumes a more universal posture: it comprises the recognition and acknowledgement of the flux and stability exemplifying the nature of existence, the knowledge not of good and evil, but of good-and-evil. The Longest Journey essentially depicts the struggle of Rickie Elliot to live by the truth of "the wine" while being immersed in the "knowledge of the world".⁴²

Fairly obviously, Journey shows a stronger "prophetic" drift than the Italian novels. Indeed, the violent death of Gino's baby in Angels, the outcome of Harriet's obduracy, betokens the peril of modern sterility. Yet such a menace hardly threatens utterly to overturn the world of the novel. Representing a social error rather than a crime, the child's death is as an unlucky accident in what is otherwise a social comedy.⁴³ The Longest Journey attempts to demonstrate Forster's humanistic creed with even greater urgency and intensity. The humbug of middle-class convention manifests itself again through the world of Sawston, a place distinguished by its mean-spiritedness, literalism and barren intellectualism, wherein Rickie, the protagonist, becomes corrupted and abandons the Cambridge values he originally holds--friendship, intelligence and free thinking. His spiritual reawakening begins with his settlement in the

Wiltshire countryside, an abode of vigour and spontaneity into which Stephen Wonham, Rickie's half-brother, is integrated. Yet, the influence of Sawston is damaging to the extent that Rickie not only fails fully to recover but is finally destroyed. Coming out of a rather weary sense of duty rather than a burning desire to rescue his brother from being hit by a train, Rickie's resolution to die for Stephen indicates his personal disillusionment with life. Yet in a sense, the protagonist's loss is an indefinite promise of fulfillment. His death implies his submission to a larger humanistic spirit, and generates the positive effect of redemption in terms of Rickie's survival: it ensures the continuance of man's intrinsic loving nature, the sole source of resistance to the threat of modern materialism, the hope of "the future of our race".⁴⁴ The Longest Journey is an original aesthetic creation indicating Forster's new inclination to "prophecy".

The novel, however, is not an entirely successful work of art. In general, it misses the structural coherence of Where Angels Fear to Tread. There are, of course, plenty of splendid moments in Journey, and they usually occur as a result of Forster's proficient mastery of social comedy in evincing the oppressive morals of Sawston. The essentially unimaginative, constraining climate of the place finds vivid expression in Herbert Pembroke--Rickie's brother-in-law and headmaster of Sawston school--particular-

ly in his constant battle with the day-boys. Consider Pembroke's oration at the school assembly. Deflating him from eloquence to banality, the scene, as John Harvey remarks, attests to Forster's genius as "master of irony by juxtaposition":⁴⁵

He told them that this term, the second of his reign, was the term for Dunwood House; that it behoved every boy to labour during it for his house's honour, and through the house, for the honour of the school. Taking a wider range, he spoke of England, or rather of Great Britain, and of her continental foes. Portraits of empire-builders hung on the wall, and he pointed to them. He quoted imperial poets....And it seemed that only a short ladder lay between the preparation₄₆ room and the Anglo-Saxon hegemony of the globe.

And Agnes Elliot's homespun exhortation to her husband is equally "felicitous". It exemplifies the grinding system with which the Pembrokes (Agnes is Herbert's sister) identify, a materialism that deprives the individual of his identity. By urging Rickie to pursue the cause of "hard uncongenial work", Agnes actually directs him to the path of alienation:

To do good! For what other reason are we here? Let us give up our refined sensations, and our comforts, and our art, if thereby we can make other people happier and better. The woman he loved had urged him to do good! With a vehemence that surprised her, he exclaimed, "I'll do it."⁴⁷

In essence, Agnes' imposition of her ideal pattern upon Rickie symbolizes an act of tyranny, a curb to freedom. And her rather Victorian interpretation of work as an end rather than as a means towards personal integrity implies her purblindness, her contorted perception of reality.

But the most troublesome blemish of Journey is Forster's failure to sustain his novel on the same level of verve and energy in conveying his moral intention as he does in demonstrating his insight into social ills. The novelist's vital principle is never truly brought to imaginative life. On the whole, Stephen Wonham is a pale embodiment of the norm against which the value of everyday living is tested. Endowed with "coarse kindness and rustic strength", he figures as a model of sincerity, breaking through the pretenses, sordidness and humdrum of bourgeois mediocrity.⁴⁸ Yet, he functions not as a mere emblem but as a human character given to little vices: Forster takes care to avoid the danger of idealization by emphasizing his surliness, impetuosity and erratic insensitivity which, at times, degenerates into brutality, as evident in Stephen's persistent desire to inflict torture upon a shepherd for his breach of trust. Of course, the churlish hero reminds us of Gino in Where Angels Fear to Tread. But while the latter's barbarism springs from his passionate valuation of life and things --particularly his baby--and is tempered with a keen sense of sympathy,⁴⁹ the former's is caused by his willfulness. Though Rickie's judgement is not always sound (a result of his flawed sensibility), we do acknowledge that there is, at least, a certain truth in the impression he conceives of his brother:

The boy had a little reminded him of Gerald [a ferocious and caddish footballer]--the Gerald of history,

not the Gerald of romance. He was more genial, but there was the same brutality, the same peevish insistence on the pound of flesh.⁵⁰

Stephen's obstinacy shows Forster's piercing sense of good-and-evil, his penetration into the complexity and inconsistency of human nature. Nonetheless, the boorish ploughboy outrages middle-class gentility at the expense of his moral status, thus overturning the novelist's original purpose. To some degree, Stephen's volatile temper dims our vision of the positive values he embodies.

Likewise, Forster's confusing symbolism greatly weakens the "prophetic" effect that he desires to achieve in Journey. In other words, the novel represents an abortive attempt to reveal his ontological vision--human integrity through love and sympathy--through "fantasy". John Harvey severely censures the episode describing Rickie's sudden revelation, his insight into the worth of existence through discerning the love that exists between Gerald and Agnes.⁵¹ Admittedly, Forster fails to do this mystical scene justice by allowing Rickie to disclose its symbolic meaning through speculative rambling rather than genuine poetic evocation. Further, the generally affected and grandiose language overstates the import of the passage--the realization of "a moment of intense awareness of personal experience".⁵² An even more flagrant example of this kind occurs in the concluding chapter of the middle section of the novel. It comprises the narrator's comment on the preceding incident

--Rickie's mental breakdown at the denunciation of him by Ansell, the Cambridge philosopher, for denying his brother. Dealing purely in abstractions, without making the slightest reference to the drama illuminating the moment of Rickie's self-awareness, the intervention of the authorial voice appears awkward, if not entirely out of place:

The soul has her own currency. She mints her spiritual coinage and stamps it with the image of some beloved face. With it she pays her debts, with it she reckons, saying, "This man has worth, this man is worthless." And in time she forgets its origin; it seems to her to be a thing unalterable, divine. But the soul can also have her bankruptcies.

.
 There is, indeed, another coinage that bears on it not man's image but God's. It is incorruptible, and the soul may trust it safely; it will serve her beyond the stars. But it cannot give us friends, or the embrace of a lover, or the touch of children, for with our fellow-mortals it has no concern....Have we learnt the true discipline of a bankruptcy if we turn to such coinage as this? Will it really profit us so much, if we save our souls and lose the whole world?⁵³

The overall assertive tone and the closing rhetorical questions fully betray the didacticism of this allegorical description. Here manifestly, Forster intrudes not as a prophet but as an eager moralist upholding the principle of spiritual well-being through mutual understanding. Besides, the discourse shares the stylistic defects of the formerly mentioned key passage. Its expressions are so often stilted and strained that they sometimes slide into the ludicrous, thereby perverting the novelist's intention to present his metaphysical preoccupations. Conscious of the difficulty of mastering the technique of "prophecy"--the

poetic evocation of the author's conception of reality, the representation of the link between the human world and the infinite--Forster laments in Aspects of the Novel: "It is a pity that Man cannot be at the same time impressive and truthful."⁵⁴ He fails to realize this ideal in The Longest Journey. Still, he continues his quest in Howards End.

NOTES

¹E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (Middlesex: Pelican, 1970), pp. 117-118.

²W. Gilomen, "Fantasy and Prophecy in E.M. Forster's Work", English Studies, XXVII (1946), 92-112.

³Forster, Aspects, p. 112.

⁴Rudolf B. Schmerl, "Fantasy as Technique", Virginia Quarterly Review, 43 (1966), 644.

⁵Ibid., p. 645.

⁶Ibid., p. 647.

⁷Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 124.

⁸Ibid., p. 160.

⁹Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁰Sena Jeter Naslund, "Fantasy, Prophecy, and Point of View in A Passage to India", SNNTS, 7 (1975), 259.

¹¹Ibid., p. 259.

¹²James McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 47.

¹³Forster, Aspects, p. 116.

¹⁴-----, "A Book that Influenced Me" in Two Cheers for Democracy (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), p. 230.

¹⁵-----, Aspects, p. 114.

¹⁶All the short stories referred to in this chapter are from The Collected Tales of E.M. Forster (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947).

¹⁷Forster, Aspects, p. 121.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 129.

²⁰Ibid., p. 20.

²¹Gilomen, "Fantasy and Prophecy in E.M. Forster's Work", p. 106.

²²Naslund, "Fantasy, Prophecy, and Point of View in A Passage to India", p. 259.

²³Ibid., p. 274.

²⁴Stone, The Cave and the Mountain, pp. 117-118.

²⁵McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster, pp. 46-47.

²⁶Forster, Aspects, p. 139.

²⁷Ibid., p. 129.

²⁸Ibid., p. 140.

²⁹Ibid., p. 140.

³⁰Ibid., p. 130.

³¹Ibid., p. 138.

³²Ibid., p. 139.

³³Ibid., p. 137.

³⁴Ibid., p. 141.

³⁵Ibid., p. 147.

³⁶E.M. Forster, A Room with a View, ed. Oliver Stallybrass (Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), p. 8.

³⁷See Stone, The Cave and the Mountain, p. 217; Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster (New York: New Directions, 1943), p. 97.

³⁸Forster, A Room, p. 194.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 186-187.

⁴⁰F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 263.

⁴¹E.M. Forster, Where Angels Fear to Tread (New York: Vintage, 1920), pp. 172-173.

⁴²-----, The Longest Journey (New York: Vintage,

1962), p. 66.

⁴³Stone, The Cave and the Mountain, p. 162.

⁴⁴Forster, Journey, p. 310.

⁴⁵John Harvey, "Imagination and Moral Theme in E.M. Forster's The Longest Journey", Essays in Criticism, VI, No. 4 (1956), 429.

⁴⁶Forster, Journey, p. 171.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 166.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 208.

⁴⁹Trilling, Forster, p. 73.

⁵⁰Forster, Journey, p. 115.

⁵¹Harvey, "Imagination and Moral Theme in E.M. Forster's The Longest Journey", p. 431.

⁵²Ibid., p. 431.

⁵³Forster, Journey, pp. 245-246.

⁵⁴-----, Aspects, p. 150.

II

HOWARDS END

1.

Howards End is crucial to our understanding of Forster's art. The significance of the novel lies in its far-reaching vision and sophisticated craft, unparalleled in Forster's work before A Passage to India. The conflict between spiritualism and materialism, art and science, passion and intellect, the outer physical world and the inner life--the novelist's central preoccupation which, in his first three novels, results in the easy rejection of one set of values in favour of another--resolves itself in Howards End into a reconciliation of these opposites. Such a development arises out of Forster's mature recognition of the complexity of reality in which these seemingly antithetical moral issues are not only related but interdependent. Likewise, Howards End is stylistically more intricate than its predecessors. The early novels share an affinity in their attempt to underscore the Forsterian notion of the human imagination through a mythological framework in which fantasy plays a prominent role. The spirit of the supernatural, though pervasive in Howards End, is more subtly present. Forster makes a considerable effort to transmit this peculiar force through an elaborate symbolism built around the

setting, characters and action, all of which express the theme of sympathy and love achieved through "prophecy"--an intuitive grasp of transcendental experience. Our main concern here is to evaluate Forster's success or failure in his attempt to render his message by integrating theme and technique--that is, whether he integrates the two elements of "fantasy" and "prophecy" with the central message of universal brotherhood.

The setting of Howards End--the house itself--epitomizes the clash between modern social conventions and freedom of the soul. The importance of this recurrent metaphor lies primarily in its unifying function: the novel commences at Howards End and concludes there. Even though the setting varies in the course of the story, the house acts as a spirit that hovers over the moral landscape of the characters. Apart from creating structural symmetry, this extended image also enables Forster to achieve thematic unity. Like the other major symbols in the novel, Howards End is expansive; every time it reappears, it encompasses an added meaning. The contrast between the visible and the invisible embodied in Howards End evolves, through the process of the characters' spiritual maturation, into a marriage of these contraries. Thus, the mysterious influence of the house transforms Margaret Schlegel from a theorist of personal relations into an active participant. The enchanted milieu of Howards End provides the background for the author's mythopoeic vision.

The opening of Howards End, a letter from Helen Schlegel to her sister, Margaret, vividly underlines the steadfastness and peace that the old dwelling exemplifies. Reflecting the freshness and vitality of its pastoral environment, the house constitutes the source of strength and spontaneity that its owner, Ruth Wilcox, embodies. She is a part of the landscape, as organic to it as the house or the surrounding hayfield:

The house is covered with a vine. I looked out earlier, and Mrs. Wilcox was already in the garden. She evidently loves it. No wonder she sometimes looked tired. She was watching the large red poppies. Then she walked off the lawn to the meadow, whose corner to the right I can just see. Trail, trail, went her long dress over the sopping grass, and she came back with her hands full of hay that was cut yesterday--I suppose for rabbits or something, as she kept on smelling it.¹

This picture of rural stability offers a sharp as well as deliberate contrast to the discordant image that almost immediately follows--the continual flux of urban London. Forster describes Wickham Place, where the Schlegels reside, as

fairly quiet, for a lofty promontory of buildings separated it from the main thoroughfare. One had the sense of a backwater, or rather of an estuary, whose waters flowed in from the invisible sea, and ebbed into a profound silence while the waves without were still beating. Though the promontory consisted of flats--expensive, with cavernous entrance halls, full of concierges and palms--it fulfilled its purpose, and gained for the older houses opposite a certain measure of peace. These, too, would be swept away in time, and another promontory would arise upon their site, as humanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London.²

Thus, Forster's principal objective is clear from the outset. Not only does he intend to examine the nature of modern

existence, but Forster desires also to convey his vision which derives from the juxtaposition between city and country, from the difficult question whether the ideal of order --an old civilization rooted in soil--can survive the barbarism of the Age of Property.

Of course, the city-country dichotomy is a common notion in literature, essentially descending from the classical models of Juvenal and Horace. But, rather than merely perpetuating this conception, Forster endows it with mystical significance. The key to Howards End lies in our proper understanding of the connection between the house and its mistress. To Ruth Wilcox, Howards End is no ordinary abode, but a spiritual home. In her complete identification with the place, she resembles a goddess inhabiting "the Holy of Holies". Together they serve as a touchstone for the rest of the characters whose salvation hinges on their realization of the true worth of the house.

The author artfully--perhaps too arbitrarily--distinguishes Ruth from the rest of the Wilcoxes, whose incompatibility with the bucolic setting is illustrated through an extensive symbol inseparable from the house--the hay. As E.K. Brown suggests, "response to the hay...is an index to value in a character."³ It is mainly through this image that we see the mystical relationship between Ruth Wilcox and her dwelling. Similarly, the Wilcoxes betray their impenetrable literalness through their hay-fever. Business-

minded, they live in a world of "telegrams and anger", totally unsusceptible to the unseen. Their conventional, practical and commercial outlook emerges most conspicuously with the death of Ruth Wilcox. Insensitive to her motives, they ignore her will that Howards End be bequeathed to Margaret Schlegel, whom they consider an outsider. The authorial voice deliberately, and somewhat clumsily, intervenes to elaborate on their superficiality in contrast with the whole numinous landscape:

Ought the Wilcoxes to have offered their home to Margaret? I think not. The appeal was too flimsy. It was not legal; it had been written in illness, and under the spell of a sudden friendship; it was contrary to the dead woman's intentions in the past, contrary to her nature, so far as that nature was understood by them. To them Howards End was a house; they could not know that to her it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir. And--pushing one step further in these mists--may they not have decided even better than they supposed? Is it credible that the possessions of the spirit can be bequeathed at all? Has the soul offspring? A wychelm tree, a vine, a wisp of hay with dew on it--can passion for such things be transmitted where there is no bond of blood? No; the Wilcoxes are not to be blamed. The problem is too terrific, and they could not even perceive a problem. No; it is natural and fitting that after due debate they should tear the note up and throw it on to their dining-room fire. The practical moralist may acquit them absolutely. He who strives to look deeper may acquit them--almost. For one hard fact remains. They did neglect a personal appeal. The woman who had died did say to⁴ them, 'Do this,' and they answered, 'We will not.'

This is the voice of the preacher, not the prophet. Rapt in his mysterious vision of the infinite, the prophet leaves it to others to interpret his iconography. In Howards End, Forster all too eagerly unravels his own symbols. As in the

passage above, much mythic resonance is lost in the course of dilation.

If the Wilcoxes are the builders of Ruth's temple (having supplied the economic wherewithal), the Schlegels are its worshippers. English descendants of a naturalized German who turned against Germany's imperialism and materialism, the Schlegels have been brought up to be cultivated intellectuals deeply interested in art, literature and human relations--Bloomsbury beliefs to which Forster is seriously committed. More emancipated both morally and intellectually than the Wilcoxes, the Schlegels readily fall under the spell of *Howards End*. That Margaret and Helen are upholders of truth, of the inner life, is seen in their appreciation of both the hay and its counterpart, the wych-elm.

During her stay at *Howards End*, Helen never ceases to marvel at the beauty of its scenery. And it is under the wych-elm that she kisses Paul Wilcox, the youngest son of the family, against a landscape vaguely fabulous, full of the "danger of surprise and light".⁵ The poetry of that moment, her receptiveness to passion evoked through the tree of love, certainly place her among the "saved". Yet, because of her reckless emotionalism and unthinking rejection of the material, she has to travel a long way before she discovers the genuine meaning of *Howards End*.

A more balanced person than Helen is her sister, Margaret. And it is she who eventually inherits Ruth's beni-

face. Though not beautiful or supremely brilliant, Margaret is distinguished by her "profound vivacity, a continual and sincere response to all that she encountered in her path through life".⁶ A remarkable sobriety and judiciousness co-exists with an equally remarkable sense of the infinite which draws her closer to Mrs. Wilcox in spirit. The separation of Paul and Helen causes a rift between the two families. But Margaret soon resumes friendship with the Wilcoxes when they move to London shortly after the crisis. Although Margaret has not the opportunity to see Howards End until late in the novel, she is intuitively well aware of and familiar with the place. She has little trouble accepting Ruth's curious story about the medicinal power of the pig's teeth in the bark of the elm. Her trust in the magical tree, in turn, clears up her misunderstanding with Mrs. Wilcox, so that she gains intimate knowledge of her friend and her sacred bond with the country home. Their friendship culminates in Ruth's proposal that Margaret visit Howards End. Yet, the trip never materializes. However highly she prizes personal intercourse with Ruth, Margaret is inexperienced. She must develop both the prose and the passion in her own life. Like Helen, she needs to find her way to Howards End.

The only Schlegel who does not participate in this pilgrimage is Tibby. Young, intelligent, yet somewhat academic and effeminate, he reminds us of Philip Herriton in Where Angels Fear to Tread. Caught up in his scholastic pur-

suits, he lives in some ivory tower remote from the world of human affairs. His tedious pedantry--his excessive commitment to the intellect at the expense of spontaneous emotion--fosters in him a frame of mind just as limited and sterile as the Wilcoxes'. That Tibby is fundamentally similar to his supposed opponents is shown by his allergy to hay. This symptom, which most of the men in the novel suffer from, enhances the major theme--the tension between rationality and intuition.

This conflict finds expression in Margaret's fulfillment of her role as Ruth's spiritual successor. Through her, the ultimate purpose of *Howards End* is revealed. Unquestionably, the house, like human existence, comprises more than the merely physical. It cannot stand without bricks and mortar; yet, it does not stand by them alone. Such a lesson Margaret learns from Mrs. Wilcox before her death. Enlightened, the disciple sees that her responsibility in life is, as she advises Helen, not to brood too much "on the superiority of the unseen to the seen",⁷ and, above all, not to differentiate the opposites, but integrate them:

Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon.
 Only connect the prose and the passion, and both
 will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its
 highest. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect,
 and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation
 that is life to either, will die.

The house, however, is not limited to the individual level. Its social dimension discovers itself when Margaret sojourns at *Howards End* for the first time. Admittance to

Ruth's shrine broadens her world perspective:

The sense of flux which had haunted her all the year disappeared for a time. She forgot the luggage and the motor-cars, and the hurrying men who know so much and connect so little. She recaptured the sense of space, which is the basis of all earthly beauty, and, starting from Howards End, she attempted to realize England. She failed--visions do not come when we try, though they may come through trying. But an unexpected love of the island awoke in her, connecting on this side with the joys of the flesh, on that with the inconceivable. Helen and her father had known this love, poor Leonard Bast was groping after it, but it had been hidden from Margaret till this afternoon. It had certainly come through the house and old Miss Avery. Through them: the notion of 'through' persisted; her mind trembled towards a conclusion which only the unwise have put into words.

Margaret's impression of Howards End extends into a representation of England firmly and peacefully rooted in the earth where class divisions no longer exist, where Wilcoxism and Schlegelism harmoniously merge. The materialization of this utopia much depends on how well the two families integrate under the shadow of Howards End.

Margaret saves her own marriage in much the same way Ruth Wilcox rescues Paul and Helen from panic and disaster. With a wisp of hay in her hands, Ruth comes forward to terminate a quarrel between Charles (her elder son) and Mrs. Munt (Helen's aunt) over the situation of the lovers--the breaking off of their engagement. Her pacifying capacity and empathy emanate from her affinity with the countryside and the past:

She seemed to belong not to the young people and their motor, but to the house, and to the tree that overshadowed it. One knew that she worshipped the

past, and that the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow had descended upon her--that wisdom to which we give the clumsy name of aristocracy. High-born she might not be. But assuredly, she cared about her ancestors, and let them help her.¹⁰

This intuitive wisdom, in turn, descends upon Margaret, who freely forgives Mr. Wilcox the sexual transgressions of his past. Deliberating in a garden where Margaret absent-mindedly plays with the fresh-mown hay, the betrothed couple re-establish their trust.¹¹ The episode terminates with Margaret's withdrawal to her chamber, leaving across the hall a long trickle of grass--a triumphant gesture characteristic of Ruth Wilcox whose presence the "heiress" feels throughout the tête-à-tête.

Without a proper appreciation of Howards End--the perpetual spring of insight and new life¹²--Margaret might not have been able to cope with the second altercation between her and Mr. Wilcox. They have been married for some time, but news of Helen's pregnancy--the outcome of an illicit affair--puts their relationship in jeopardy. Enraged by Mr. Wilcox's bourgeois fastidiousness and his egotism in tolerating no one's misbehaviour but his own, Margaret refuses to enter his house. Their showdown takes place in a verdant terrain overlooking the Six Hills, enigmatical mounts assumed by Margaret to be the burial place of chivalric warriors. A soldier's daughter, she valiantly combats her husband against this backdrop of ancient honour and glory. The confrontation culminates in the simultaneous

mortification and enlightenment of Mr. Wilcox. Margaret's military feat climaxes in another mystical gesture--she runs her fingers through the grass and senses the Six Hills moving.

The final scenes are indeed, as E.K. Brown observes, "more variously suggestive".¹³ But they also precisely betray the ultimate weakness of the novel. In his treatment of the overriding symbol of Howards End, Forster is perhaps guilty of a certain artificiality. No doubt, he eventually fulfills his intention of equating the house with a "heaven-haven". Yet, in doing so, he runs into difficulties which incur the criticism of "an unconvincingly moral ending" upon his book.¹⁴

The sisters' reunion under the wych-elm after several months symbolizes their ultimate salvation. The inspired tree rustles in response to the hallowed moment when they reach mutual understanding, the instant when they seem "to apprehend life" and attain "peace of the present".¹⁵ Their grasp of the "now" also means hope for the future. For in the last episode, set in harvest time, Margaret assures Helen that the withered wisp of grass she is holding "will sweeten tomorrow".¹⁶ And Mr. Wilcox, more tolerant than before, reveals his will that Howards End be bequeathed to Margaret, and, upon her death, to her nephew. Helen's son, who is playing on the lawn, represents the restoration of a traditional style of living--an agrarian civilization

from which his father is severed by the oppressive tide of modern imperialism. Hence, *Howards End* reverts to its rightful beneficiary and is, as Brown comments, "saved from Wilcoxism not for one but for two generations".¹⁷ Helen's jubilant announcement at the close of the novel reinforces this air of finality: "The field's cut!--the big meadow! We've seen to the very end, and it'll be such a crop of hay as never."¹⁸

Yet, this reading holds true only on a symbolic level. It appears rather too easy and simplistic, once we take into account Forster's shrewd social observation projected through Helen prior to her exultant epilogue--his troubled perception that the pestilence of industrialization and expansionism has become rampant in London, and virtually all over the world. *Howards End* is essentially a retreat from these terrors. There is no explicit indication as to how it constitutes an adequate defence against the modern disease, or, indeed, why it should be spared. Margaret's resolution of such fears is dubious at best:

This craze for motion has only set in during the last hundred years. It may be followed by a civilization that won't be a movement, because it will rest on the earth. All signs are against it now, but I can't help hoping, and very early in the morning in the garden I feel that our house is the future as well as the past.¹⁹

The passage betrays the "vagueness of vision" for which F.R. Leavis indicts *Howards End*.²⁰ But, as Malcolm Bradbury explicates, an ambiguous denouement is Forster's aim.²¹ The

novelist, of course, realizes the seriousness of his field of inquiry--a cultural problem concerning "the continuation of those who 'will kindle the light within'" that no facile answer can satisfy.²² Skeptical that any one belief may single-handedly embrace the impersonal forces of history and the inner life, he can only offer a solution which is "makeshift and temporal".²³ Although the Schlegels finally inherit Howards End, there is no guarantee of its perpetuation.

Lionel Trilling praises Forster for his perspicacity in Howards End, his "mature sense of responsibility" in attempting both to fuse and qualify the two opposing spheres of human interest oversimplified in the early works.²⁴ Granting this appraisal, we may still ask: does Forster successfully achieve his purpose? It is difficult to overlook what seems to be the capital flaw of Howards End: the action of the novel, largely promoted through Forster's symbolism, appears inadequate and incompatible with his piercing moral realism--his critique of modern sterility. The Schlegels' optimism strikes us as ill-founded and unjustified--a fantasy that arises out of the sisters' desperate desire to buttress their wavering "cause" against the antagonism of the Machine Age.

In this light, we cannot comfortably dispense with Leavis' objection to Howards End: its "perversity of intention".²⁵ The Schlegels--"stars in the contemporary greyness",²⁶ preservers of a lost tradition--are, ultimately, no more

than recluses in Howards End. As Frederick Crews remarks, the private life is upheld at the expense of society, and Forster bungles "in the task of truly reconciling [the prosaic outer world] with his own values".²⁷ Our impression of Forster in Howards End is not that of a prophet, but a trenchant moralist.

2.

If Forster's symbolism is too schematic, the same is true of his characterization. In terms of their inefficacy in delivering Forster's vision, the characters in Howards End are not entirely "prophetic". Whether as natural or "fantastic" figures (only one or two fit into the latter category in the novel), none of them wholly compasses the symbolic role to which he/she is assigned. And worse, they often degenerate into mere "flat" characters.

Personifying the realm of fact and materialism, luggage and motorcars, the Wilcoxes (with the exception of Ruth) are, like the Gradgrinds, types rather than individuals. Henry, the most impressive of his clan, remains for the most part a dry representation of the unemotional, hard-headed businessman. (We only need to recall Mr. Wilcox's hay-fever--an arbitrary emblem of his obtuseness--to recognize the thinness of Forster's conception.) Similarly, the shallowly conceived Bastis (in particular, Leonard, Helen's lover) stand for the lower middle-class, victims of a society torn between the two poles of artistic refinement and commerce.

Together with the tiresome Tibby, the stereotypical, sequestered young scholar, these characters are, in one way or another, "extremists" unable to connect the beast and the monk in them. They live in fragments and so are ineluctably pedestrian and insubstantial.

But, Forster's uninspired types pale beside the spectacular caricatures of someone like Dickens: the latter's comic grotesqueries and melodramatic flair lend to his characters much singularity and vitality. Forster's fiction is, of course, informed with a rather different philosophical fervour than is Dickens'. And the provincial "types" he seeks to delineate in Howards End are not supposed to be colourful or, in any ordinary sense, satirical. But still, Forster cannot easily exonerate himself from the charge of failing to invest his characters with an aesthetic, if not moral, energy that makes them lively and interesting.

Even the "round" characters--three-dimensional individuals capable of development--are ultimately implausible. Of these figures, Helen is perhaps the least satisfying. In the course of the novel, she loses her apparent "rotundity" and turns into a radical "type", an apostle of the faith of personal relations. It is true that her "flatness" can be justified on the grounds that Forster is attempting to expose the "practical impotence" of her religion.²⁸ Nevertheless, Helen suffers excessively from what seems to be a common ailment among Forster's characters--the want of emot-

ional depth.

Helen's affair with Leonard Bast is a notable instance. It stems from her scorn for Mr. Wilcox's irresponsibility--his thoughtless advice which indirectly renders Leonard both jobless and penniless--and her determination to compensate for the wrongs she assumes to have been perpetuated by her class ("I was full of pity, and almost of revenge").²⁹ As Forster depicts the incident,

Helen loved the absolute. Leonard had been ruined absolutely, and had appeared to her as a man apart, isolated from the world. A real man, who cared for adventure and beauty, who desired to live decently and pay his way, who could have travelled more gloriously through life than the Juggernaut car that was crushing him. Memories of Evie's wedding had warped her, the starched servants, the yards of uneaten food, the rustle of overdressed women, motor-cars oozing grease on the gravel, rubbish from a pretentious band. She had tasted the lees of this on her arrival; in the darkness, after failure, they intoxicated her. She and the victim seemed alone in a world of unreality, and she³⁰ loved him absolutely, perhaps for half an hour.

The petty nature of the liaison is unequivocally drawn. And the final reference to its brevity wittily adds an ironic touch to this generally romantic description and deflates it from pathos to bathos. But in spite of such stylistic virtuosity, and notwithstanding Forster's poetic language which suits his metaphysical preoccupations, our conception of Helen's actual involvement in the event remains blurred. Evasive in tone, the passage indicates Helen's presence on this occasion not so much as a figure, or even a caricature, as a mere tool illustrating Forster's qualification of the

inner world.

Unlike Helen, Margaret is more of an individual and is the most vivid of the characters in Howards End. Throughout the novel, she struggles to achieve personal integrity by yoking the two sides of human life that are mutually dependent. She emerges most impressively as a character of "proportion" at the end of the novel where she accomplishes the synthesis. More and more, she reveals the mysticism which she shares with Ruth Wilcox; both women are receptive to the literal and the "supernatural"--the improbabilities or paradoxes of life which make human existence all the more enriching. For all her moral consistency, however, Margaret is not wholly adequate as a symbolic figure. Her deficiency surfaces most clearly in her marriage with Mr. Wilcox which F.R. Leavis regards as neither "credible" nor "acceptable".³¹ Forster is so preoccupied with the implications of this relationship that he neglects to develop it logically. The day after Margaret receives her engagement ring, the narrator informs us:

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

It was hard going in the roads of Mr. Wilcox's soul. From boyhood he had neglected them. 'I am

not a fellow who bothers about my own inside.' Outwardly he was cheerful, reliable and brave; but within, all had reverted to chaos, ruled, so far as it was ruled at all, by an incomplete asceticismReligion had confirmed him. The words that were read aloud on Sunday...had once kindled the souls of St. Catharine and St. Francis into a white-hot hatred of the carnal. He could not be as the saints and love the Infinite with seraphic ardour, but he could be a little ashamed of loving a wife. 'Amabat; amare timebat,' And it was here that Margaret hoped to help him.³²

A grand creed this is, and Margaret's endeavour to execute it is heroic. Yet, on the whole, her betrothal to Mr. Wilcox is unconvincing: it appears not so much as the consequence of her intimate feeling for Henry as her desire to uphold the "cause" with which she identifies herself. Symbolic characters in fiction must succeed on the elementary level of narrative, must display a naturalness and consistency (if not a psychological complexity) before they can acquire the resonance which renders them something more than monotonous thesis figures. Purely as a fictional heroine, Margaret is only erratically convincing.

The figure of Ruth Wilcox, Margaret's spiritual predecessor, is more rivetting. Her symbolic richness emanates primarily from her identification with the house and the wych-elm: she is a living embodiment of the supreme human values rooted in the agrarian tradition. Haunting and enigmatic, she resembles Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse and is a forerunner of Mrs. Moore in A Passage to India. Peacemakers endowed with a keen instinctive acumen and profound sensitivity, they are capable of integrating relationships into

harmony and unity. At the same time, they are all "immortal" figures; their creative spirit endures even after death. Mrs. Wilcox's genius, for instance, helps Margaret discern "a little more clearly than hitherto what a human being is, and to what he may aspire. True relationships gleamed. Perhaps the last word would be hope--hope even on this side of the grave."³³ And the night the Schlegel sisters reunite in *Howards End* fully attests to Ruth's cryptic, beneficent influence. The incident marks their growth in understanding and paves the way for their ultimate reconciliation with the Wilcoxes. Thus Margaret informs Helen:

I feel that you and I and Henry are only fragments of that woman's mind. She knows everything. She is everything. She is the house, and the tree that leans over it. People have their own deaths as well as their own lives, and even if there is nothing beyond death we shall differ in our nothingness. I cannot believe that knowledge such as hers will perish with knowledge such as mine. She knew about realities.³⁴

Yet, Ruth fails to realize her great "prophetic" potentiality to the full. As a symbolic figure, most recent critics find her intolerable. Duke Maskell sardonically describes her character as "a blank space" inside a "schematic outline": her "portentous symbolic role is justified by nothing in her character" and "the things she says and does go no further in explaining her importance than the things said about her."³⁵ James McConkey, too, complains that she is merely "a statement of the transcendent unity, but neither a plausible human being nor a bearer of the true implication of [the Forsterian] voice".³⁶ He concludes that Ruth is "the

most significant failure of the novel".³⁷

Although these criticisms are, by and large, valid, the last is probably too severe. For Forster's message does not solely depend upon the character of Mrs. Wilcox, and her portrait is not exactly devoid of human qualities. In essence, she is "fantastic", though in a limited sense. She qualifies as an intriguing symbol of the marvellous and the mysterious. (In this respect, she outdoes many of the other characters in the novel.) Though she is not a "type", her idealization as a goddess functioning on a transcendental level allows her little or no room to interact with the other characters (which explains her minimal influence upon her family). The following is an extract from an early episode in which Mrs. Wilcox invites Margaret to accompany her to Howards End. Acknowledging the privilege of visiting the house--the honour of sharing her friend's "one passion in life",--Margaret finally settles on a positive reply:

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

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

'I shall never repent joining you.'

'It is the same.'³⁸

Mrs. Wilcox's strange, esoteric language bespeaks her eminence as an awesome deity. Yet, it simultaneously emphasizes her detachment from the human sphere, and, consequently, her

nebulous connection with Margaret. Thus handicapped, the character of Ruth Wilcox never effectively evinces the ideal of communication and comradeship, which is much better demonstrated by the more human Margaret Schlegel. In Aspects of the Novel, Forster remarks: "The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way."³⁹ Mrs. Wilcox does surprise with her symbolic resonance--though not convincingly. She is "flat pretending to be round".⁴⁰

Yet, Ruth's "rotundity" does emerge occasionally. In the same scene in which Mrs. Wilcox invites Margaret to Howards End, the former's human qualities subtly manifest themselves. Margaret deems Ruth's silence--her response to the former's decline of her proposal--as a snub. The irony is that Ruth's silence may be due to her own mortification at Margaret's original refusal:

Margaret glanced at the pitiless air and then at the tired face of her companion. 'Later on I should love it,' she continued, 'but it's hardly the weather for such an expedition, and we ought to start when we're fresh. Isn't the house shut up, too?'

She received no answer. Mrs. Wilcox appeared to be annoyed.

'Might I come some other day?'

Mrs. Wilcox leant forward and tapped the glass. 'Back to Wickham Place, please!' was her order to the coachman. Margaret had been snubbed.⁴¹

Ruth's moment of silence reveals her fine feminine sensibilities. Nonetheless, these human qualities of hers are subordinate to her symbolic significance. In the final analysis, she is more successful as a fantastic than as a human

figure.

3.

If Forster's characters are on the whole unconvincing because of their "flatness", except for some occasions when their human qualities emerge--in Ruth's case, especially--his plot-handling is equally artificial save for a few episodes which evince Forster's architectonic potential. An effective plot, Forster argues in Aspects, demands tight organization--dexterity in leaving no "loose ends"--and the essential "element of surprise or mystery" which allows the novelist to control the reader.⁴² Although the action of Howards End is basically unified and engaging in that Forster has, in the main, satisfied these criteria --the Beethoven Fifth Symphony episode is illustrative of Forster's skill in manipulating the plot--it remains defective. For the novelist indulges in a superficial "fantastic" mode which, in plain terms, is his stress on illogical plot twists. Howards End is replete with "mysteries"; however, instead of elucidating his plot, Forster merely misleads.

The famous Beethoven's Fifth Symphony episode, which, fortuitously or otherwise, constitutes the fifth chapter of the novel, is a supreme case of Forster's refined craftsmanship and his "highly sensitive and active intelligence"⁴³ as a manipulator of events.⁴⁴ In terms of plot advancement, the Schlegels' accidental meeting with Leonard Bast at the concert marks the beginning of their dramatic relationship.

On a symbolic level, the incident foreshadows the ensuing action of Howards End.

The Beethoven episode--Forster's metaphorical vision of human experience--is conveyed through the juxtaposition of the characters' points of view. Their various responses to the music disclose, to a certain degree, their personal temperament and moral outlook. The bookish Tibby, of course, views the concert as nothing beyond an intellectual exercise, attending it with "the full score open on his knee".⁴⁵

Margaret, equable and intuitive, "can only see the music",⁴⁶ without indulging in fanciful interpretations like her more emotional sister. What Helen conceives of the Allegro is a dire panorama of the futility and anarchy of existence:

'No; look out for the part where you think you have done with the goblins and they come back,' breathed Helen, as the music started with a goblin walking quietly over the universe, from end to end. Others followed him. They were not aggressive creatures; it was that that made them so terrible to Helen. They merely observed in passing that there was no such thing as splendour or heroism in the world. After the interlude of elephants dancing, they returned and made the observation for the second time. Helen could not contradict them, for, once at all events, she had felt the same, and had seen the reliable walls of youth collapse. Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness! The goblins were right.⁴⁷

Indeed, as Trilling notes, such a "dreadful fate" awaits almost everyone in the novel, "the unformed Leonard Bast as well as the cultivated Helen Schlegel" in particular.⁴⁸

Yet, Helen's impression of Beethoven is incomplete. For the composer's courage in acknowledging and confronting the malignant goblins is, at least, a partial affirmation of

life's worth. Supplementing Helen's reading, the narrator provides his own viewpoint:

Beethoven chose to make all right in the end. He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for the second time, and again the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and, amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy, he led his Fifth Symphony to its conclusion. But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely, and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things.

Beethoven is for Forster a paradigm humanist as are Sophocles and Goethe for Matthew Arnold: the three sages partake of a profound intelligence in that they "see life steadily and see it whole".⁵⁰ Following his model, Forster also seeks to restore order in the end, through the steadfast Margaret Schlegel.

"Modern criticism", says Mark Schorer in his penetrating article on technique in fiction, "has demonstrated with finality that in art beauty and truth are indivisible and one."⁵¹ The "Beethoven" chapter in Howards End validates this statement. Truly, Forster's adept manipulation of the episode through various standpoints bears close resemblance to the art of counterpoint in music. Further, he manages to mingle levity and seriousness in the passage--a characteristic of "wit" and of "a sophisticated literature", according to T.S. Eliot.⁵²

Forster portrays the first half of the concert in a generally chatty, colloquial tone, as is apparent in phrases like: "Here Beethoven, after humming and hawing with great

sweetness, said 'Heigho' and the Andante came to an end," "it will be generally admitted that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has penetrated into the ear of man" and "such a noise is cheap at two shillings".⁵³ This comic mode enables the novelist to provide a realistic background for Helen's metaphysical speculations. Duke Maskell condemns Forster for his disconcerting use of "low comedy" on this occasion: "His doubts are attached to neither music nor the taste for it but to his own capacity to make either seem important or credible."⁵⁴ But Maskell's superficial attitude denotes a serious misapprehension of Forster's intent. Significantly, the Beethoven episode exhibits a powerful coalition of the kingdoms of "fantasy and fact"--metaphysical considerations presented in a real-life context.⁵⁵ It is here that Forster emerges as a true prophet.

Nevertheless, this outstanding scene simultaneously throws into relief the unevenness of Howards End. The rest of the narrative, though demonstrating no blatant contravention of the principle of causality, often appears too ingenious to be wholly satisfying. Forster adroitly introduces into his novel "the phantoms of cowardice and unbelief"--the Basts--with whom Helen entangles herself the moment she erroneously carries Leonard's umbrella back home from the music-hall. Yet, the fitful egresses and returns of these goblins are not manifestations of an organic plot development, but Forster's deliberate arrangement of events

to conform with the moral pattern he lays out early in the novel.

The movement of Howards End hinges on a series of losses in which the Bastis are frequently involved. Leonard's lost umbrella--a mildly farcical "contretemps"--prompts a brief encounter between Helen and her morose, diffident "lover". The sprites of "panic and emptiness" revisit the Schlegels, with Jacky's intrusion upon Wickham Place seeking her missing husband--the preposterous outcome of Leonard's secret retreat into the woods. The incident underscores Forster's ironic representation of modern civilization. In his attempt to account for his sudden disappearance, Leonard brings home to Margaret the plight of the lower middle class where he and the major part of society belong. Beneath the superstructure of wealth and art, she sees "an ill-fed boy", "one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit", who have given up "the glory of the animal for a tailcoat and a couple of ideas".⁵⁶ As his name suggests, Leonard Bast is a misbegotten offspring of modern times, resembling in some respects the Arnoldian tragic hero: they share an identical fate--"wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born."⁵⁷

Leonard's unemployment is yet another mishap intensifying Forster's social analysis. Hyatt Howe Waggoner finds this unexpected turn of events a striking instance which

startles us "into awareness of the degree to which our lives hinge upon coincidence".⁵⁸ Such a circumstance does not happen "without cause", but is rather an indication of a larger world beyond human control and comprehension.⁵⁹ This is a sound interpretation. And indeed, Forster does achieve his metaphysical purpose, but at the expense of the novel's logical development. The episode also heightens our consciousness of the purely functional character of the Basts--pawns employed by the novelist mainly to further the plot.

Forster's superficial design is also manifested in the wedding of Evie, Mr. Wilcox's daughter. The abrupt arrival of Leonard and Jacky Bast at the party unexpectedly sheds new light on Mr. Wilcox's moral fibre. Beneath his veneer of respectability lies the mean spirit of the bourgeois. The pettiness of his affair with Jacky and the carelessness of his advice to Leonard, both of which are unveiled in this scene, discover the vacuity of the world he represents.

Yet, the overall effect of the episode is disappointing. Forster lets pass the opportunity of developing an otherwise potentially dramatic incident in favour of vapid didacticism--an illogical intrusion upon the event. The revelation of the adversities of Leonard and Jacky, the climax of the incident, is perfunctorily drawn. It hardly demonstrates the afflictions which one might expect the Basts to have undergone as victims of Mr. Wilcox's exploitation. The whole occurrence seems to have been designed as an enact-

ment of Forster's humanistic creed. With ardent enthusiasm, Helen reassures Leonard in the hotel room to which Margaret dispatches them:

...to Helen the paradox became clearer and clearer. 'Death destroys a man; the idea of Death saves him.' Behind the coffins and the skeletons that stay the vulgar mind lies something so immense that all that is great in us responds to it. Men of the world may recoil from the charnel-house that they will one day enter, but Love knows better. Death is his foe, but his peer, and in their age-long struggle the thews of Love have been strengthened, and his vision cleared, until there is no one who can stand against him.

'So never give in,' continued the girl, and re-stated again and again the vague yet convincing plea that the Invisible lodges against the Visible.⁶⁰

In addition to its artificiality, this passage, strained and dogmatic, reveals the inadequacy of Forster's fusion of realism and fantasy. The irony of Helen's exhortation lies in her failure to live up to her convictions: her rejection of the Wilcoxes precludes the possibility of connection, of universal brotherhood. Forster undercuts Helen's idealism by counterpointing it with Leonard's skepticism. His fears cast doubt on the integrity of her romantic dream: "Death, Life and Materialism were fine words, but would Mr. Wilcox take him as a clerk? Talk as one would, Mr. Wilcox was king of this world, the superman, with his own morality, whose head remained in the clouds."⁶¹ But these questions, mildly mock-heroic in tone, also undermine Forster's own message: the ascendancy of humanistic values. The novelist's ironic irresolution confounds his metaphysics.

Like Beethoven, Forster restores hope in the end by

dispelling the goblins, the agents of woe and chaos that beset the universe. Yet, the novelist does so at the cost of credibility. Leonard's death--the last "coincidental" loss in Howards End--most prominently manifests the incongruity of the plot. Torn apart by guilt and remorse, Leonard turns up at Howards End to confess to Margaret his liaison with Helen. Enraged by his presence, Charles Wilcox thrashes the "seducer" with a sword and accidentally kills him. The tragedy paradoxically underlines Leonard's spiritual regeneration: his death, a kind of muted triumph arising out of his sincere grappling with his plight, reaffirms the meaning of man. Further, it strengthens Forster's plea for fellowship by resolving the muddled relationship between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. The news of Charles's legal arraignment results in a crushed and helpless Mr. Wilcox whom Margaret conveys to Howards End for rehabilitation, an act which leads to Henry's eventual conciliation with the Schlegel sisters. Undoubtedly, Leonard's murder confirms Helen's dictum that death is a kind of affirmation:

To Leonard, intent on his private sin, there came the conviction of innate goodness elsewhere. It was not the optimism which he had been taught at school. Again and again must the drum tap and the goblins stalk over the universe before joy can be purged of the superficial. It was rather paradoxical, and arose from his sorrow. Death destroys a man, but the idea of death saves him--that is the best account of it that has yet been given. Squalor and tragedy can beckon to all that is great in us, and strengthen the wings of love. They can beckon; it is not certain that they will, for they are not love's servants. But they can beckon, and the knowledge of this incredible truth comforted him.⁶²

However sound it may appear, such a theory is contingent upon the plot. Essentially, Leonard represents both product and victim of a society split between materialism and culture. By eliminating him through a deft turn of the plot, Forster merely achieves a hollow solution to his problem. The novelist's casual disposal of Leonard, the catalyst of the various crises in the plot, provides a facile resolution of the clash between Wilcoxism and Schlegelism, elements inherent in the modern social structure. Had Forster not so simply dismissed Leonard from his narrative, he would have faced an additional perplexity. A further development of Leonard's role as the exponent of the underprivileged would generate more social strife, more "muddle", which Forster might not be able to resolve so comfortably. Leonard's death readily serves as a kind of deus ex machina for the novelist.

Howards End is, ultimately, unsuccessful. Its overall deficiency lies in its want of credibility. Forster's "fantasy", his symbolism woven around the setting, characters and action of the novel, is often too self-conscious and contrived. For the most part, he fails to achieve the effect of "prophecy"--the reader's intuitive grasp of Forster's message through the medium of "fantasy". To concur with Trilling's remark that the novel is "undoubtedly Forster's masterpiece"⁶³ is surely illadvised and wide of the mark.

-NOTES

¹E.M. Forster, Howards End (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), pp. 19-20.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³E.K. Brown, Rhythm in the Novel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1950), p. 51.

⁴Forster, Howards End, pp. 107-108.

⁵Ibid., p. 39.

⁶Ibid., p. 25.

⁷Ibid., p. 112.

⁸Ibid., p. 188.

⁹Ibid., pp. 204-205.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 36.

¹¹Though the setting is Henry's house in Oniton, Margaret's moral landscape is clearly Howards End.

¹²George H. Thomson, The Fiction of E.M. Forster (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), p. 184.

¹³Brown, Rhythm, p. 49.

¹⁴Frederick C. Crews, E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 122.

¹⁵Forster, Howards End, p. 307.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁷Brown, Rhythm, p. 50.

¹⁸Forster, Howards End, p. 332.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 329.

²⁰F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 272.

²¹Malcolm Bradbury, "Howards End", in Malcolm Bradbury, ed., Forster: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 142.

²²Ibid., p. 142.

²³Ibid., p. 141.

²⁴Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster (New York: New Directions, 1943), p. 115.

²⁵Leavis, Common Pursuit, p. 269.

²⁶Denis Godfrey, E.M. Forster's Other Kingdom (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), p. 141.

²⁷Crews, Perils of Humanism, p. 123.

²⁸Leavis, Common Pursuit, p. 269.

²⁹Forster, Howards End, p. 304.

³⁰Ibid., p. 308.

³¹Leavis, Common Pursuit, p. 269.

³²Forster, Howards End, pp. 187-188.

³³Ibid., p. 111.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 305-306.

³⁵Duke Maskell, "Style and Symbolism in Howards End", Essays in Criticism, 19 (1969), 302.

³⁶James McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), p. 80.

³⁷Ibid., p. 80.

³⁸Forster, Howards End, p. 96.

³⁹-----, Aspects of the Novel (Middlesex: Pelican, 1970), p. 85.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 85.

⁴¹Forster, Howards End, p. 93.

⁴²-----, Aspects, p. 95.

⁴³Virginia Woolf, The Death of the Moth and other Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 109.

⁴⁴Another remarkable example is Ruth Wilcox's unexpected death which marks the beginning of Chapter XI. The scene prior to this episode is a conversation between Ruth and Margaret. As Malcolm Bradbury suggests, such an attempt to "break up the chronological account of events" aims to achieve the "maximum dramatic effect". (See "Howards End", p. 139.) Further, it marks a change in point of view in the novel. The scene following Ruth's death portrays the family meeting of the Wilcoxes, and this is the first time we do not see the Wilcoxes through the Schlegels' eyes. Ruth's death readily serves as a medium through which Schlegelism and Wilcoxism are juxtaposed.

⁴⁵Forster, Howards End, p. 45.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁸Trilling, Forster, pp. 131-132.

⁴⁹Forster, Howards End, p. 47.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 264. See also Arnold's "To a Friend" in Kenneth and Miriam Allott, eds., The Poems of Matthew Arnold (London: Longman, 1965), p. 111.

⁵¹Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery" in his The World We Imagine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), p. 3.

⁵²T.S. Eliot, "Andrew Marvell" in Frank Kermode, ed., Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), pp. 164-165.

⁵³Forster, Howards End, pp. 44-46.

⁵⁴Maskell, "Style and Symbolism in Howards End", p. 298.

⁵⁵Woolf, The Death of the Moth, p. 106.

⁵⁶Forster, Howards End, p. 122.

⁵⁷Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" in Kenneth and Miriam Allott, eds., The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p. 305.

⁵⁸Hyatt Howe Waggoner, "Notes on the Uses of Coincid-

ence in the Novels of E.M. Forster" in Malcolm Bradbury, ed., Forster: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 85.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁰Forster, Howards End, p. 237.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 236-237.

⁶²Ibid., p. 315.

⁶³Trilling, Forster, p. 114.

III

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

1.

A Passage to India is of a supreme literary stature. It stands not only as a significant novel in the twentieth century, but also as a great aesthetic monument in the whole canon of English literature. Completed fourteen years after the publication of Howards End, A Passage is more intricate and profound than its immediate predecessor. Yet, the two novels share a fundamental affinity in Forster's moral preoccupations. And in this sense, Howards End, the lesser work, may be deemed a preparatory exercise for our reading of the mature A Passage to India. Despite its dry schematism, Howards End represents an expansion of Forster's ontological vision in its attempt to integrate human relationships by synthesizing the inner and outer lives, rather than merely emphasizing one at the expense of the other, the latter notion demonstrated chiefly by the early novels. Essentially, A Passage succeeds where Howards End fails; the former manages to convey cogently Forster's message of universal brotherhood by integrating theme and technique. The long lapse between the composition of Forster's last two novels perhaps connotes the rigorous process that the novelist underwent to attain full mastery of his art as well

as assimilate his experiences to refine his conception of existence, all of which find thorough expression in A Passage to India.

Notwithstanding its thematic development, Howards End misses the completeness of perception that is the principal strength of A Passage to India. In the former novel, the successful union between the external world of action and the private inner life, epitomized by the harmony that Henry Wilcox and the Schlegels eventually share inhabiting Howards End, is ultimately too pat and propitious to be convincing. It is dubious whether such a resolution does, in effect, suggest any recognition and acceptance of Wilcoxism, for Howards End is, in the main, a retreat from the disintegrating society of materialism. Comradeship, born out of the fusion of the prose and the passion, the temporal and the infinite, is no longer easy in A Passage to India. Events in the troubled years between the completion of Howards End and A Passage--the war and Forster's visits to India, in particular--provided the novelist with ample material for his final novel and, more crucially, broadened his view of the dualistic principle that underlies human experience, the central preoccupation in practically all his fiction. ¹ In A Passage, Forster examines the possibility of love in the modern age by probing the relationship between occidentals and orientals in India. The comprehensiveness and intricacy of the novel are appar-

ent: its meaning is not strictly confined to the personal, social and political levels, but is also invested with a universal dimension.

And stylistically, A Passage to India surpasses Howards End. Though both bear a close resemblance in their sophisticated craft, the former distinguishes itself from the latter in its symbolic resonance which renders A Passage to India powerfully "prophetic". The reader's intuitive grasp of Forster's revelation in the novel springs from the novelist's keen and provocative symbolism, in which "fantasy" performs a vital role, as in Howards End. But in A Passage, this magical force operates in a sharply different manner than in the pre-war novel. Rather than disrupting the symbolic structure of the book, this force blends harmoniously with the setting, characterization and action of A Passage to India, thus contributing to the novel's singular effect. To ascertain whether Forster's message of love does truly come through "fantasy" and "prophecy" in A Passage to India, let us now turn to the novel.

The complexity of A Passage necessitates a different critical approach from that to Howards End. In the latter novel, the house exercises a mysterious influence over the major characters and their action. In essence, Howards End is an utopia and the people who understand its meaning are "saved". The setting of A Passage to India, however, no longer manifests such arbitrary--if not entirely unfounded--

optimism; it does not suggest a faltering faith in humanity, but Forster's determination to confront the issue more realistically. In A Passage, India serves as a neutral ground on which human integrity is tried. If the place does betoken some kind of promised land, its accessibility is totally contingent upon men's efforts to communicate, to establish a bond of fellowship among themselves. Hence, in evaluating A Passage to India, it is necessary to study both the setting and the characters' interaction hand in hand instead of isolating them for discussion. The result of this procedure will, in turn, shed light on the characterization of the novel, which constitutes the final part of this analysis.

The prefatory chapter of A Passage to India, composed mainly of a topography of Chandrapore, subtly sets up the overall prophetic tone of the novel. Forster's picturesque description of the city, marked by "fantastic" touches in spots, elicits a vague uneasiness as to the prospect of "passage", of human rapprochement, in India. Not remarkably exciting, Chandrapore, the principal setting of A Passage, is indeed characterized by its extraordinary impersonality. There seems to be no link between the city, whether the dilapidated outskirts or the verdurous tropical inland, and its residents. Neither men nor their undertakings seem to have the least impact on the expansive landscape:

Inland, the prospect alters....The toddy palms and neem trees and mangoes and pekul that were hidden behind the bazaars now become visible and in their turn hide the bazaars....Seeking light and air, and endowed with more strength than man or his works, they soar above the lower deposit to greet one another with branches and beckoning leaves, and to build a city for the birds. Especially after the rains do they screen what passes below, but at all times, even when scorched or leafless, they glorify the city to the English people who inhabit the rise, so that newcomers cannot believe it to be as meagre as it is described, and have to be driven down to acquire disillusionment. As for the civil station itself, it provokes no emotion. It charms not, neither does it repel. It is sensibly planned, with a red-brick club on its brow, and farther back a grocer's and a cemetery, and the bungalows are disposed along roads that intersect at right angles. It has nothing hideous in it, and only the view is beautiful; it shares nothing with the city except the overarching sky.

The sky too has its changes, but they are less marked than those of the vegetation and the river. Clouds map it up at times....But the core of blue persists, and so it is by night. Then the stars hang like lamps from the immense vault. The distance between the vault and them is as nothing to the distance behind them, and that farther distance, though beyond colour, last freed itself from blue.

The sky settles everything--not only climates and seasons but when the earth shall be beautiful. ...The sky can do this because it is so strong and so enormous. Strength comes from the sun, infused in it daily, size from the prostrate earth. No mountains infringe on the curve. League after league the earth lies flat, heaves a little, is flat again. Only in the south, where a group of fists and fingers are thrust up through the soil, is the endless expanse interrupted. These fists and fingers are the Marabar Hills, containing the extraordinary caves.

The passage discloses a sort of double-vision in which the Indian setting seems mundane at close range but appears colourful at a distance. Such a shifting reality, the testing ground for human relationships, becomes symbolic of the uncertainty of attaining cross-cultural communication,

understanding and love. The final mysterious reference to the Marabar Hills, a deliberate echoing of the opening sentence of the chapter, heightens our consciousness of the place where the drama epitomizing the major characters' attempt to achieve friendship and understanding is to occur.

The outstanding Marabar incident, fittingly portrayed in "Caves", the central part of A Passage, is carefully prepared for by a series of ominous events and followed by a coda, both of which make up "Mosque" and "Temple", the first and third sections of the novel respectively. Apart from supplying A Passage to India with a coherent dramatic framework, this design also contributes to its symbolic unity. The three sections, each of which represents a different aspect of India, together compound Forster's extensive vision of the country. "Mosque", set in spring time, is associated with Islam and expresses in a prophetic voice the problem of communication between East and West. This perplexing issue vividly shows itself in the coincidental first encounter between Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore, which happens in the mosque.

The episode is peculiarly intriguing. It firmly attests to Forster's finesse as a plot-maker. As Wayne C. Booth astutely elucidates, the import of the incident stems from the accomplishment of both its "dramatic necessity and rhetorical function".³ The scene establishes the requisite friendship between the young Indian doctor and the elderly

British visitor, which generates the ensuing major events. Fabulously evocative, it also allows us insight into the rest of the novel's action. In addition, the incident exemplifies Forster's forceful treatment of the Indian setting. The numinous mosque lends enchantment to the accidental meeting between the two principal figures and, more compellingly, foreshadows the difficulty that such a relationship may involve.

The manner in which Aziz and Mrs. Moore initiate their fellowship is sudden but sincere. Their chance conversation arises out of Aziz's withdrawal into the mosque to recover his self-possession lost through his rebuff by two British ladies. He rages at her interruption of his meditation, only to find that she, unlike most other Englishwomen in India, is candid, tolerant and respectful. In a delightful yet mildly Gothic vein, Forster depicts the incident:

...one of the pillars of the mosque seemed to quiver. It swayed in the gloom and detached itself. Belief in ghosts ran in his blood, but he sat firm. Another pillar moved, a third, and then an Englishwoman stepped out into the moonlight. Suddenly he was furiously angry and shouted: 'Madam! Madam! Madam!'

'Oh! Oh!' the woman gasped.

'Madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems.'

'I have taken them off.'

'You have?'

'I left them at the entrance.'

'Then I ask your pardon.'

Still startled, the woman moved out, keeping the ablution-tank between them. He called after her, 'I am truly sorry for speaking.'

'Yes, I was right, was I not? If I remove my shoes, I am allowed?'

'Of course, but so few ladies take the trouble, especially if thinking no one is there to see,'⁴

'That makes no difference. God is here.'

Here through Aziz's fluid mind, Forster creates a realistic context in which to render his "fantasy" convincingly. Mrs. Moore's mysteriousness richly augments the charm of her new-found friendship with the Indian physician. Their exchange culminates in Aziz's blissful discovery that Mrs. Moore shares his feeling about the inconsiderate Mrs. Callendar, who has snubbed Aziz most seriously. Their initial misunderstanding eventually resolves itself in mutual confidence:

He was excited partly by his wrongs, but much more by the knowledge that someone sympathized with them. It was this that led him to repeat, exaggerate, contradict. She had proved her sympathy by criticizing her fellow-countryman to him, but even earlier he had known. The flame that not even beauty can nourish was springing up, and though his words were querulous his heart began to glow secretly. Presently it burst into speech.

'You understand me, you know what others feel. Oh, if others resembled you!'

Rather surprised, she replied: 'I don't think I understand people very well. I only know whether I like or dislike them.'

'Then you are an Oriental.'⁵

In effect, the scene objectifies "the secret understanding of the heart" that Aziz is contemplating before Mrs. Moore's intrusion.⁶ There is little doubt that this genuine friendship will endure. And indeed, it does produce a far-reaching effect in view of Aziz's rapport with Mrs. Moore's children. Yet, the hope that such a promising relationship is a microcosm of the larger concern of universal brotherhood,

of harmony between East and West, remains equivocal. For Mrs. Moore, with her profound mysticism and marvellous intuitive knowledge of people, is hardly an ordinary person, much less a characteristic westerner. But more strikingly, the episode discloses Aziz's impetuosity, his erratic temperament which, though creating no adverse effect on Mrs. Moore's attitude towards him, does not in any sense strengthen his position in his subsequent attempts to befriend other Anglo-Indians.

This ambiguous tone is further intensified through the mise-en-scène. As Reuben A. Brower observes, the mosque itself delicately reveals "an ambivalence" characteristic of the novel's grand perspective on the feasibility "of communication between Britons and Indians".⁷ Here the setting, discernibly more substantial and comprehensive than the house in Howards End, exhibits not an optimistic vision, but an insight into the dualistic nature of human existence wherein opposites co-exist, contain each other--light and darkness, mind and body, passion and intellect, and likewise, good and evil:

The courtyard was paved with broken slabs. The covered part of the mosque was deeper than is usual; its effect was that of an English parish church whose side has been taken out. Where he sat, he looked into three arcades whose darkness was illuminated by a small hanging lamp and by the moon. The front--in full moonlight--had the appearance of marble, and the ninety-nine names of God on the frieze stood out black, as the frieze stood out white against the sky. The contest between this dualism and the contention of shadows within pleased Aziz, and he tried to symbolize the whole into some truth of religion and love.

A mosque by winning his approval let loose his imagination. The temple of another creed, Hindu, Christian, or Greek, would have bored him and failed to awaken his sense of beauty. Here was Islam, his own country, more than a Faith, more than a battle-cry, more, much more...Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and his thoughts found their home.

Again, Aziz's foolhardiness clearly surfaces in his appreciation of the form rather than the content of Islam and in his unquestioned belief in the supremacy of his religion. On the whole, it is true that the episode accentuates the Islamic spirit--"Equality before God"--which is, as Forster argues elsewhere in his non-fictional writing, "so doubtfully proclaimed by Christianity".⁹ But whether such an ideal will materialize remains to be seen.

To a large extent, Fielding's tea-party, a symbolic extension of the mosque episode, also serves as an enriching rehearsal for the revelatory human drama at Marabar. The gathering, primarily arising out of the schoolmaster's intention to entertain the two British visitors, occasions Aziz's second encounter with Mrs. Moore and his new acquaintance with her young, eager travelling companion, Miss Adela Quested, the Hindu Professor Godbole and Fielding himself. Essentially an exercise in perspective, the episode unfolds the highly organized structure of A Passage to India. Prior to this scene is the Bridge party, a half-hearted attempt by the British at the Civil Station to close the gap between East and West. The failure of this

reception evidences itself in "the echoing walls of [the Indians'] civility",¹⁰ an emblem of the partition between the generally indifferent English and their servile guests. Fielding's tea-party contrasts sharply with the Bridge party in that it consists of the most understanding members of the two races, distinguished by their good-will and sincerity rather than superficiality. Thus with its different outlook, Fielding's party offers a new standpoint from which to perceive the problem of connection between the two civilizations.

In his critique of A Passage, Arnold Kettle elaborates upon this scene, stressing its "superb" atmosphere, its tone of "a profound scepticism, tempered by a vague confidence" that is predominant throughout the novel.¹¹ Indeed, the incident does indicate a certain hope of comradeship with the existence of open-minded and genial figures such as Aziz, Fielding and Mrs. Moore; yet, it also underlines what seems to be the foremost obstacle in this prospect--the incongruity of spirit between East and West. The characters' discussion of Indian etiquette uncovers their fundamental cultural disparity:

The host was inclined to change the subject, but Aziz took it up warmly, and on learning fragments of the delinquents' name pronounced that they were Hindus.

'Slack Hindus--they have no idea of society; I know them very well because of a doctor at the hospital. Such a slack, unpunctual fellow! It is as well you did not go to their house, for it would give you a wrong idea of India. Nothing sanitary. I

think for my own part they grew ashamed of their house and this is why they did not send.'

'That's a notion,' said the other man.

'I do so hate mysteries,' Adela announced.

'We English do.'

'I dislike them not because I'm English, but from my own personal point of view,' she corrected.

'I like mysteries but I rather dislike muddles,' said Mrs. Moore.

'A mystery is a muddle.'

'Oh, do you think so Mr. Fielding?'

'A mystery is only a high-sounding term for a muddle. No advantage in stirring it up, in either case. Aziz and I know well that India's a muddle.'

'India's--Oh, what an alarming idea!' ¹²

Urbane, clear-witted and shrewd, Fielding epitomizes the English character at its best. Nonetheless, its general want of sensitivity manifests itself most prominently in the literal-minded and somewhat priggish Miss Quested, who stands apart from Fielding and Mrs. Moore in her ironic intention to see the "real" India without knowing its people.¹³ Conversely, the Indians are intensely passionate, a singularity of temperament which frequently incurs the sacrifice of suavity and grace. As seen in the passage, Aziz's flippant behaviour, his indiscreet denunciation of Hindus, verges on the preposterous. The characters' racial chasm emerges even more glaringly at the end of the meeting which unveils a moderately bleak picture with respect to the chance of their ultimate union.

A prime example of Kettle's concept of "the symbolic moment, the satisfying incident or episode which, though complete in itself, trembles with the more distant, more general repercussions which themselves thus force their way

back into the book", this farewell scene is acutely "prophetic".¹⁴ The symbolic conclusion of the party, reinforced by the mystical setting, evokes a pervasive mood of hollowness typical of the characters' action. The friendly gathering terminates with the unexpected intervention of Ronny Heaslop, the City Magistrate who endeavours to drag Adela and Mrs. Moore--his fiancée and mother respectively--off to attend a polo game:

So the leave-taking began. Everyone was cross or wretched. It was as if irritation exuded from the very soil. Could one have been so petty on a Scotch moor or an Italian alp? Fielding wondered afterwards. There seemed no reserve of tranquillity to draw upon in India. Either none, or else tranquillity swallowed up everything, as it appeared to do for Professor Godbole....

His thin voice rose, and gave out one sound after another. At times there seemed rhythm, at times there was the illusion of a Western melody. But the ear, baffled repeatedly, soon lost any clue, and wandered in a maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none intelligible. It was the song of an unknown bird. Only the servants understood it. They began to whisper to one another. The man who was gathering water chestnut came naked out of the tank, his lips parted with delight, disclosing his scarlet tongue. The sounds continued and ceased after a few moments as casually as they had begun--apparently half through a bar, and upon the subdominant.

'Thanks so much: what was that?' asked Fielding.

'I will explain in detail. It was a religious song. I placed myself in the position of a milk-maiden. I say to Shri Krishna, "Come! come to me only." The god refuses to come. I grow humble and say: "Do not come to me only. Multiply yourself into a hundred Krishnas, and let one go to each of my hundred companions, but one, O Lord of the Universe, come to me." He refuses to come. This is repeated several times. The song is composed in a raga appropriate to the present hour, which is the evening.'

'But he comes in some other song, I hope?' said Mrs. Moore gently.

'Oh, no, he refuses to come,' repeated Godbole, perhaps not understanding her question. 'I say to him, Come, come, come, come, come, come. He neglects to come.'

Ronny's steps had died away, and there was a moment of absolute silence. No ripple disturbed the water, no leaf stirred.¹⁵

This startling end to the tea-party, punctuated by Godbole's arcane incantation, suggests the ultimate reality beyond human grasp. Enigmatic and disconcerting, the professor's song partakes of the same cosmic vision that the Indian milieu embodies. His chant intensifies the formidable starkness of the place through the pivotal image of the echo which reverberates throughout the novel. Hitherto India's profundity has been likened on various occasions to the voice of the echo and the arch of the sky (another key symbol), notably in Mrs. Moore's growing anxiety towards the foreign surroundings: "Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence."¹⁶

Godbole's musical invocation, essentially a repetition of sounds grounded in the petition "Come, come, come...", further dramatizes this feeling of apprehension: winding up in a negative response to the protagonist's earnest appeal, the hymn bespeaks men's fruitless efforts towards mutual understanding. With its solidity of setting and verisimilitude of action, the scene resembles the mosque episode in providing the natural conditions for the perfection of Forster's "fantasy". As Kettle indicates, "the room, the tank, the garden...Aziz's half-comic attempts to bridge the

gap...the self-sufficiency of Godbole and his mythology... and the figures of the servants in the garden, responding to the song, counteract any danger of the scene's becoming too obviously a mere symbolic dramatization."¹⁷ Effectively, the party grants us insight into the problem of human love which explicitly distinguishes itself in the Marabar incident.

2.

The profusion of scholarly exegeses that this central event has generated thoroughly attests to its richness and, consequently, Forster's consummate artistry. Like the Beethoven episode in Howards End, the Marabar expedition represents a sublime coalescence of substance and style. Simultaneously dramatic and metaphorical, Forster's construction of the incident deftly expresses the awesomeness of the adventure. And what is frequently recognized as the novelist's primary defect--his inability to meld the real and the symbolic--becomes irrelevant here: the momentous excursion powerfully exemplifies a symbiosis of realism and symbolism, of social comedy and poetic seriousness, a perfect conjunction not invariably achieved in Forster's previous novels.

To compare the respective comic sensibilities of Forster and Jane Austen might appear a critical commonplace. Yet, it is highly interesting and worthwhile to observe the

way Forster, the Jane Austenite,¹⁸ works hand in hand with Forster, the metaphysical writer, to achieve, in Henry James's term, "the maximum intensity with the minimum of strain" in the Marabar incident.¹⁹ Consider the following excerpt which delineates a minor mishap in the early part of the tour:

There were Fielding and old Godbole, held up at the level-crossing. Appalling catastrophe! The gates had been closed earlier than usual. They leapt from their tonga; they gesticulated; but what was the good. So near and yet so far! As the train joggled past over the points, there was time for agonized words.

'Bad, bad, you have destroyed me.'

'Godbole's pujah did it,' cried the Englishman.

The Brahman lowered his eyes, ashamed of religion. For it was so: he had miscalculated the length of a prayer.

'Jump on, I must have you,' screamed Aziz, beside himself.

'Right, give a hand.'

'He's not to, he'll kill himself,' Mrs. Moore protested. He jumped, he failed,...The train rumbled past....

'Mrs. Moore, Miss Quested, our expedition is a ruin.' He swung himself along the footboard, almost in tears.

'Get in, get in; you'll kill yourself as well as Mr. Fielding. I see no ruin.'

'How is that? Oh, explain to me!' he said piteously, like a child.

'We shall be all Moslems together now, as you promised.'

She was perfect as always, his dear Mrs. Moore. All the love for her he had felt at the mosque welled up again, the fresher for forgetfulness. There was nothing he would not do for her. He would die to make her happy.²⁰

The passage demonstrates, no less than Forster's other successful scenes, the novelist's masterful use of irony, his poise, penetration and economy of style--felicities

which he shares with Jane Austen. Here comedy evolves out of a flurry, ironically prompted by men of authority and intellect. The characters' reactions to the "contretemps" --Fielding's helplessness, Godbole's humiliation and Aziz's habitual naïveté--all cleanly presented in a few strokes, add to the whimsicality of the situation. While acknowledging in an interview his own indebtedness to Jane Austen, Forster described himself as a more ambitious writer than she: through her, he learned "the possibilities of domestic humour", and he "tried to hitch it on to other things".²¹ Thus for Forster, the comic mode is not an end, but a medium through which to establish a realistic ground for upholding his cosmic vision. In this light, the droll beginning of the Marabar excursion carries an extended function: Aziz's interjection that the trip is a failure represents a dramatic irony which achieves its full effect in the characters' climactic entrance into the caves.

Indeed, the Marabar journey is, symbolically, "a stupendous replica of [Fielding's] tea-party".²² The latter ends ruefully in an abortive attempt at communication; the former results tragically in disaster and misunderstanding. The crisis centres on the traumatic experiences of Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested in the caves. In an unfamiliar and immeasurably obscure environment, the characters' lack of comprehension grimly denotes the hopelessness of connection. By and large, the Marabar incident, the highlight of the

middle section of A Passage, is conveyed through the symbol of "caves", the background as well as catalyst of the grand muddle. In the preamble to this tremendous event--the initial chapter of Part II--Forster, viewing the caves in a meticulously detailed and erudite fashion, presents them as some dire creation, aloof and inscrutable. Predating the origin of humanity, they have witnessed the world's nascence and seem to exist in a timeless state which eludes man's estimations and critical distinctions:

[The visitor] finds it difficult to discuss the caves...for the pattern never varies, and no carving, not even a bees'-nest or a bat, distinguishes one from another. Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation...does not depend upon human speech. It is as if the surrounding plain or the passing birds have taken upon themselves to exclaim 'extraordinary', and the word has²³ taken root in the air, and been inhaled by mankind.

The dismaying neutrality of the caves, their complete absence of moral attributes, hints at a higher order indifferent to human action: "Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil."²⁴ In interpreting the caves, modern critics mostly employ either a theological or a Jungian approach (or, in the case of Wilfred Stone, both). According to some commentators, though the Marabar Hills precede religion and "are older than all spirit",²⁵ Hinduism, a form of elemental knowledge, parallels to a great extent the vital principle they embody.

This ancient religious faith, based on the tenet that maintains the realization of truth (Brahma) through recognition of the unity between Self (Atman) and Not-self (Brahmin), of the identification between good and evil, corresponds to the indistinctness, the nullity of value that typifies the Marabar. The Jungian view equates the caverns with the "primal womb", icon of the unconscious--the "darkness before existence".²⁶ This notion represents the caves as the non-being out of which all things emanate. Common to these ideological arguments is the presentation of a cosmic reality alien to the characters' western religious background and basic training.

In a sense, the tragic event of Marabar stems from the visitors' misapprehension of the caves. Of these figures, the mystical Mrs. Moore is the most cognizant of the message embodied in the landscape; yet, her grasp of it is incomplete. For her, what the caves symbolize is starkly negative. They intensify her fear by reinforcing what Godbole's song seems to imply--that contemporary society is a godless world vexed by emptiness and chaos. This horror is chiefly portrayed through the recurring symbol of the echo. What is so terrifying about the echo in the caves is its vacuity of meaning: "Whatever is said, the same monotonous voice replies....Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce 'boum'."²⁷ Its impact on Mrs. Moore is that

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

Her pessimism can be explained in terms of Godbole's analysis of the Marabar incident. Though not a member of the expedition, the Hindu mystic discloses a far deeper insight into the caves than any of the visitors. Viewing the event as an evil action that "expresses the whole of the universe", he further informs Fielding:

'Good and evil are different as their names imply. But, in my own humble opinion, they are both of them aspects of my Lord. He is present in one, absent in the other, and the difference between presence and absence is great, as great as my feeble mind can grasp. Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, "Come, come, come, come".'

The professor's metaphysics offers us a powerful glimpse into the mystery of the Marabar. Prefiguring the ultimate reality, the caves transcend all human values and moral distinctions; in this sense, they are neither good nor evil and represent the identification of these opposites. To conceive the caves as vile, as symbolic of the non-existence of infinite goodness, is to miss the pivotal point that their apparent lack of positive values paradoxically denotes the existence of an absolute truth, however veiled to human eyes. But this principle escapes Mrs. Moore. Hitherto, she has desired to communicate with God through becoming "one with the universe".³⁰ Yet, her experience at

the Marabar subverts such an aspiration, for it reveals the cosmos to her as an oppressive rather than benignant force, hostile to mankind. What has spoken to her in the caves, as she reflects some time after the event, is "something very old and very small. Before time, it was before space also. Something snub-nosed, incapable of generosity--the underlying worm itself."³¹ This last metaphor, "emblematic of the life principle", further clarifies the meaning of the caves.³² With its recoiling and contorted motion, the worm or "serpent of eternity made of maggots"³³ suggests the disorder and uncertainty of nature. However, these evils, providing man with an impetus to restore order and meaning, express in the long run the value of human existence; they are part of an eternal pattern which indicates a measure of stability and purpose in a sombrous, chaotic universe. But Mrs. Moore's religion does not allow her to see that far. She is shocked to discover the futility of her attempt to achieve oneness with the infinite. Her Christian values break down in the face of her observation that the unseen is devoid of exaltation and beauty, and that the thought of ultimate unity equals that of nothingness:

But suddenly, at the edge of her mind, Religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from 'Let there be Light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum'. Then she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe, never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no repose to her soul, the mood of the last two months took definite form at last, and she realized that she didn't want to write to her children, didn't want to communicate with anyone,

not even with God.³⁴

Likewise, Adela becomes the victim of a calamitous occurrence at the caves. Distinguished by her arid intellectualism and rigidly logical reasoning, she lacks the imagination to recognize the significance of the Marabar landscape. Yet, her tragedy is essentially the result of her inadequacy consciously to perceive the mystery of the place. Throughout the novel, Forster offers us no explanation as to what exactly happens in the caves. For he is not so much interested in the specifics of the action as in its moral tension and overall implications. Simply by disclosing Adela's portentous disappearance during the trip, Forster astutely prepares us for a double shock: Aziz's immediate arrest at his return to Chandrapore and the subsequent revelation of his alleged assault of Adela in a cavern. (Besides, a detailed account of the crisis would merely distract us from discerning the psychological subtlety with which the novelist conceives the incident. For this reason, Forster also constantly drops hints about Aziz's innocence. Based on the assumption of Aziz's sexual appetite, the indictment appears tenuous for, prior to the outing, we are already informed of Aziz's critical attitude towards Adela's physical appearance: "Adela's angular body and the freckles on her face were terrible defects in his eyes, and he wondered how God could have been so unkind to any female form."³⁵ And in a down-to-earth manner, he ex-

presses a similar opinion to Fielding: "She had practically no breasts, if you come to think of it."³⁶ Thus, to understand Adela's disastrous adventure, it is necessary to examine her mental process on the way to the caves.

Her contemplated subject is marriage. Appropriately, the Hills provide the elusive ambience in which she reviews her relationship with Ronny. The sight of a peculiarly indented rock, reminiscent of the depressed spot caused by the engaged couple's minor car accident, forces her into realizing the flimsy foundation upon which her engagement rests. Symbolic of the recklessness and impetuosity of their reconciliation, the ride, culminating in a collision with an animal, reminds the sullen lovers of their physical attraction towards each other,³⁷ and consequently, reverses Adela's decision not to marry Ronny: "There was esteem and animal contact at dusk, but the emotion which links them was absent."³⁸ Regardless of her discovery, however, Adela insists on the feasibility of marriage without love and that to break off the betrothal would be too much trouble. Unsurprisingly, therefore, she wishes she had physical charm, which might help strengthen her relationship with her fiancé. And in this muddled frame of mind, she enters the caves.

Some critics have attributed Adela's delusion--Aziz's attempted rape--to her unconscious lust for sexual gratification.³⁹ But this interpretation is unsound.

Though she finds the Moslem physically attractive, she does "not admire him with any personal warmth, for there was nothing of the vagrant in her blood".⁴⁰ Further, as June Perry Levine argues, Adela's wish for sexual magnetism does not signify her libido, but her need to be admired.⁴¹ Her delirium, the outcome of her assertion of this vagary, parallels Mrs. Moore's "spiritual muddledom": these are the characters' responses to the caves' indifference, represented through the echo symbol. It is the moment Adela unleashes the reverberating sound by scratching the wall that she entirely loses her power of discrimination. Yet, such a reaction is not an exemplification but a parody of the principle of non-differentiation epitomized by the caves.⁴² Despite her ignorance of its true implication, what the peevish and dejected Mrs. Moore says of marriage after her return from Marabar has important bearing upon Adela's frantic behaviour: "And all this rubbish about love, love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the least difference."⁴³ Manifestly, Adela's hallucination is a projection of her fear and insecurity: refusing to acknowledge the ultimate sameness of all things--vice and virtue, ugliness and beauty, illusion and reality, promiscuity and love--as well as the futility of her obtuse rationalizations, she seeks to uphold her confounded individualism, her questionable concept of marriage without love and her desire for admiration. Altogether, the echo stands for her dubious

conscience, the "barrier between her and the realization she cannot quite admit".⁴⁴ It is only when she withdraws her accusation at the trial that her echo--the buzzing noise that hitherto has continually disturbed her--disappears.

The only visitor unaffected by the horrific "boum" is Aziz. That he is totally insensitive to the caves' significance is partly due to his own religious bias--his complacent acceptance of Islam which he believes to be the absolute truth--and partly to his passionate temperament--his bent towards human concern rather than metaphysical speculation--a trait that distinguishes him from Mrs. Moore. Similarly, with his habitual placidity and rationality, Fielding does not detect any immediate threat inside the caverns. His humanism precludes the possibility of his succumbing to the spirit of the Marabar landscape; yet, it does not cause him to deny the deep, lasting impact of the setting upon certain characters and the Indian society at large. Upon the aftermath of Aziz's inquisition which turns what is originally an accident into an international crisis--the racial hostility between the British and the Indians--Fielding reflects: "Everything echoes now; there's no stopping the echo. The original sound may be harmless, but the echo is always evil."⁴⁵ Insightfully, the school principal penetrates the essence of the Marabar tragedy. Metaphorically speaking, the echo acts as the chief agent of the whole crisis. And thus, this man-made rather than spontan-

eous force is pestilent and malicious. Nonetheless, the echo is not a manifestation of man's innate depravity, but his illusion, his self-deception and egotistical complacency, which generates human misunderstanding and intolerance. Although Adela's initial action in the cave--her scratch against the granite--is innocuous, the detrimental repercussions it engenders occasion Aziz's incarceration, the widened gulf between his countrymen and the westerners, and eventually, the split between him and Fielding. But because of his practicality, Fielding, though perspicuous, can gain only a partial glimpse into the Marabar Hills. He misses the profound neutrality and mystical indistinctness of the prehistoric caves, which differ vastly from the dreary, unoriginal echoes. (Understandably, he "could never develop ['the reflection about an echo']. It belonged to the universe that he had missed or rejected.")⁴⁶ As a result, in perceiving mystery as a grand muddle, an obfuscation of form and distinctions that is to be avoided, he overlooks the possibility that such a disorientation paradoxically effaces these relative, timely and restrictive human standards, and discovers the inter-connectedness of creation which intimates the ultimate order. On the whole, the failure of the Marabar journey betokening the characters' unavailing effort at communication is a foregone conclusion. The following extract from the prefatory chapter of the "Caves" section tellingly serves as a microcosm of the whole endeavour:

...the visitor arrives for his five minutes, and strikes a match. Immediately another flame rises in the depths of the rock and moves towards the surface like an imprisoned spirit: the walls of the circular chamber have been most marvellously polished. The two flames approach and strive to unite, but cannot, because one of them breathes air, the other stone. A mirror inlaid with lovely colours divides the lovers, delicate stars of pink and grey interpose, exquisite nebulae, shadings fainter than the tail of a comet or the midday moon, all the evanescent life of the granite, only here visible....The radiance increases, the flames touch one another, kiss,⁴⁷ expire. The cave is dark again, like all the caves.

Opulently lyrical, the description encapsulates the general purport of the novel's middle part. Through the light imagery which, as Glen O. Allen suggests, is associated with intelligence, Forster cogently demonstrates the inadequacy of reason and, to a certain extent, Christianity (a discriminative, exclusive and therefore limited form of religion, in the novelist's view) in their attempt to explore the mystery of the universe.⁴⁸ The futile struggle of the flame within the granite wall to reach the source of light without is symbolic of the failure of the visitors to achieve unity with the infinite through their western religious consciousness and analytical training. The hope of universal brotherhood culminating in the expedition ultimately wanes, like the final extinguishing of the flames in the cavern.

Indubitably, Forster's intricate design and convincing treatment render the Marabar episode remarkably provocative. It not only illuminates and deepens our ap-

preciation of the development of preceding events but also, by way of the novelist's subtle management, induces us to want to learn the subsequent action in order to attain a comprehensive picture of the central incident. Moreover, its elaborate symbolism represented through a realistic action and solid setting is, in both the ordinary and Forsterian sense of the word, "fantastic", thus prompting Forster to achieve the effect of "prophecy"--our intuitive identification with his ontological vision. Yet, our praise of the novelist is not entirely unconditional. For in this principal episode, as in other passages, Forster is guilty of overarticulation: his authorial voice routinely intrudes where actions, events or experiences of the characters should be speaking for themselves. The following two quotations plainly illustrate this point:

Like most Orientals, Aziz overrated hospitality, mistaking it for intimacy, and not seeing that it is tainted with the sense of possession. It was only when Mrs. Moore or Fielding was near him that he saw further, and knew that it is more blessed to receive than to give.⁴⁹

Incurably inaccurate, he already thought that this was what had occurred. He was inaccurate because he was sensitive. He did not like to remember Miss Quested's remark about polygamy, because it was unworthy of a guest, so he put it from his mind, and with it the knowledge that he had bolted into a cave to get away from her. He was inaccurate because he desired to honour her, and--facts being entangled--he had to arrange them in her vicinity as one tidies the ground after extracting a weed.⁵⁰

It is evident why both F.R. Leavis and Duke Maskell object to Forster's "personal" style, his distinguished manner of

composition which "keeps us very much aware of his personality".⁵¹ But Maskell's rigorous censure of Forster's rhetoric--the omniscient narrative voice which aims to "flatter the reader that he is listening to 'good conversation'",--is callously overstated.⁵² In essence, authorial generalizations constitute as much a prominent feature in Forster's novels as in George Eliot's. Hers are conveyed in the first personal mode and chiefly serve as a direct commentary on the characters' actions; Forster's, "delivered from outside the book", are not really "unconnected with anything going on inside it", but are philosophical extensions of the plot.⁵³ In general, however, Leavis' criticism that Forster's peculiar craftsmanship involves limitations is warranted. The omniscient tone of the presenter and commentator hinders, to a certain extent, the evolvment of characters and events, and deprives them of the objectivity necessary for developing the novelist's moral vision to the fullest effect. For this reason, the Marabar episode is not entirely successful.

3.

The pessimism of the "Caves" is overwhelming, but not terminal. The closing sequence of the section--the trial--offers a gleam of light in an otherwise grim and disordered human world, thus making way for our sense of a "yet possible hope for spiritual integrity", the crux of the

last part of the novel.⁵⁴ Representing Adela's epiphany and Mrs. Moore's spiritual rebirth, the incident adeptly exemplifies Forster's "natural supernaturalism". The narrator's concluding comment on the episode is highly revealing: "...before long no one remained on the scene of the fantasy but the beautiful naked god. Unaware that anything unusual had occurred, he continued to pull the cord of his punkah, to gaze at the empty dais and the overturned special chairs, and rhythmically to agitate the clouds of descending dust."⁵⁵ Previously introduced as a sight that indelibly impresses Miss Quested--the Indian slave's physical grandeur awakens her consciousness of the pettiness of the trial--the analogy of the untouchable to a supreme divinity is by no means far-fetched or extravagant. In the present context, it artfully serves as a "parody" or an "adaptation", the object of which is to present the theme of the Marabar journey in another light, and thus clarifies Adela's reappraisal of her experience at the caves.⁵⁶ The image of the punkah wallah is somewhat mock-heroic: the garbless deity is actually a servant; he is smeared with earthly toil rather than haloed with heavenly glory; he exists but acts perfunctorily, and is far removed from the rest of humanity. Thus, he is not only a personification of the underlying principle of the caves--the existence of a transcendent spirit simultaneously obscure and indifferent to human activities--but also a travesty of Miss Quested's

mechanical intellectualism, the muddled self-knowledge which results in her alienation. Through this singular character, she acquires a new-found insight into her plight:

A new and unknown sensation protected her, like magnificent armour. She didn't think what had happened, or even remember in the ordinary way of memory, but she returned to the Marabar Hills, and spoke from them across a sort of darkness to Mr. McBryde. The fatal day recurred, in every detail, but now she was of it and not of it at the same time, and this double relation gave it indescribable splendour. Why had she thought the expedition 'dull'? Now the sun rose again, the elephant waited, the pale masses of rock flowed round her and presented the first cave; she entered and a match was reflected in the polished walls--all beautiful and significant, though she had been blind to it at the time. ...Smoothly the voice in the distance proceeded, leading along the paths of truth, and the airs from the punkah behind her wafted her on.⁵⁷

Adela's defeat at court arising from her withdrawal of the accusation ironically represents her moral triumph.

Concomitant with Adela's enlightenment is Mrs. Moore's "fantastic" deification. The latter's death during her return to England coincides with the moment of her transformation into a goddess at Aziz's trial. Far from fanciful, the Indians' invocation of "Esmiess Esmoor" issues from their compelling wish for Mrs. Moore's presence at the trial, the only person whom they believe can bring about Aziz's acquittal. Set in this context, Mrs. Moore's role as an enduring spirit is technically justifiable; however, it still poses the problem of thematic conceivability. Sour and downcast, Mrs. Moore seems to have undergone a drastic psychic change after the Marabar crisis. Her apathy, the

outcome of her disillusionment with life, finds full expression in her refusal to testify for Aziz, whom she knows to be innocent. Thus, Reuben A. Brower judges that "the dramatic preparation for the mystical effect of Mrs. Moore's influence is lacking or unconvincing."⁵⁸ But many other critics defend her "resurrection". James McConkey perceives Mrs. Moore's death as ultimately valuable, and asserts that she "must die through spiritual exhaustion...in order that a new birth, a new growth, may be achieved".⁵⁹ Frederick C. Crews contends that her redemption is accomplished through a parody of Hindu enlightenment.⁶⁰ Ironically paralleling the Katha-Upanishad, "When all the ties of the heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal," Mrs. Moore's very indifference makes it appropriate that she turns into a Hindu goddess after withering out of bodily existence.⁶¹ Likewise, interpreting her tragic experience as essentially an expression of Indian mysticism, Frank Kermode labels her "a saint of Nothingness".⁶² But these elaborate arguments are ultimately specious. In general, they do not furnish a credible explanation for Mrs. Moore's spiritual revival. Throughout her lifetime, she has never really abandoned her position as a compassionate figure. To a great extent, her bitter despair during her last days originates in her intense love for mankind. She is both emotionally and spiritually pulverized, because the grand muddle--Adela's accusation of Aziz's

assault--objectifies and corroborates what she believes the caves have imparted to her--the insignificance of existence and the insufficiency of human understanding--a sweeping obliteration of the inspiriting principle she identifies with and cherishes. To her, legalistic and moral distinctions become futile: Aziz's exculpation will not in any sense relieve the squalid human condition. Hence, she stays away from the trial. Yet, during this woeful time, her intrinsic loving spirit is never extinguished. Her pessimism and inertia do not stop her from informing Adela that Aziz is innocent, an act which has a great effect on the result of the trial. And it is this benevolent Mrs. Moore that survives in the consciousness of the other characters. As John Beer puts it, "her vicarious survival is a form of redemptive immortality."⁶³ Further, her death at sea is symbolic of her spiritual salvation. Her ultimate vision of Asirgarh on the voyage reawakens her soul by presenting a fresh and undespairing picture of India:

...thousands of coconut palms appeared all round the anchorage and climbed the hills to wave her farewell. 'So you thought an echo was India; you took the Marabar caves as final?' they laughed. 'What have we in common with them, or they with Asirgarh? Good-bye!'⁶⁴

Suitably, Mrs. Moore is proclaimed a goddess by the Indian multitude in the course of the legal proceedings. Reinforcing the punkah wallah's vitality, her mystical presence supplies Adela with a source of strength to rectify her error, to admit her wrongful indictment of Aziz. Such a

resolution of the trial, though failing to settle the dis-sension between the British and the Indians, is itself an affirmation; it implies the possibility that order lurks in the chaos, that a certain radiance indistinctly illumines the darkness.

This reassuring idea emerges palpably in "Temple", the concluding part of A Passage featuring the Gokul Ash-tami festival. The spiritualized setting of Mau, where the Hindu religious ceremony takes place, evokes Godbole's numinous vision of the universe, his extensive though in-complete sense of love and unity. In many ways, his mystic-al experience forms an obverse to Mrs. Moore's:

Thus Godbole, though she was not important to him, remembered an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days. Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by this spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction. His senses grew thinner, he remembered a wasp seen he forgot where, perhaps on a stone. He loved the wasp equally, he impelled it likewise, he was imit-ating God. And the stone where the wasp clung-- could he...no, he could not, he had been wrong to attempt the stone, logic and conscious effect had seduced, he came back to the strip of red carpet and discovered that he was dancing upon it.⁶⁵

The Christian mystic's fervent hope to attain spiritual union with God dissipates upon her shocking discovery at the Marabar that the Eternal is devoid of beauty and that oneness equals nothingness; Godbole's meditation manifests the essence of Hinduism which aims at completeness through a blurring of all distinctions, "a frustration of reason

and form"⁶⁶ typified by the Krishna ritual: "By sacrificing good taste", Forster remarks, "this worship achieves what Christianity has shirked: the inclusion of merriment."⁶⁷ The Hindu's vast benignity parallels Mrs. Moore's, the paragon of love rightfully resurrected in Godbole's mind. His attitude towards the wasp reminds us of the night in Chandrapore when Mrs. Moore reveals her essential kindness by refusing to kill another wasp lying on a coat-peg. Yet, the Hindu way of love has its limitations: though it makes a close attempt at spiritual unity and is treated with great sympathy in the novel, it is nonetheless insufficient to embody the totality of being, the ultimate truth. Echoing the caves, the stone image betokens the presence of an awesome cosmic reality which Godbole, even at the height of his religious transport, fails to fathom. His persistent effort at communication, however, is not entirely fruitless. For though intimating no certain promise of immortality, it at least affirms life's worth:

It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of the God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and to say to God, 'Come, come, come, come.' This was all he could do. How inadequate! But each according to his own capacities, and he knew that his own were small. 'One old Englishwoman and one little, little wasp,' he thought, as he stepped out of the temple into the grey of a pouring wet morning. 'It does not seem much, still it is more than I am myself.'⁶⁸

Despite the general recognition that the Mau festival graphically demonstrates Forster's refined sensitivity,

thoughtfulness and wit as a writer, the scene exposes one of the novelist's principal deficiencies--the mistiness of his style. Of course, Forster rightfully deserves our commendation for perceptively discerning the vastness of his metaphysical preoccupation--the accessibility of the infinite--which no single philosophy or religion can wholly unravel. The various faiths presented in A Passage to India are ultimately ineffectual. The novelist's basic charge against Islam is that despite its emphasis on personal relationships ("communion with a fellow-creature"),⁶⁹ a concern compatible with the Forsterian creed and concretely dramatized through the friendship between Aziz and Mrs. Moore in the first part of the novel, the faith seems to stress temporal existence at the expense of spiritual life, making little effort to seek transcendental union with God, a neglect which renders the religion somewhat dissatisfying. As Fielding says, "'There is no God but God" doesn't carry us far through the complexities of matter and spirit; it is only a game with words really, a religious pun, not a religious truth.'⁷⁰ The inadequacy of Christianity is largely manifested in "Caves", but it emerges sharply early in the novel. Contending that within heaven itself there are special mansions for the specially elect and that though divine hospitality may well be extended to all animals, it draws the line at the insects, the discussion between the two English missionaries, Mr. Grayford and Mr. Sorley,

symbolically represents the common Christian conception of love as distinct from the exceptional, mystical Mrs. Moore's, and consequently betrays the fundamental rigidity and exclusiveness of this religion: "We must exclude someone from our gathering or we shall be left with nothing."⁷¹ Even Hinduism, which is so sensitively portrayed in the novel's last section, does not provide for Forster the final answer. What makes it such a vital form of religion, as the novelist appreciatively shows in his description of the Mau festival, is the Hindu ideal of oneness; yet, its disorderly approach is no less than an abolition of the "intellectual sanity" that renders existence endurable to the Western mind.⁷² Thus Forster writes of the Krishna procession in one of his letters: "There is no dignity, no taste, no form, and though I am dressed as a Hindu I shall never become one."⁷³ Obviously, the novelist's profound scepticism is rooted in his estimation that the universe is not man-centered, that human beings are no more significant than beasts and plants in view of their ignorance of the ultimate truth. Given this extremely difficult task of presenting his vision of the infinite in fiction, a subject which inherently does not lend itself to dramatization, we credit Forster both for attempting and nearly accomplishing his grand purpose. Certainly, the notion of man's puniness and ephemerality manifests itself tellingly through Mrs. Moore's horrific experience in the caves. Nevertheless, Forster is some-

times obscure and misleading in his postulation of a "proper impersonality"⁷⁴ represented in Godbole's beatific vision of oneness. As seen in the passage depicting the Hindu's mystical experience, the kind of poetic language is injudiciously elusive. Its weakness becomes most explicit once we fasten our critical notice upon the central stone image on which the message of the whole scene rests. While the metaphor points to Forster's good common sense in perceiving that the mystery of the universe cannot be understood in full; its strongly negative overtones sabotage the novelist's original intention to supply evidence of the possibility of cosmic unity, of peace that passes all understanding. Here, the author's ironic realism jars with his solemn mysticism.

If Forster stumbles in his handling of the question of divine union, he excels in his portrayal of the human world. And the closing scenes unequivocally prove that he is above all a prophetic novelist of personal relations.⁷⁵ Remarkably, the characters' boat collision towards the end of the Hindu ceremony raises hope for the prospect of universal love. Vivid and compelling, the incident occurs as a result of Aziz's attempt to pay homage to Mrs. Moore's son, Ralph, by taking him off shore to observe the ritual of the birth of Krishna. Paralleling this positive act accomplished in such a spiritualized context--the immersion of the Hindu God emblematic of salvation--the smash-up of

Aziz's skiff and Fielding's symbolically restores their friendship. Upon discovering that Fielding's wife is actually Stella, Mrs. Moore's daughter who is involved in the accident, Aziz's previous misconstruction of the schoolmaster's motive in marrying Stella is rectified.

Such a reconciliation is, however, highly qualified. The final scene portraying the parting between Aziz and Fielding magnificently evinces Forster's profound objectivity in his refusal to draw a facile representation of reality and his unfailing conscientiousness in his attempt to hint at, in Arnold Kettle's words, "the unpredictable element in the most fully analyzed relationship".⁷⁶ On a personal level, Aziz and Fielding are reunited. But circumstances--the antipathy between their native countries--make their separation inevitable. "Passage", or universal brotherhood, seems to be contingent upon even greater and relentless effort by individuals like Aziz and Fielding. This sense of uncertainty is poignantly evoked by the haunting Indian landscape through which the two characters ride in their last encounter:

'...We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty five-hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then'--he rode against him furiously--'and then,' he concluded, half kissing him, 'you and I shall be friends.'

'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It's what I want. It's what you want.'

But the horses didn't want it--they swerved apart;

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

This forceful and ambiguous ending nonetheless incurs some criticisms. Kettle casts doubt on Forster's attempt to generalize on the basis of the relationship between Aziz and Fielding.⁷⁸ Because of the characters' inclination to lapse into wistfulness, their refusal to be heroic "which may be very human but...is also less than human", he questions: "But might not friendship with Aziz have been possible had Fielding been prepared to go a little further, to renounce rather more than he was prepared to renounce of the imperialist attitude?"⁷⁹ A similar objection is raised by Gertrude White who develops Lionel Trilling's argument that most of the characters of A Passage to India are sufficient for the "plot"--the tale of Aziz's tragically unsuccessful attempt to overcome the fences and barriers that sever him from Mrs. Moore and Adela--but not large enough for the "story"--"the cosmic stage on which [Aziz's] adventures are played".⁸⁰ Though realizing "the uselessness of attempts at friendship and union", she says, "[Aziz] never apprehends the real significance of his own ordeal nor relates it to the ordeal of India and of the whole world."⁸¹ Thus, this structural uncertainty, the incongruity in the relation of plot to story, demonstrates the primary flaw of the

novel--Forster's failure to bridge "the gulf between symbol and reality".⁸²

Both Kettle and White seem to have missed Forster's point. The former is probably just in calling the novelist "spinsterish"; it is hard to escape the impression of a vague quaintness and obstinacy about all of Forster's characters. Yet, particularity of temperament does not prevent Aziz and Fielding from achieving the secret understanding of the heart which, as June Perry Levine suggests, is revealed by "the whole tenor of the conversation" in the concluding episode.⁸³ It is only the larger forces of time and place--the historical background as well as the existing social and political conditions of India--that divide them. Likewise, there is some truth in White's recognition of the disharmony between the realistic and the symbolic in A Passage to India. But this appraisal is irrelevant to the final scene. Here Forster's aim is to show that the ultimate separation between the Indian Moslem and the English humanist results from their failure to comprehend the larger ramifications of their own action. As Trilling comments, "the characters are in the events, the events are not in them."⁸⁴ The ending of the book is not really pessimistic. Rather, it embodies the novelist's all-encompassing vision of human experience: life is at once a muddle and a mystery. Men's incomplete knowledge certainly generates confusion and chaos, but it also results in their

constant search for order and mutual understanding, the act of which alone ensures the continuity and vitality of existence. Altogether, the closing episode exemplifies Forster's masterly coalescence of "fantasy" and reality. In the final analysis, he is a "prophetic" novelist.

4.

The verisimilitude of plot and setting is matched by Forster's piquant characterization in A Passage to India. By and large, the characters are full and vibrant, unlike those in Howards End. Most of the major "fantastic" and naturalistic figures perform their symbolic roles neatly. On the whole, their interplay serves prophetically to represent the novelist's humanistic vision.

A Passage contains a multitude of characters split into two camps: Indian and British. Most of these figures are types distinguished by their mutual distrust because of their cultural differences. But their "flatness" does not blur their individuality; they are broadly informed with a creative energy which renders them vivacious and engaging. Among the more notable minor Indian characters are the Nawab Bahadur who disapproves of superstition but nonetheless believes in ghosts, Hamidullah who wistfully muses upon his happy days in Cambridge in contrast with the tumultuous life in Chandrapore, and Mahmoud Ali whose cynicism about the British climaxes in an outburst in ob-

jection to the proceedings of Aziz's trial. On the English side, there are, among others, Major Callendar, the Civil Surgeon, who frowns upon Aziz's queer manner though he recognizes his expertise as a physician; Mr. Turton, the sincere but jingoistic Collector; Mr. McBryde, the quirky District Superintendent of Police who theorizes that natives residing south of latitude thirty are criminals at heart; and, of course, Ronny (Mrs. Moore's son), the somewhat pusillanimous and superficial City Magistrate who conforms to the superior attitude displayed by his fellow expatriate officials. Together, these characters create a panorama of the complexity and multi-levelled profusion of Indian society.

The "round" characters are even more arresting. Both Adela and Fielding stand out as remarkable individuals in the novel. For the most part, the former is distinguished by her irksome donnishness, her want of imagination. Yet, to stamp her as a type devoid of emotional depth is decidedly shortsighted. For, like Lucy Honeychurch in A Room with a View and Rickie Elliot in The Longest Journey, she is largely a figure unable to connect head and heart. Aziz's trial occasions her self-discovery, and her conversation with Fielding shortly afterwards finely illustrates that, to some degree, she achieves such an integration:

'Let us call it the guide,' she said indifferently. 'It will never be known. It's as if I ran my fingers along that polished wall in the dark, and

cannot get further. I am up against something, and so are you. Mrs. Moore--she did know.'

'How could she have known what we don't?'

'Telepathy, possibly.'

The pert, meagre word fell to the ground. Telepathy? What an explanation! Better withdraw it, and Adela did so. She was at the end of her spiritual tether, and so was he. Were there worlds beyond which they could never touch, or did all that is possible enter their consciousness? They could not tell. They only realized that their outlook was more or less similar, and found in this a satisfaction. Perhaps life is a mystery, not a muddle; they could not tell. Perhaps the hundred Indias which fuss and squabble so tiresomely are one, and the universe they mirror⁸⁵ is one. They had not the apparatus for judging.

Here, in spite of her rationality, Adela shares Mrs. Moore's intuitive wisdom, which deepens her respect for the loving old lady as well as broadens her world perspective, thus allowing her to appreciate the inscrutability of the universe. And it is this Adela, the tolerant rationalist, with whom Aziz associates the most sacred name in his mind --Mrs. Moore.

The same scene also portrays Fielding as a character replete with sense and sensibility. The author's chief spokesman, he epitomizes the Forsterian creed that men thrive by the help of "good will plus culture and intelligence".⁸⁶ His roundness lies mainly in his unflinching efforts at fellowship as well as his constant evaluation of his own principles. The end of the discussion between Fielding and Adela testifies to the man's integrity:

A friendliness as of dwarfs shaking hands, was in the air. Both man and woman were at the height of their powers--sensible, honest, even subtle. They

spoke the same language, and held the same opinions, and the variety of age and sex did not divide them. Yet they were dissatisfied. When they agreed...the words were followed by a curious backwash as though ...they had seen their own gestures from an immense height--dwarfs talking, shaking hands and assuring each other that they stood on the same footing of insight. They did not think they were wrong....But wistfulness descended on them now, as on other occasions; the shadow of the shadow of a dream fell over their clear-cut interests, and objects never seen again seemed messages from another world.

'And I do like you so very much, if I may say so,' he affirmed.

'I'm glad, for I like you. Let's meet again.'

'We will, in England, if I ever take home leave.'⁸⁷

The passage firmly establishes the friendship between the schoolmaster and the departing English lady. The immediate impact of the Marabar incident on Fielding is that he becomes plaintive and disheartened, doubting the achievement of forty years of social relationships as well as questioning whether he is "really and truly successful as a human being".⁸⁸ But at this juncture, he, like the enlightened Adela, comes to realize the profundity of life, which no faith--not even his extensive liberalism--is sufficient to gauge. And Fielding's humility, his consciousness of his inadequate understanding, bespeaks his mettle and largeness of vision. Rather than a mere symbol, he emerges as a genuine humanist.

Widely hailed as Forster's most brilliant creation, Aziz is absorbing, lively and exhaustively developed.⁸⁹ A romantic at heart, he is reminiscent of Helen Schlegel in Howards End. But while the latter is no more than a

banner of her own faith--the supremacy of passion and imagination, of the inner world into which she recedes--the former is substantially human. Throughout the novel, Aziz strikes us as being capricious, warmly sensitive (though sporadically egocentric), and vaguely mystical. The trial transforms him into a bitterly disillusioned man whose warm hospitality has yielded to an abstract aversion for the British and a distrust of Fielding (whom he suspects of having fallen in love with Miss Quested). Still, beneath the surface of this angry, uncompromising Mohammedan is an idealist who sedulously believes in "the secret understanding of the heart". His encounter with Ralph, Mrs. Moore's youngest son, at Mau is illustrative:

'I must go back now, good night,' said Aziz, and held out his hand, completely forgetting that they were not friends, and focusing his heart on something more distant than the caves, something beautiful. His hand was taken, and then he remembered how detestable he had been, and said gently, 'Don't you think me unkind any more?'

'No.'

'How can you tell, you strange fellow?'

'Not difficult, the one thing I always know.'

'Can you always tell whether a stranger is your friend?'

'Yes.'

'Then you are an Oriental.' He unclasped as he spoke, with a little shudder. Those words--he had said them to Mrs. Moore in the mosque in the beginning of the cycle, from which, after so much suffering, he had got free. Never be friends with the English! Mosque, caves, mosque, caves. And here he was starting again. He handed the magic ointment to him. 'Take this, think of me when you use it. I shall never want it back. I must give you one little present, and it is all I have got; you are Mrs. Moore's son.'

Aziz's initial animosity towards Ralph--evident in the bru-

tality with which he applies medication to the English boy plagued by bee-stings--dissolves in the course of their conversation. The Aziz who befriends this youth is, of course, the same impassioned and intuitive Indian doctor who achieves an enduring relationship with Mrs. Moore, and who eventually resolves his differences with Fielding. As a sympathetic protagonist, Aziz is always convincing.

But the "fantastic" characters (with one prominent exception) are not quite so successful. As visionary figures modelled after their mother (Mrs. Moore), Ralph and Stella are notably thin. The son partakes of his mother's spirit to the point that it effaces his own identity; hence, as can be seen in his accidental meeting with Aziz, Ralph's mysticism wants the resonance which would render it unaffectedly plausible. Similarly, Fielding's reference to Stella's uncommon point of view and his remark that she is "after something" are trifling evidence of her discernment of the infinite.⁹¹ In brief, the children's late appearance in the book allows them little time and space to mature as fully developed individuals.

Forster's handling of Professor Godbole is likewise objectionable--though for significantly different reasons. Many critics agree that the Brahman is the most "psychic" of the characters. In a sense, his Hindu mysticism draws him nearer to comprehending the Marabar caves than Mrs. Moore. By immersing himself in the elemental world, how-

ever, he suffers from the same defect as Ruth Wilcox: both of them move awkwardly among their human companions.⁹²

The scene delineating Godbole's view of Aziz's arraignment is indicative of the Hindu's ponderousness as a "fantastic" figure:

'I am informed that an evil action was performed in the Marabar Hills, and that a highly esteemed English lady is now seriously ill in consequence. My answer to that is this: that action was performed by Dr. Aziz.' He stopped and sucked in his thin cheeks. 'It was performed by the guide.' He stopped again. 'It was performed by you.' Now he had an air of daring and of coyness. 'It was performed by me.' He looked shyly down the sleeve of his own coat. 'And by my students. It was even performed by the lady herself. When evil occurs, it expresses the whole of the universe. Similarly when good occurs.'

'And similarly when suffering occurs, and so on and so forth, and everything is anything and nothing something,' Fielding muttered in his irritation, for he needed the solid ground.

Godbole's spirituality, his total identification with his own philosophy, is adroitly drawn. Yet, absorbed in his vision of the transcendent reality, the Brahman does not seem to have any role on the human stage. Predominantly, his language is crabbed and airy, so much so that it frequently verges on the absurd. Though acting primarily as a mystic capable of little social interaction, Ruth Wilcox does at times manifest her sharp feminine sensibilities. But nowhere in A Passage to India does Godbole show that he is actually a flesh-and-blood character. His metaphysics simply eclipses his human identity.

By contrast, Mrs. Moore is superbly realistic as

Godbole's counterpart. Compounded with her phenomenal instinctive knowledge is a far-reaching compassion which makes her supremely human. For this reason, the charge laid by some critics that she is never vitally related to the people and events around her is rather obtuse.⁹⁴ The exchange between her, Adela and Ronny after the Marabar trip subtly reveals her basic humanity:

Mrs. Moore came back, with the same air of ill-temper, and sat down with a flump by the card-table. To clear the confusion, Ronny asked her point-blank whether she had mentioned the prisoner....She replied: 'I never said his name,' and began to play Patience.

'I thought you said, "Aziz is an innocent man," but it was in Mr. Fielding's letter.'

'Of course he is innocent,' she answered indifferently: it was the first time she had expressed an opinion on the point.

'You see, Ronny, I was right,' said the girl.

'You were not right, she never said it.'

'But she thinks it.'⁹⁵

Obviously, Mrs. Moore is no less perturbed than Adela, the victim of the Marabar crisis. Yet, her defence of Aziz, a quiet hint that Adela has unjustly accused him, exhibits Mrs. Moore's intuitive acumen and esteem for friendship, regardless of her glumness and bewilderment. It is, therefore, not surprising that this charitable figure lives on in people's hearts after her death. Substantially achieving a fusion between the kingdoms of fact and "fantasy", Mrs. Moore is exuberantly "prophetic". Her success as a "redemptive" character saliently affirms Forster's stylistic virtuosity.

NOTES-

¹Much of the material in A Passage to India is based on Forster's travels in India recorded in his letters and journals. Further, the war corroborated Forster's recognition of the squalor of modern civilization; and such a picture provides the discordant backdrop against which the characters struggle to achieve peace and understanding in the novel.

²E.M. Forster, A Passage to India (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), pp. 9-11.

³Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 108.

⁴Forster, A Passage, p. 21.

⁵Ibid., p. 24.

⁶Ibid., p. 21.

⁷Reuben A. Brower, "The Twilight of the Double Vision: Symbol and Irony in A Passage to India" in his The Fields of Light (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 185.

⁸Forster, A Passage, p. 20.

⁹-----, "The Mosque" in Abinger Harvest (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), p. 294.

¹⁰-----, A Passage, p. 43.

¹¹Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol. II (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p. 140.

¹²Forster, A Passage, p. 68.

¹³Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁴Kettle, Introduction, p. 137.

¹⁵Forster, A Passage, pp. 77-78.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 51-52.

¹⁷Kettle, Introduction, p. 140.

¹⁸Forster, "Jane Austen" in Abinger Harvest, p. 162.

¹⁹Henry James, The Art of the Novel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 56.

²⁰Forster, A Passage, pp. 130-131.

²¹P.N. Furbank and F.J.H. Haskell in Malcolm Cowley ed., Writers at Work: the 'Paris Review' interviews (New York: The Viking Press, 1958), p. 34.

²²Forster, A Passage, p. 126.

²³Ibid., p. 124.

²⁴Ibid., p. 125.

²⁵Ibid., p. 124.

²⁶Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 307. See also Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster, p. 157.

²⁷Forster, A Passage, p. 145.

²⁸Ibid., p. 147.

²⁹Ibid., p. 175.

³⁰Ibid., p. 203.

³¹Ibid., p. 203.

³²Frederick P.W. McDowell, E.M. Forster (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), p. 107.

³³Forster, A Passage, p. 203.

³⁴Ibid., p. 148.

³⁵Ibid., p. 67.

³⁶Ibid., p. 67.

³⁷John Beer, "The Undying Worm" in Malcolm Bradbury, ed., E.M. Forster: A Passage to India (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 199.

³⁸Forster, A Passage, p. 150.

³⁹Among these critics are Frederick C. Crews who maintains that "the echo that is metaphorically sounded in Adela's hallucination...of sexual attack is that of her un-

voiced desire for physical love." See E.M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism, p. 159. In more or less the same terms, Wilfred Stone suggests that "Adela no doubt suffered a form of sexual hysteria." See The Cave and the Mountain, p. 335.

⁴⁰Forster, A Passage, p. 151.

⁴¹June Perry Levine, Creation and Criticism: A Passage to India (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 92.

⁴²Ibid., p. 179.

⁴³Forster, A Passage, p. 197.

⁴⁴Levine, Creation and Criticism, p. 93.

⁴⁵Forster, A Passage, p. 269.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 269.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 125.

⁴⁸Glen O. Allen, "Structure, Symbol and Theme in A Passage to India", PMLA, LXX (December, 1955), p. 943.

⁴⁹Forster, A Passage, p. 141.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 156.

⁵¹F.R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit, p. 275.

⁵²Duke Maskell, "Style and Symbolism in Howards End", p. 299.

⁵³Ibid., p. 299.

⁵⁴Edwin Nierenberg, "The Prophecy of E.M. Forster", Queens Quarterly, XXV (June, 1964), p. 196.

⁵⁵Forster, A Passage, p. 224.

⁵⁶-----, Aspects, p. 124.

⁵⁷-----, A Passage, pp. 221-222.

⁵⁸Brower, "The Twilight of Double Vision", p. 197.

⁵⁹James McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster, p. 85.

⁶⁰Crews, Perils of Humanism, p. 160.

- ⁶¹Ibid., p. 160.
- ⁶²Frank Kermode, "The One Orderly Product" in his Puzzles and Epiphanies: Essays and Reviews 1958-1961 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 85.
- ⁶³Beer, "The Undying Worm", p. 210.
- ⁶⁴Forster, A Passage, p. 205.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 281-282.
- ⁶⁶Ibid., p. 280.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., p. 284.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 286.
- ⁶⁹Forster, "Salute to the Orient" in Abinger Harvest, p. 291.
- ⁷⁰-----, A Passage, p. 269.
- ⁷¹Ibid., p. 38.
- ⁷²Crews, Perils of Humanism, p. 183.
- ⁷³P.N. Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), II, 90.
- ⁷⁴Leavis, The Common Pursuit, p. 274.
- ⁷⁵Brower, "The Twilight of the Double Vision", p. 197.
- ⁷⁶Kettle, Introduction, p. 146.
- ⁷⁷Forster, A Passage, p. 317.
- ⁷⁸Kettle, Introduction, p. 142.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., p. 142.
- ⁸⁰Gertrude White, "A Passage to India: Analysis and Reevaluation", PMLA, LXVIII (September 1953), p. 654.
- ⁸¹Ibid., p. 654.
- ⁸²Ibid., p. 655.
- ⁸³Levine, Creation and Criticism, p. 188.
- ⁸⁴Trilling, E.M. Forster, p. 147.

- ⁸⁵Forster, A Passage, p. 256.
- ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 62.
- ⁸⁷Ibid., p. 257.
- ⁸⁸Ibid., p. 187.
- ⁸⁹McDowell, E.M. Forster, p. 119.
- ⁹⁰Forster, A Passage, p. 306.
- ⁹¹Ibid., p. 314.
- ⁹²White, "A Passage to India: Analysis and Revaluation", p. 654.
- ⁹³Forster, A Passage, p. 175.
- ⁹⁴See White, "A Passage to India: Analysis and Revaluation", p. 654. See also Brower, "The Twilight of the Double Vision", p. 197.
- ⁹⁵Forster, A Passage, pp. 199-200.

CONCLUDING NOTE

Forster's reputation, eminent though it may be, is based on a comparatively limited output. The entire body of his work consists merely of six novels, three volumes of short stories, as well as some critical and journalistic writings. Nonetheless, it is an impressive canon. Together with other literary and social criticisms, Aspects of the Novel attests to Forster's sensitivity and his keen perception. Likewise, the novels affirm his artistic genius. Fusing form and substance, A Passage to India particularly represents a sublime aesthetic achievement. It distinguishes Forster as a consummate and enduring twentieth century artist.

Though falling short of the success of A Passage, Forster's earlier fictional works are still interesting and not to be slighted. For all together, they reveal the process by which he grows and matures into an accomplished novelist. The short stories are "fantasies" aimed at exposing human folly. In doing so, however, they crudely divide humanity into black and white by dramatizing the contrast between two conflicting worlds--the real and the supernatural. The results are generally dubious. The two early novels--Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with a View--essentially embody a similar moral framework. Yet, they are more

credible "fantasies" because they are able to present the numinous element--the norm representing Forster's notion of a rich and vigorous existence--much less obtrusively than the short stories. In Angels especially, the novelist manages to integrate realism and symbolism; thus, he vividly manifests the weaknesses of mankind by opposing inner truth and outer convention. The Longest Journey and Howards End are more sophisticated and ambitious than the Italian novels. Conceptually, they resemble A Passage to India in their attempt to achieve the effect of "prophecy"--the reader's intuitive grasp of Forster's ontological vision--through "fantasy". By synthesizing the real and the mystical, Forster endeavours forcefully to convey his idea of reality based on the connection between materialism and spirituality, between the mortal realm and the infinite. But ultimately, neither of these novels completely fuses the author's moral emphasis with his dramatic technique. Still, we should not exaggerate the importance of such weaknesses. Even at his lowest ebb, Forster never ceases in his attempt to intimate the value of mortality, to avoid facile generalizations about human existence; he is, at his best, tough-minded, conscientious and profoundly compassionate. He is also a writer of abiding strength, radically manifested in the ultimate realization of his grand theme in A Passage to India. The novelist himself finally epitomizes the vital, creative force he seeks to portray in his

fiction.

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