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THE ROLE OF SETTING IN THE NOVELS OF E.M. FORSTER

by
Edward Trainor

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Joe Lee Davis, Chairman
Assistant Professor Floyd L. Bergman
Associate Professor James J. Gindin
Professor Robert F. Haugh

ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF SETTING IN THE

NOVELS OF E. M. FORSTER

by
Edward Trainor

Chairman: Professor Joe Lee Davis

E. M. Forster has created some of the most memorable settings in the English novel. Howards End, The Cadbury Rings, the Marabar Caves have their place beside Egdon Heath and Wuthering Heights.

Settings in Forster's novels are never merely backdrops; rather there is vital interaction between setting and character. We have, for example, the benign effect of Howards End on the Schlegel sisters and the destructive effect of the Marabar Caves on Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested. To conceive of the role of setting in man's life as Forster does, is to see setting as one of the essential factors in shaping man's character and destiny.

Forster's conception of the role setting and his subsequent depiction of it in his novels was in large measure shaped by four aspects of his experience. Basic was his thorough grounding in nineteenth century Romanticism, the Romanticism of Coleridge and Arnold. Combined with this was his belief that man's life must be rooted in a home, a belief which he inherited from his Thornton ancestors. Important, too, was his coming to believe that a place may be inhabited

by a spirit, a genius loci. The final shaping force was his encounter with the philosophy of G. E. Moore, particularly as it is outlined in Principia Ethica, a philosophy which holds that man's aesthetic sensibilities reflect his ethical nature.

In Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with A View, Forster treats of the enlightening, the enriching effects of encounters between sensitive middle class Englishmen and Italy. He deals with similar situations in The Longest Journey and Howards End, but in these novels the place is England, the England of Salisbury Plain and Howards End, itself. Only A Passage to India does not conform to this pattern. Here, Forster deals with the destructive effect of a confrontation between the sensitive Englishman and a totally alien environment.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

Edward Morgan Forster has created some of the most memorable settings in the English novel. The house called Howards End, the caves of Marabar, the Cadbury Rings--these find peers in English fiction only in such settings as Wuthering Heights and Egdon Heath. They have a life and vitality which Frederick C. Crews has termed "almost pantheistic."[1] Rather than mere backdrops against which the characters of the novels play out their roles, they are themselves actors in the dramas, essential to the dénouements.

That a novelist creates such settings reflects a particular attitude toward physical environment and man's interaction with it. The novelist must be convinced of the importance of the relation of the non-human to the human. He must believe that in all that he does man is significantly affected by the rooms which he inhabits and the landscapes through which he moves. It is a distinctly romantic attitude. And in considering setting in Forster's work, we must keep constantly in mind how deeply he was influenced by Romanticism.

That Romanticism was such a great influence on Forster

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[1] E. M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 38.

is not surprising. It was a world of Wordsworth in standard editions and Edward Burns-Jones paintings. Rose Macauley points out that he ". . . evolved his self-expression in the early twentieth-century as a young Englishman of the professional classes, whose forebearers had for some generations lived cultured, humane, philanthropic, comfortable, liberal, nineteenth-century kind of lives . . ."[2] And Wilfred Stone, in attempting to summarize Forster's thought, turns to this passage from John Stuart Mill:

> The Germano-Coleridgean doctrine . . . expresses the revolt of the human mind against the philosophy of the eighteenth century. It is ontological, because it was experimental; conservative, because it was innovative; religious, because so much of that was infidel; concrete and historical, because that was abstract and metaphysical; poetical, because that was matter of fact and prosaic.[3]

Stone quotes Mill because he feels, and convincingly demonstrates, that Forster "is an implicit Coleridgean though neither a political conservative nor religious in a Christian sense, he shows essentially all the values, he is engaged in the same movement of thought and protest, and he is dedicated to the same search for ways (to take one instance) of joining poetry and matter of fact."[4]

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[2]The Writings of E.M. Forster, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938, p. 8.

[3]The Cave and the Mountain, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966, p. 5.

[4]Ibid.

Not surprisingly then, as we look at the settings in each of his novels, we will find implicit and explicit evidence of Forster's espousal of the nineteenth-century Romantic view of the physical world and of man's relationship to it. The following analysis by Lionel Trilling of the moment of epiphany in Forster's short story, "The Road from Colonus," points to the type of evidence we will discover:

> . . . we perceive that here, continuing through a long century, is still the romantic quest. The romantic spirits from Wordsworth to Matthew Arnold had looked for coherence in nature's apparently 'accidental pattern'; they did not want to believe in a dead or mechanical or merely neutral universe, they wanted to find what Mr. Lucas the hero of the story found, 'meaning' and 'intention.' And the nearest they could come to finding them was when they felt like Mr. Lucas, the sense of being a whole man, an experience which seemed most often to come to them in quiet contemplation of Nature or of the ancient traditional life of humanity.[5]

This analysis brings to mind immediately Margaret Schlegel's reaction to Howards End and, negatively, Mrs. Moore's to the caves at Marabar, for certainly both reactions can be interpreted much as Trilling interprets Mr. Lucas' feeling as he stands before the great, offering-hung tree.

Forster's family background is a second major influence on his conception of the relationship between man and his physical environment and, consequently, on his treatment of setting. He is descended on his father's side from the Thornton

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[5]E. M. Forster, Norfolk, Connecticut: New Direction Books, 1943, p. 40.

family whose great house was Battersea Rise. The family's feeling about this house more than borders on the religious. In his biography of his great-aunt, Marianne Thornton, Forster describes the house in quite exacting detail, although it had fallen before the wreckers' hammers before he was born, and he shows very movingly the intensity of emotion with which the members of the family regarded it. One of Marianne's sisters, he tells us, flatly called it a "sacred place," and he, himself, only half-ironically, refers to it as a "shrine." Perhaps the greatest crisis which the book recounts is Marianne's departure from the house. Deaths and threats of financial disaster seem almost insignificant when balanced against the loss of the Rise.

Marianne left the house because her brother Henry (the head of the family) married his dead wife's sister. At the time such a marriage was not legal under British law, and propriety would not permit Marianne to stay on at the Rise or allow any member of the family to visit it. The storm of scandal which the marriage caused, while hurting Marianne and the family deeply, was as nothing compared to the realization that the Rise could no longer be the axis on which the Thornton world turned. Forster writes:

> Battersea Rise had been abandoned. This is the point that most horrified the family [Henry had taken his bride to the continent for a visit of indeterminate length]. Servants had been left in charge, and though no one would be more loyal than Mr. Harrison the butler

> or more shocked by the course of events, he was no substitute for the Master, the Inheritor who had betrayed his trust. It was the loss of Battersea Rise that distressed them most and exacerbated their general moral distress. They had been accustomed to return to it and to show it to their children, or at any rate to think of it as functioning. Now they were excluded forever--unless they bent the knee to immorality, which was unthinkable. Their outlook wavered; they did not know whether they wished Henry to return at once or after an interval or never. They did not know whether they wished the house to be sold and to vanish off the spiritual face of the earth, or to stand as it was, an empty and dishonored shell. I understand many of their feelings: it has so happened that I have been deprived of a house myself. They will not be understood by the present generation.[6]

Later on the same book Forster reiterates his empathy with the Thorntons' feelings about the loss of the Rise. In writing about the house in Hertfordshire in which he and his mother once lived, the house on which he modeled Howards End, he says:

> . . . I took it to my heart and hoped, as Marianne had of Battersea Rise, that I should live and die there. We were out of it in ten years. The impressions I received there remained and still glow--not always distinguishably, always inextinguishably--and have given me a slant on society and history. It is a middle class slant, atavistic, derived from the Thorntons, and it has been corrected by contact with friends who have never had a home in the Thornton sense and do not want one.[7]

Certainly, as we consider these passages, Margaret's feelings about Howards End come to mind, and also the

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[6]Marianne Thornton, London: Edward Arnold (Publisher) Ltd., 1965, p. 188.

[7]Thornton, p. 269.

Honeychurches about Windy Corners in A Room with A View, or Aziz's about the mosque in the opening section of A Passage to India, or in a negative sense, Mrs. Failing's about Cadover in The Longest Journey.

The Thornton reverence for the Rise extended to its gardens and prominent in the early pages of Marianne Thornton is a great tulip tree that grew outside a window of the oval library of the Rise. It was a thing of wonderment to the Thornton children and, during the tense days when a Napoleonic invasion seemed imminent, they were most concerned that it would be captured by the invaders. Forster's treatment of the tree and the children's feeling about it suggests, to a degree, his involvement with the notion of genius loci, a third major influence that helps account for the particular role setting has in his novels.

A belief in genius loci, that is that each place, be it a wych-elm or a hearthstone, is inhabited by a spirit, is not an uncommon feature of primitive religions and it is likely that when Forster was a boy he encountered some vestiges of it in the folklore of the kitchens and fields. Certainly he met it as it appeared in Latin literature, for he studied under and associated with such eminent classicists as Oscar Browning, J. M. McTaggart and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, whose biography he wrote. With these men as mentors and friends, he was unquestionably familiar with such a work as

Horace's De Agriculturia. In this poem Horace explains, for example, the proper way of making an offering to the spirit of a copse which is to be cut down.

Forster is quite serious about genius loci. He does not treat it as a pretty conceit or a handy convention. In his introduction to his collected stories, he mentions the indebtedness of The Longest Journey to genius loci, and tells, only half whimsically, how on three occasions he was inspired by a personal encounter with a genius loci to write stories:

> One of my novels, The Longest Journey, does indeed depend from an encounter with the genius loci [sic], but indirectly, complicatedly, not here to be considered. Directly, the genius loci [sic] has only inspired me twice, and on the third occasion it deprived me of a sovereign. [He could not find a publisher for the third story.][8]

He makes clear in this introduction that he is not using the term figuratively, but is speaking of actual experiences which he has had.

Alan Wilde feels that genius loci pervades the stories which have been collected in The Celestial Omnibus.[9] It appears clear that it is a recurrent phenomenon in all of Forster's fiction. Certainly the grove at Cambridge and the Cadbury Rings of The Longest Journey, for example, or the "magic" pool in A Room with a View or Howards End owe something

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[8]Collected Tales of E. M. Forster, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1952, p. vii.

[9]Art and Order, A Study of E. M. Forster, London: Peter Owen, 1965, pp. 62-85.

in their conception, realization, and their roles within the novels to Forster's concern with this idea.

A fourth major factor which affected setting in Forster's novels, because it helped shape his view of the place of physical environment in man's total experience, is the philosophical system proposed by G. E. Moore in Principia Ethica. Whether Forster actually read the book is not material. As we shall see there is strong internal evidence in The Longest Journey that he did, but even if he did not, the precepts of the book were so widely discussed, so generally admired in the intellectual milieu in which he moved, that he could not but have been thoroughly familiar with them. J. K. Johnstone quotes the following passage from a speech Maynard Keynes delivered in 1938 to suggest the impact of Moore's work on the young intellectuals of the time:

> I went to Cambridge at Michaelmas 1902 and Moore's Principia Ethica came out at the end of my first year. I have never heard of the present generation having read it. But, of course, its effect on us, and the talk which preceded and followed it, dominated, and perhaps still dominates, everything else. We were at an age when our beliefs influenced our behavior.[10]

Forster's indebtedness to Moore for the doctrine of "personal relationships," one of the basic doctrines of Principia Ethica, has been generally recognized and exhaustively discussed. According to this doctrine, one of the

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[10]The Bloomsbury Group, New York: The Noonday Press, 1954, p. 20.

indisputable "goods" which man can attain is a true relationship with another human. In Howards End, Forster most explicitly dramatizes this conviction, but he deals with it in one form or another in each of the novels. The final and only hope for man, for instance, which he offers in A Passage to India is that at some future time it will be possible for man to establish true personal relationships. In one of the most famous sentences he ever wrote, he does nothing more than carry this doctrine to its logical conclusion. When he writes in "What I Believe" that ". . . if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country,"[11] he is stating an orthodox Moorean position.

His indebtedness to Moore for a second major ethical position has been largely ignored. Although this position is clearly important in the novels and explicitly stated by Forster in a number of essays, critics tend to overlook it. Quite simply, Forster, at least when writing the first four of his novels, ranked the aesthetic as one of the supreme experiences which man can have (equaled only by the experience of a true personal relationship). He partially explains his position in the essay "Art for Art's Sake." In the concluding paragraph, he summarizes "the various categories that have

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[11] Two Cheers for Democracy, London: Penguin Books Ltd., p. 76.

laid claims to the possession of order" and, after dismissing the claims of the social and political, the astronomical, and the religious, he ends with this judgment:

> The aesthetic category. Claim allowed on the evidence of various works of art, and on the evidence of our own creative impulses, however weak these may be, or however imperfectly they may function. Works of art, in my opinion, are the only objects in the material universe to possess internal order, and that is why, though I don't believe that only art matters, I do believe in Art for Art's Sake.[12]

In the above passage he is clearly reflecting his acceptance of the second of Moore's two indisputable "goods," the second equal in importance with the first. Of these two "goods," Moore wrote:

> No one, probably, who has asked himself the question, has ever doubted that personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art or Nature, are good in themselves; nor, if we consider strictly what things are worth having purely for their sakes, does it appear probably that any one will think that anything else has nearly so great a value as things which are included under these two heads . . . What has not been recognized is that it is the ultimate and fundamental mental truth of Moral Philosophy. That it is only for the sake of these things--in order that as much of them as possible may at some time exist--that anyone can be justified in performing any public or private duty; that they are the raison d'etre of virtue; that it is they--these complex wholes themselves and not any constituent or characteristic of them--that form the rational ultimate end of human action and the sole criterion of social progress . . .[13]

In another passage, Moore discusses the nature of evil. He

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[12] Two Cheers, pp. 102-3.

[13] Principia Ethica, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922, p. 188-9.

determines it always to "include an enjoyment or admiring contemplation of things which are in themselves either evil or ugly." One can be led into evil either by finding beauty in that which does not possess beauty or by feeling emotions appropriate to a beautiful object when in the presence of an ugly one. The second is obviously, from an ethical point of view, the more serious of the two.

The implications of this doctrine in relation to setting in Forster's novels would seem obvious, yet critics have for the most part simply ignored them. The Wilcoxes' insensitivity to Howards End in light of this doctrine becomes a much more serious matter than a cursory consideration of the situation might suggest. It does not merely underline their Philistinism, but reveals basic ethical faults in their characters. And the description in The Longest Journey of the trappings of Henry Pembroke's boarding-house at Sawston School--the "framed certificate praising the drains," the "carved teak monkey holding out a salver"--is intended to do more than poke fun at the Pembrokes' bad taste; it is to help reveal their moral barrenness. On the other hand, Mrs. Moore's reaction to the beauty of Chandrapore by moonlight, her feeling for the mosque, shimmering white, is intended to give us insight into her moral nature and to stand juxtaposed against her reaction to the caves at Marabar.

E. M. Forster's view, then, of the relationship between man and his physical environment is philosophically rooted in Principia Ethica, but reflects as well the Romanticism of the nineteenth century, his family's traditions and his unique concern with the concept of genius loci. These are the factors that determine the role of setting in his fiction. And it is the purpose of this study to examine settings in the novels in light of the four major influences which helped shape this view.

This study is, for this reason, primarily concerned with setting on the narrative level, rather than on the symbolic or mythologic. It may well be true, as Lionel Trilling claims, that Howards End is "the symbol for England."[14] It may, as Rose Macaulay suggests, stand "for the stability and privacy of the personal life, as contrasted with the vast impersonal muddle of the great towns . . . ."[15] It is unquestionably an English country house, however, which plays a major role in the action of the novel, and it will be so considered. Freud is said to have once reminded a gentleman who eyed him warily as he puffed on a cigar, that it was, after all, a cigar as well. In dealing with setting in Forster's novels, this reminder shall be the guide.

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[14] E.M. Forster, p. 118.

[15] The Writings of E. M. Forster, p. 124.

CHAPTER II

THE ITALIAN NOVELS

When Marianne Thornton, the deposed mistress of Battersea Rise, died in 1887, she bequeathed £8,000 to her great nephew, Edward Morgan Forster. The money, he writes in Marianne Thornton, enabled him to travel, and the traveling inclined him to write.[1] One of his earliest forays was to follow the Romantic pilgrims' path to Italy, a country long magical to him if only through the poetry of Shelley and Byron and the rapturous accounts of it by Cambridge dons like Goldsworthy Lowes Dickenson and Oscar Browning. Out of his experiences in Italy and his reflections upon them, he wrote two novels, Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905) and A Room with A View (1908). Although he published The Longest Journey (1907) between publishing these Italian novels, they are traditionally considered together because of the similarity of their concerns and because A Room with A View was at least partially drafted before he began The Longest Journey.

In discussing the two Italian novels from the point of view of setting, we will consider the nature of the descriptive passages, the role of setting and the influence on each of these of such things as Forster's Romanticism, his Thorntonian

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[1]Thornton, p. 289.

concern with the value of a home, his involvement with the idea of genius loci and finally his espousal of G. E. Moore's ethical system. The major settings of the two novels are Italy and England.

The Italy which Forster describes is a land bathed in Romantic light. His description of Monteriano and of its environs in Where Angels Fear to Tread, for example, is very much in the tradition of Lord Byron of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. It is reminiscent, in part, of Byron's description of Venice, particularly in its various sea metaphors. Noteworthy, too, is the abundance of lush detail which brings to mind some of the excesses of Pre-Raphaelite painting. The countryside and Monteriano are viewed through the consciousness of Philip Herriton, the novel's hero, as he is driven from the railway station to the city:

> At that moment the carriage entered a little wood, which lay brown and sombre across the cultivated hill. The trees of the hill were small and leafless, but noticeable for this--that their stems stood in violets as rocks stand in the summer sea. There are such violets in England, but not so many. Nor are there so many in Art, for no painter has the courage. The cart-ruts were channels, the hollows lagoons; even the dry white margin of the road was splashed, like a causeway soon to be submerged under the advancing tide of Spring.[2]

and

> They were among olives again, and the wood with its beauty and wildness had passed away. But as they

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[2]Where Angels Fear to Tread, Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1905, p. 38.

> climbed higher the country opened out, and there appeared, high on a hill to the right, Monteriano. The hazy green of the olives rose up to its walls, and it seemed to float in isolation between trees and sky, like some fantastic ship city of a dream. Its color was brown, and it revealed not a single house--nothing but the narrow circle of walls, and behind them seventeen towers--all that was left of the fifty-two that had filled the city in her prime. Some were only stumps, some were inclining stiffly to their fall, some were still erect, piercing like masts into the blue.[3]

In the Italian section of A Room with A View there are very similar descriptive passages. Lucy Honeychurch, the novel's heroine, while "doing" the hills above Florence with a group of tourists steps out onto a terrace which a grape farmer had fashioned in the hillside. This is how Forster describes the scene:

> From her feet the ground sloped sharply into view, and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracks, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the wellhead, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth.[4]

In Where Angels Fear to Tread Forster also uses the device, a device used by Byron, of placing Monteriano in historical perspective of conjuring up its past to heighten the romance of its present. Philip recalls that Monteriano is a city

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[3] Angels, p. 43

[4] A Room With A View, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953, p. 110.

> which knew the Etruscan League, and the Pax Romana, and Alaric himself, and the Countess Matilda, and the Middle Ages, all fighting and holiness, and the Renaissance, all fighting and beauty.[5]

Later he and Caroline Abbott, the novel's heroine, in imagination, actually step back for a moment into the Monteriano of the days of its glory:

> [Caroline] . . . removed a pile of plates from the Gothic window, and they leant out of it. Close opposite, wedged between mean houses, there rose up one of the great towers. It is your tower: you stretch a barricade between it and the hotel, and the traffic is blocked in a moment. Farther up, where the street empties out by the church, your connections, the Merli and the Capocchi, do likewise. They command the Piazza, you the Siena gate. No one can move in either but he shall be instantly slain, either by bows or by crossbows, or by Greek fire. Beware, however, of the back bedroom windows. For they are menaced by the tower of the Aldobrandeschi, and before now arrows have struck quivering over the wash stand. Guard these windows well, lest there be a repetition of the events of February 1338, when the hotel was surprised from the rear, and your dearest friend--you could just make out that it was he--was thrown at you over the stairs.[6]

We have in the descriptive passages of these novels, then, an Italy seen through the eyes of a cultured young man predisposed to worship its beauty and to respond to its Romance--a man already equipped by the poets with a fixed viewpoint and with a vocabulary to record his impressions. For almost unquestionably Forster is to some extent describing himself when he says that Philip was a man with a "sense of beauty."

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[5] Angels, p. 41.

[6] Angels, pp. 193-4.

> It [Forster continues] caused him at twenty to wear parti-coloured ties and a squashy hat, to be late for dinner on account of the sunset, and to catch art from Burne-Jones to Praxiteles. At twenty-two he went to Italy with some cousins, and there he absorbed into one aesthetic whole olive-trees, blue sky, frescoes, country inns, saints, peasants, mosaics, statues, beggars.[7]

Forster does not, however, include these passages simply to offer tribute to the beauty of Italy, or merely to decorate the novels, or even solely to help the reader visualize where the action takes place. In each novel Italy is a central force, affecting the action of the novels as surely as any of the major characters. Particularly in Where Angels Fear to Tread we see dramatized the interaction between Italy and the characters of the novel. In the paragraph immediately following the one earlier quoted in which Philip and Caroline imaginatively step back into Monteriano's past, Forster comments,

> Philip found a certain grace and lightness in his companion which he had never noticed in England. She was appallingly narrow, but her consciousness of wider things gave to her narrowness a pathetic charm. He did not suspect that he was more graceful too. For our vanity is such that we hold our own characters immutable, and we are slow to acknowledge that we have changed, even for the better.[8]

Within pages, we find Caroline further changing under the spell of Monteriano. As part of this change, she gains insight into the nature of Sawston, the oppressively provincial

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[7] Angels, p. 117.

[8] Angels, p. 194.

town in which she and Philip live, and into the character of its inhabitants--the people with whom she has spent her life. The scene takes place almost midway through the novel. The action up to this point has revolved mainly around the marriage of Philip's brother's widow, Lilia, to one Gino, the son of a Monteriano dentist. The Herritons are bitterly opposed to the marriage and cut themselves off from Lilia. The marriage turns out badly, not because, as the Herritons and Caroline assume, Gino is a cad, but rather because Lilia cannot adapt to the ways of Italy. When Lilia dies in childbirth, the Herritons decide to ignore the whole unpleasant business, but quickly discover that such a decision is not theirs to make: Irma, Lilia's child by her first marriage, begins to receive postcards from her "lital brother." This, of course, forces the matter into the open. Caroline, who had been traveling with Lilia at the time of her courtship nd marriage and who had given her blessing, mands that the Herritons adopt the child. She has come more and more to feel that she should have prevented the marriage, and she sees in "saving" the child some expiation of her guilt. When she realizes that in spite of her offices the Herritons have no intention of bringing the baby to England, she determines to adopt it herself. This of course, forces the Herritons' hand, and Philip and his sister Harriet are dispatched to Monteriano to rescue the baby. There they meet Caroline on a parallel mission.

In spite of the awkwardness of the situation, on their first night in Monteriano, the three attend an opera. The opera house is a garish "beet red and tomato" extravagance. The performance is less than classical, and the audience is rowdy. Miss Herriton is shocked by the whole vulgar display, but Caroline and Philip are delighted. "Miss Abbott," Forster writes,

> once had a wonderful evening, nor did she ever remember such stars or such a sky. Her head, too, was full of music, and that night when she opened the window her room was filled with warm sweet air. She was bathed in beauty within and without; she could not go to bed for happiness. Had she ever been so happy before? Yes, once before, and here, a night in March, the night Gino and Lilia had told her of their love--the night whose evil she had come now to undo.
>
> She gave a sudden cry of shame. 'This time--the same place--the same thing,' and she began to beat down her happiness, knowing it to be sinful. She was here to fight against this place, to rescue a little soul who was innocent as yet. She was here to champion morality and purity, and the holy life of an English home. In the spring she had sinned through ignorance; she was not ignorant now. 'Help me!' she cried, and shut the window as if there was magic in the encircling air. But the tunes would not go out of her head, and all night long she was troubled by torrents of music, and by applause and laughter, and angry young men who shouted the distich out of Baedeker.
>
> Poggibonizzi, Fatti in là
> Che Monteriano si fa città!
>
> Poggibonizzi was revealed to her as they sang--a joyless, straggling place, full of people who pretended. When she woke up she knew that it had been Sawston.[9]

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[9]Angels, pp. 213-4.

Very quickly, under the stimulus of her experiences in Monteriano, she discovers not only the truth about Sawston and its pious citizenry, but also more and more about herself. She finds that she too has pretended and that she is not at all the bloodless, proper Miss Abbott that Sawston knows. Instead she is a woman who is capable of not only appreciating beauty but of responding to it, a woman who is capable of recognizing the rich possibilities of life and--and this above all--a woman who can love deeply and passionately. Italy forces Caroline to discover her real self beneath the dull trappings of her respectability.

Caroline's final discovery is intimately involved with setting. The stage for it is prepared when she inadvertently sees the main room of the house that Lilia had bought Gino. She comes to the house to make a last plea to be allowed to take the child. Gino is not at home and she is left to wait in the drawing room, now a dusty, crepe-hung memorial to Lilia. Through the doorway she sees into the next room which

> was a shocking mess. Food, bedclothes, patent-leather boots, dirty plates, and knives strewn over a large table and on the floor. But it was the mess that comes of life, not of desolation. It was preferable to the charnel-chamber in which she was standing now, and the light in it was soft and large, as from some gracious noble opening.[10]

Her first reaction, her shock at the mess, is a Sawston reaction: the reaction we would expect of Mrs. Herriton who

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[10]Angels, p. 219.

when planting vegetables always kept the peas until last "because they were such fun." Her second reaction is that of a woman who is coming to realize that the ordered, antiseptic, sterile rule of Sawston--the rule under which she lives--is the enemy of life, a denial of nature, in its very broadest sense. The glory of Italy she is beginning to learn transcends painted ceilings and crumbling antique buildings and quaint peasants. Italy's glory is rather in its people's acceptance of life and their attunement to nature.

During the scene with Gino which follows, the two Miss Abbotts do battle, and the lady from Sawston is defeated. Gino's beauty, his naturalness, and his passionate love for his son win the field. Caroline finally admits to herself "The man was majestic; he was a part of nature," and that, before the scene is over, she loves him. When Philip arrives at the house, he finds her sitting on the loggia with "twenty miles of view behind her." She is facing toward the house with its shocking mess of a room bathed in light which "was soft and large, as from some gracious noble opening." Italy to her is no longer a series of vistas and panoramas, no longer a country whose dimensions are set by Baedeker. She has made a true synthesis, absorbing it not into an "aesthetic whole," but into a whole. When she says at the end of the novel that she knows Italy, Forster wants us to believe her.

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we ought to blame him very much. It makes such a difference when you see a person with beautiful things behind him unexpectedly. It really does . . ."[12] In other words, she sees the beauty of Nature as an active rather than a passive force, capable of effecting a positive change in a person who responds to it.

This realization, important as it is, is not the ultimate gift which Italy gives Lucy. It is, instead, Forster explicitly tells us, her coming to recognize the possibilities which human relationship offers. He writes that while in Italy,

> Her senses expanded; she felt that there was no one whom she might not get to like, that social barriers were irremovable, doubtless, but not particularly high. You jump over them just as you jump into a peasant's olive yard in the Apennines, and he is glad to see you.
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> . . . . . .
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> . . . If she was too great for the provincial society she moved in, [he continues a few lines later] she was too great for all society, and had reached that stage where personal intercourse alone would satisfy her. A rebel she was . . .--a rebel who desired, not a wider dwelling room, but equality beside the man she loved. For Italy was offering her the most priceless of all possessions--her own soul.[13]

To Lucy and Caroline, then, Italy proffers, above all, insight into themselves and into the possibility of attaining

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[12] Room, p. 225.

[13] Room, pp. 171-2.

the highest good--a true personal relationship. Italy can not offer this gift to everyone. Cecil Vyse, the hero of A Room with A View, and Philip Herriton are affected by Italy, certainly. Their aesthetic sensibilities are honed and their outlook on the world is broadened. Whatever significant personal insight either one gains, however, is largely at second-hand through the insight of other characters, particularly Caroline and Lucy. Most important, neither man's capacity to recognize the essentiality of true personal relationships nor, obviously, his ability to enter into them is substantially altered.

These men have been so emotionally deformed by their earlier experiences that they are incapable of coming to grips with the flesh and blood of life. They are in a sense emotional voyeurs. Lucy tells Cecil,

> . . . you may understand beautiful things, but you don't know how to use them; and you wrap yourself up in art and books and music, and would try to wrap up me. I won't be stifled, not by the most glorious music, for people are more glorious . . . You were all right as long as you kept to things but when you came to people--[14]

Similarly, Caroline warns Philip that he must get involved with life, that he must not "sit intending on a chair." Philip replies,

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[14] Room, p. 263.

> I seem fated to pass through the world without colliding with it or moving it . . . I don't die--I don't fall in love . . . You are quite right; life to me is just a spectacle . . .[15]

Philip's use of the word fate is insightful. It was his fate to grow up in Sawston among ugliness and narrowness. It was his fate to grow up in a family where there was no love, where there were no honest relationships. His widowed mother manipulated him and his sister to gain her will, and his sister lived in a walled-in world of decorum and fundamental Christianity; this world was not a world which allowed the heart to develop.

Cecil's situation is different only in accidentals. He replies to Lucy's charge by saying "It is true"; and a few moments later he repeats one of her earlier judgments, "The sort that can know no one intimately," and says once more, "It is true."[16] Like Philip, Cecil is fated never to know a fully satisfying personal relationship. He grew up in the grime and fog of London, rootless, having never known love. He was raised by a mother who had been "swamped" by "too many seasons, too many cities, too many men," a woman who even with Cecil was . . . "mechanical, and behaved as if he was not one son but, so to speak, a filial crowd."[17]

Even Caroline, in spite of all that happens to her in

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[15] Angels, pp. 260-1.

[16] Room, 263.

[17] Room, 188.

Italy cannot entirely unshackle herself from the past, from Sawston. Her love for Gino in one sense comes to nothing; she even sees it as shameful. Although she "worshipped every inch of him, and every word he spoke," she never tells him. In the end, when Philip asks her what she plans to do, she tells him that she will return to Sawston. "You forget," she continues, "my father; and even if he wasn't there, I've a hundred ties: my district--I'm neglecting it shamefully--my evening classes, the St. James'."[18]

It is only Lucy who can accept from Italy the priceless possession it is offering, since of the four only she was prepared to accept it. In considering the reason for her ability to accept Italy's gift, we have to consider another of the major setting-connected themes in Forster's fiction. Forster, as was pointed out in the first chapter, was committed to the Thornton position on the importance to the individual of a home. The home need not be as grand as Battersea Rise, but it must be a place where there is beauty. It must be loved by those who live in it and, in some measure, be an expression of them. It must have about it an aura of permanence and continuity. Lucy's home in Sussex has all of these and because of this and because of the love which the members of the Honeychurch family have for each other, Lucy is spared

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[18]Angels, p. 308.

that most spiritually crippling of defects, an underdeveloped heart, and for this reason she is able to receive from Italy the full measure of what it has to offer. In a sense the interrelationship between Lucy and her home is an idealized dramatization of the Thornton-Forster creed.

Forster's descriptions of the house, Windy Corner, and of the countryside about are as romantic in conception and realization as his descriptions of Italy. For example, there is this description of the terrace outside the drawing room windows. The curtains are opened and,

> There was revealed a terrace, such is owned by many villas, with trees each side of it, and on it a little rustic seat and two flower beds. But it was transfigured by the view beyond, for Windy Corner was built on the range that overlooks the Sussex Weald. Lucy, who was in the little seat, seemed on the edge of a green magic carpet which towered in the air above the tremulous world.[19]

Another example is the following description of the "magic pool" which is in the woods below the house.

> There lay a pond, set in its little alp of green--only a pond but large enough to contain the human body, and pure enough to reflect the sky. On account of the rain, the waters had flooded the surrounding grass, which showed like a beautiful emerald path, tempting the feet toward the central pool.[20]

Forster's most comprehensive view of the house and the countryside is filtered through the consciousness of Mr.

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[19] Room, pp. 135-6.

[20] Room, p. 198.

Beebe, a local clergyman who is a Romantic and who is highly sensitive to beauty--like Philip Herriton, a man much like Forster himself. The description is noteworthy not only because it illustrates Forster's facility in writing romantic description but also because in it Forster explicitly points out that Windy Corner has those qualities which, as has been suggested, he felt a home should have. The house is surrounded by the beauty of the countryside; it is loved by those who inhabit it; and it has about it an air of permanence and continuity.

> Windy Corner lay, not on the summit of the ridge, but a few hundred feet down the southern slope, at the springing of one of the great buttresses that supported the hill. On either side of it was a shallow ravine, filled with ferns and pine trees, and down the ravine on the left ran the highway into the Weald.
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> Whenever Mr. Beebe crossed the ridge and caught sight of these noble dispositions of the earth, and, poised in the middle of them, Windy Corner--he laughed. The situation was so glorious, the house so commonplace, not to say impertinent. The late Mr. Honeychurch had affected the cube, because it gave him the most accommodation for his money, and the only addition made by his widow had been a small turret, shaped like a rhinoceros' horn, where she could sit in wet weather and watch the carts going up and down the road. So impertinent--and yet the house 'did,' for it was the home of people who loved their surroundings honestly. Other houses in the neighborhood had been built by expensive architects, over others their inmate had fidgeted sedulously, yet all these suggested the accidental, the temporary; while Windy Corner seemed as inevitable as an ugliness of Nature's own creation. One might laugh at the house but one never shuddered.[21]

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[21] Room, pp. 268-9.

Life inside the house really "did" too, for the Honeychurches loved not only their surroundings but each other. They had something very close to the kind of personal relationships that Forster most highly prized and which so many of his characters strive for: Of Lucy's relationship with the house and her family, Forster writes at one point that ". . . though nothing is perfect, Lucy felt for the moment that her mother and Windy Corner and the Weald in the declining sun were perfect."[22] Later he writes ". . . today she Lucy felt she had received a guarantee. Her mother would always sit there, her brother here. The sun, though it had moved a little since morning, would never be hidden behind the western hills."[23] There is in the house, too, something of the "mess of life," but nothing of the charnel chamber: Cecil finds the furniture in the drawing room undistinguished and the room itself as a result, despite its noble prospect, not quite right. He also deplores Lucy's brother's habit of leaving stray bones he is using in his desultory study of anatomy about the drawing room. Of Cecil's reactions, Forster comments, "Cecil considered the bone and the . . . furniture separately; he did not realize that, taken together, they kindled the room into the kind of life that he desired."[24]

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[22]Room, p. 211.

[23]Room, p. 235.

[24]Room, p. 141.

Windy Corner rather obviously foreshadows Howards End, and it is tempting to treat it in terms of genius loci. There does not seem to me to be enough evidence, however, to support such a treatment. It is better, it would seem, to see it as I have, in terms of Romanticism and in light of Forster's obsession with the paramount role of a home in a man's life. Similarly, there is a temptation to talk of Monteriano and genius loci, for Forster frequently and pointedly writes of its "magic" and "enchantment" and dramatizes Caroline and Philip succumbing to its spell. Again, however, it seems in light of the evidence that it is wiser to see Forster's conception of the city and its power as an orthodox Romantic one.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that Forster was not concerned with genius loci at the time he wrote these novels or that, in at least A Room with A View, this concern is not reflected in his work. Most certainly in this novel he explicitly writes of it in a very insightful paragraph on the central square in Florence:

> The Piazza Signoria is too stony to be brilliant. It has no grass, no flowers, no frescoes, no glittering walls of marble or comforting patches of ruddy brick. By an odd chance--unless we believe in a presiding genius of places [my italics] --the statues that relieve its severity suggest, not the innocence of childhood, nor the glorious bewilderment of youth, but the conscious achievements of maturity. Perseus and Judith, Hercules and Thusnelda, they have done or suffered something, and though they are immortal, immortality has come to them after experience, not before.

> Here, not only in the Solitude of Nature, might a hero meet a goddess, or a heroine a god.[25]

Later in talking about the fateful day on which Lucy tumbled from the grape terrace and George kissed her, Forster playfully alludes to a slightly different version of the same idea. He says that

> Pan had been among them [the tourists] --not the great god Pan, who has been buried these two thousand years, but the little god Pan, who presides over social contretemps and unsuccessful picnics.[26]

More significantly, genius loci rather obviously underlies Forster's description and use of the magic pool in this novel. This pool, a partial description of which was quoted earlier, is the catalyst which sets in motion the events which lead to Lucy's breaking her engagement to Cecil and her marrying George.

It is first mentioned by Lucy who calls it--she doesn't know why--"The Sacred Lake." Clearly she associates it in her mind with "naturalness and freedom" as opposed to conventionality and restraint (or perhaps Paganism as opposed to Christianity). Almost the first thing she tells Cecil about the pool is that she used to bathe there with her brother until she was found out--by Charlette Bartlett, later her traveling companion in Italy and a woman who has permitted the "proper" to stunt the development of her heart. When the

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[25]Room, pp. 93-4.

[26]Room, p. 111.

pool fills to overflowing after a heavy rain, it entices Lucy's brother Freddy, George and Mr. Beebe into bathing and then frolicking on the grass. Within minutes Lucy accompanied by her mother and Cecil come upon them. From the moment George, "barefoot, bare chested, radiant, and personable" calls out to Lucy without hint of embarrassment, the fate of the major characters is decided. Lucy sees in George at this moment the kind of natural majesty that Caroline saw in Gino, but unlike Caroline she is later able to effect the kind of relationship which Italy revealed was the most vital kind.

Forster's final words about the pool, particularly if we keep in mind his comments about the spirit of place and the Piazza Signoria, clearly suggest that he conceives of the pool in terms of genius loci, that he sees it as having a spirit, directly working on the characters.

> On the morrow the pool had shrunk to its old size and lost its glory. It had been a call to the blood and to the relaxed will, a passing benediction whose influence did not pass, a holiness, a spell, a momentary chalice for youth.[27]

To turn from the mythological to the philosophical, implicit in much of my discussion of the Italian novels had been Forster's involvement with G. E. Moore's ethics. As we think back on them, the major characters of the novels, based on their relative attainment of Moore's "goods," can be arranged along a continuum. At one end we have Harriet

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[27] Room, p. 153.

Herriton, who has neither a sense of beauty nor the ability to establish any but the most surface relationships, and at the other Lucy Honeychurch, who has a highly developed sense of the beautiful and is capable of the most profound personal relationships. In designing the novels, Forster, it seems, provided situations in which the major and even minor characters have, as it were, the opportunity to reveal whether they have the ability to appreciate what is beautiful in art and nature. Inevitably those whom we are to admire, the good people, have this ability, while those whom we are not to admire do not, or, worse, see as beautiful that which does not have beauty.

One of the more striking scenes in which Forster uses aesthetic sensibility as an indication of moral virtue is in the Italian section of A Room with A View. The setting is Santa Croce, before Giotto's Ascension of St. John, and the protaganists are the Reverend Eagers, a thoroughly evil man, and Mr. Emerson, a thoroughly good one. The Reverend Eagers cautions a group of tourists to

> Remember, . . . , the facts about this church of Santa Croce; how it was built by faith in the full fervor of mediaevalism, before any taint of the Renaissance had appeared. Observe how Grotto in these frescoes--now, unhappily, ruined by restoration--is untroubled by the snares of anatomy and perspective . . .

and Mr. Emerson shouts back,

> Remember nothing of the sort! Built by faith indeed! That simply means that the workmen weren't paid properly. And as for the frescoes, I see no truth in them. Look at that fat man in blue! He must weigh as much as I do, and he is shooting into the sky like an air balloon.[28]

This exchange is funny, of course, and is meant to be, but behind the laughter there is serious intent--the way these men react to the church and to the fresco reflects the kind of men they are. Similarly, in a far more crucial scene, when Caroline stands before the hotel window in Monteriano, "bathed in beauty, within and without" she reveals the kind of person she is. (Forster tells us that on that night, "Harriet, it seemed, had gone straight to bed.")

In using this aspect of Moore's ethical thought in these novels, Forster is forced to assume that his own aesthetic sense is impeccable, and so he does. The boundaries of beauty in nature have, he appears to believe, been prescribed by the Romantic poets and painters and are beyond dispute. He seems equally certain that the boundaries of the tactile arts have been set once and for all by Walter Pater and his followers and woe be to him who should allow John Ruskin to corrupt his taste.[29] One of the earliest indications we have that Lucy will be all right is that she prefers Della Robbia "babies" to Giotto frescoes.

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[28]Room, p. 43.

[29]In A Room with A View Ruskin comes off almost as much of a villain as Mr. Eagers.

In Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with A View we see, then, that setting is a vital part of the novels. Without considering setting and Forster's dispositions which determine its presentation and role, we cannot adequately comprehend any other aspect of the novel, be it story, people, plot, fantasy, prophecy, or pattern and rhythm. What we have found true of these novels we will find equally true of The Longest Journey and Howards End and, in a different way, of A Passage to India.

CHAPTER III

THE LONGEST JOURNEY

I

E. M. Forster's most frankly autobiographical novel is The Longest Journey. Although the novel is spiced with irony and social comedy, above all it is a novel about the anguish of a young man attempting to build a satisfying and a purposeful life in a world for which he has been ill-prepared. Here, Forster--a novelist most unwilling to talk about his personal life--dramatizes his youthful attempt to come to terms with his past, to establish meaningful personal relationships and to find the permanence of a home. Here, he clearly, though perhaps not completely, enumerates the particular view of life that was to be the substance of the rest of his literary work. The novel is not a startling departure from the Italian novels, but rather it more frontally and comprehensively deals with themes and modes of thought which they introduce.

The novel is divided into three parts, "Cambridge," "Sawston," and "Wiltshire." Forster explains the division when he tells us in the novel that Rickie Eliot, the hero of the novel, was " . . . sensitive to places. He would compare Cambridge with Sawston, and either with the third type of

existence, to which, for want of a better name, he gave the name of Wiltshire."[1] The division, then, calls attention to the three places and the three types of existence particular to them with which Rickie interacts during his longest journey. The first is awash with a kind of golden glow and is filled with scenes of love and good fellowship; the second is shrouded in fog and dampness and deals basically with the breakdown of personal relationships; the third is cast in the strong light and dark night of Wiltshire and is concerned with attempts to establish viable personal relationships.

Predictably, the major descriptions of setting in that portion of the book dealing with Rickie's life at Cambridge are similar to the perhaps overly romantic descriptions of setting in Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room with A View. The most important of these (as well as the most extravagant) is a description of a dell which Rickie discovered near Madingley:

> A little this side of Madingley, to the left of the road, there is a secluded dell, paved with grass and planted with fir trees. It could not have been worth a visit twenty years ago, for then it was only a scar of chalk, and it is not worth a visit at the present day, for the trees have grown too thick and choked it. But when Rickie was up, it chanced to be the brief season of its Romance, a season as brief for a chalk-pit as a man--its divine interval between the barren-of boyhood and the stuffiness of age. Rickie had discovered it in his second term, when the January

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[1]The Longest Journey, Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1943, p. 168.

> snows had melted and left fiords and lagoons of clearest water between the inequalities of the floor. The place looked as big as Switzerland or Norway--as indeed for the moment it was-- . . .[2]

In describing Sawston, the dreary suburb from which the Herritons and Caroline Abbott of Where Angels Fear to Tread came and to which Rickie goes after his marriage, Forster in his language chooses those details to etch in his picture that a Ruskin or a Morris would have chosen. He is particularly concerned with Rickie's immediate environment. Rickie, he writes, "looked with reverence" as he examined the school's chapel, "at . . . a morsel of Jacobean brickwork, ruddy and beautiful amidst the machine-squared stones of the modern apse."[3] He mocks Dunwood House, the house at which Rickie is employed, for its "hygienic splendours" and has one of the characters note the outstanding features of the exterior of the building--"the bow windows, the cheap picturesque gables, the terra cotta dragons clawing at a dirty sky."[4] The interior of the house he describes in more detail stressing the vulgarity of its furnishings and the sterility of the atmosphere they create:

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[2]Journey, p. 28.

[3]Journey, p. 57.

[4]Journey, p. 248.

> On the left of the entrance a large saffron drawing room, full of cosy corners and dumpy chairs: here the parents would be received . . . . In the hall a framed certificate praising the drains, the bust of Hermes, and a carved teak monkey holding out a salver. Some of the furniture had come from Shelthorpe [Rickie's wife's family home], some of it had been bought from Mr. Annisin [the previous master of the house], some of it was new. But throughout he recognized a certain decision of arrangement. Nothing in the house was accidental or there merely for its own sake.[5]

In dealing with the town outside the school's grounds Forster is not as effusive as he is in dealing with the school itself. He does suggest to the reader, however, a grim world of "straggling roads . . . full of houses," of "slate-roofed cottages, row beside row, climbing a shapeless hill" under a sky that was yellow toward London, and particularly of the continual clouds and fog that overhang everything.

The most important setting in the novel is, of course, Wiltshire, near Salisbury, and in describing it, Forster wrote some of his finest descriptive passages. The tone he assumed and the techniques he used are naturally Romantic. He finds in the Wiltshire's landscape none of the lush beauty of Italy. Of the view from Cadover, the main house of the area, he writes, "though extensive, it would not have been accepted by the Royal Academy."[6] Instead he finds beauty in its barrenness, its vastness and in the subtlety of its colors. He describes this countryside as Rickie and his half-

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[5]Journey, p. 179.

[6]Journey, p. 114.

brother, Stephen Wonham ride across it one morning:

> Cadover and its valley had disappeared, and though they had not climbed much and could not see far, there was a sense of infinite space. The fields were enormous, like fields on the Continent, and the brilliant sun showed up their colours well. The green of the turnips, the gold of the harvest, and the brown of the newly turned clods, were each contrasted with morsels of grey down. But the general effect was pale, or rather silvery, for Wiltshire is not a country of heavy tints. Beneath these colours lurked the unconquerable chalk, and wherever the soil was poor it emerged. The grassy track, so gay with scabious and bed straw, was snow-white at the bottom of its ruts. A dazzling amphitheatre gleamed in the flank of a distant hill, cut for some Olympian audience. And here and there, whatever the surface crop, the earth broke into little embankments, little ditches, little mounds: there had been no lack of drama to solace the gods.[7]

The great man-made structures of the countryside are the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, "the most beautiful spire in the world," and the more ancient one, the more important one, the Cadbury Rings, two huge earthen work circles, one within the other. No one knows who erected them or even to what purpose. They are simply there. Immense. "A bank of grass enclosed a ring of turnips, which enclosed a second bank of grass, which enclosed more turnips, and in the middle of the pattern grew one small tree."[8] They, as Forster describes them, remind us of other mysterious, almost featureless structures, that he will write of in the future: the caves of Marabar. And their role in the novel is not unlike that of the caves in the later novel.

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[7]Journey, p. 129.

[8]Journey, p. 115.

Before, however, we consider the role of the Cadbury Rings in this novel, let us look at the first major setting of The Longest Journey, Cambridge, and particularly at the fir-tree encircled dell near Madingley. Cambridge was to Forster and to his hero Rickie Eliot much as it was to so many Cambridge men of the period: a kind of enchanted place of sunlit days and sherry by dons' firesides and endless hours of good fellowship. Of her effect on Rickie, Forster writes that,

> She had taken and soothed him, and warmed him, and had laughed at him a little, saying that he must not be so tragic yet awhile, for his boyhood had been but a dusty corridor that led to the spacious halls of youth.[9]

Such ministrations Rickie needed, for his past had been almost as destructive as the pasts of Philip Herriton and Cecil Vyse. Like them he had grown up in an urban world:

> He had opened his eyes to filmy heavens, and taken his first walk on asphalt. He had seen civilization as a row of semi-detached villas, and society as a state in which men do not know the men who live next door. He had himself become part of the grey monotony that surrounds all cities.[10]

As a child he had not known either beauty or love. His mother didn't have the "gift of making her home beautiful" and for her son she could not express more than a fondness. Always, although he worshipped her, she kept him "at a little distance."

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[9] Journey, p. 14.

[10] Journey, p. 32.

When he came to Cambridge he was prepared for a "silent and solitary journey," but Cambridge revealed to him that life is rich with possibilities.

Many places at Cambridge were precious to the boy but none so precious as the dell near Madingley. Like Monteriano there was a magic about the place, and under its spell Rickie recognized, as Caroline Abbott had recognized at Monteriano, that life could be far finer than one might imagine. On an autumn day he takes a number of his friends there, and within its protective confines, after looking at the sunlight on its "ramparts," he is suddenly able to talk to them about himself and his past. He is, in a sense, able to make the first tentative gropings toward true personal relationships, and we are reminded of Caroline on the loggia of Gino's house.

Later, it is under the spell of the dell that Rickie, against all his resolve and judgment, asks Agnes Pembroke to marry him. He is aware of the enchantment of the place, and he attempts to keep her from finding it. Once she finds and enters it, he refuses to follow, afraid of what will happen. He finally enters when he can no longer resist, and at the call of a bird.

The dell, although described Romantically, is always connected with the classical, with a stability and permanence only heightened by the suggestion of change. Forster tells us that

> Inside the dell it was neither June nor January. The chalk walls barred out the seasons, and the fir trees did not seem to feel their passage. Only from time to time the odours of summer slipped in from the wood above, to comment on the waxing year.[11]

Wiltshire, too, is seen in terms of its permanence and changelessness. Forster writes of the endless generations who have lived there stretching back to the very days when the Cadbury Rings were built and of the wind-swept landscape little changed from the days of Alfred and before. But he talks of it, not in classical terms, but in terms of its mystic and primeval qualities. Rather than the England of grass lanes and pretty hedges he sees it as the essential England. It is here, sunk in the white chalk, that the Englishman has his roots. Here, Forster writes,

> is the heart of our island: the Chilterns, the North Downs, the South Downs radiate hence. The fibres of England unite in Wiltshire, and did we condescend to worship her, here we should erect our national shrine.[12]

It is here, in Wiltshire, under the spell of Cadbury Rings that a second greater change takes place in Rickie. While he and Agnes are visiting his aunt, Mrs. Failing, Rickie walks with Mrs. Failing into the Rings. As they go into the structure, the familiar world begins to disappear behind them. When they pass beyond the first Ring, "the view, though not hidden, was greatly diminished" and Rickie immediately thinks

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[11] Journey, p. 89.

[12] Journey, p. 147.

of the dell near Madingley, "whose ramparts excluded the familiar world." When they enter the second Ring, even more of the familiar world is shut out. Suddenly, as they near the tree in the center of the Rings, the farthest point from the familiar world they can reach, Rickie's world is shattered, and he is forced to see the real world.

Throughout the walk Mrs. Failing has been suggesting that Stephen Wonham, her ward, was Rickie's brother, but he failed to understand what she meant. Finally he recognizes the implications of her words: Stephen is the illegitimate child of his dead father whom he hates. He is shocked and horrified. For a moment he argues against the fact; then,

> He was gazing at the past, which he had praised so recently, which gaped ever wider, like an unhallowed grave. Turn where he would, it encircled him. It took visible form: it was this double entrenchment of the Rings. His mouth went cold, and he knew that he was going to faint among the dead. He started running, missed the exit, stumbled on the inner barrier, fell into darkness--[13]

When he comes to

> The earth he had dreaded lay close to his eyes, and seemed beautiful. He saw the structure of the clods. A tiny beetle swung on the grass blade. On his own neck a human hand pressed, guiding the blood back to his brain.
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> There broke from him a cry, not of horror but of acceptance. For a short moment he understood.
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> 'Stephen'[14]

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[13] Journey, p. 151.

[14] Journey, pp. 152-2.

Rickie is to call this moment "symbolic." By this he means as James Joyce means in talking of epiphanies: a moment when one sees into the heart of things. In one sense this moment is a development of the earlier moment (not in Rickie's opinion symbolic) when in the chalk pit at Madingley he is able to accept his friends to the point where he can tell them about his past. Now he is given the opportunity to accept a brother at whatever cost.

Rickie himself comments that both these events happen in a place where the familiar world does not obtrude. Forster is here stating rather explicitly what he had only implied in the earlier novels: that the scales can fall from our eyes, revealing ourselves to ourselves, only when we somehow find ourselves away from the grey grimness of a London or a Sawston, away from the false debilitating habit which guides our day to day urban lives. It is obviously a Wordsworthian kind of suggestion, altered only in that Forster stresses, particularly in this novel, the tension between the familiar and unfamiliar world and the necessity of the latter's liberating one from the former.

Rickie rejects the opportunity he is given at Cadbury Rings. Agnes, who speaks from the values of the familiar world, soon convinces him of the impracticality of accepting a bastard brother. Rickie has had his chance, and he has not accepted it. From this point on we watch Rickie withering--

it is Forster's word--morally and emotionally among the carved teak and framed certificates of Sawston School. Finally, even in the face of the fact that Stephen is turned out of their aunt's house and exiled from the countryside of which he is so much a part, largely through Agnes' manipulations, Rickie does nothing. Forster says that, "He troubled himself no longer with justice or pity . . ."

But Rickie is given another chance. Through a series of highly melodramatic circumstances he discovers Stephen is his mother's illegitimate son, not his detested father's, and he manages to effect a reconciliation with him. This series of discoveries and events causes a kind of moral rebirth. For a moment Rickie seems to be saved from the familiar world and to be on the threshold of establishing a viable personal relationship with Stephen. They even agree at one point to meet at the Rings, the place of Rickie's betrayal, perhaps to be the place of his redemption. Rickie appears to have a second chance to have the "highest of all [opportunities], the symbolic moment, which, if a man accepts it, he has accepted life." There is even a moment of something like mystical union when the two brothers float a piece of burning paper on a Wiltshire stream:

> The paper caught fire from the match, and spread into a rose of flame. 'Now gently with me,' said Stephen, and they laid it flower-like on the stream. Gravel and tremulous weeds leapt into sight, and then the

> flower sailed into the deep water, and up leapt the two arches of a bridge. 'It'll strike!' they cried; 'no, it won't; it's chosen the left,' and one arch became a fairy tunnel, dropping diamonds. Then it vanished for Rickie; but Stephen, who knelt in the water, declared that it was still afloat, far through the arch, burning as if it would burn forever.[15]

But in the end, Rickie fails to effect a union with his brother. He fails to establish a personal relationship as Philip Herriton and Cecil Vyse had failed and for the same reason. The values of the familiar world were so much his values that he could not overcome them: For example, while on a trip to Wiltshire, Rickie forces Stephen to promise him that he will not drink. When Stephen breaks his word, Rickie disgusted and feeling betrayed, rejects him, shouting to the landlord of the inn, "Tell him he's broken his word, and I will not go with him to the Rings."[16] As he stands outside in the darkness, his thoughts turn to their mother:

> . . . the woman he loved would die out, in drunkenness, in debauchery, and her strength would be dissipated by a man, her beauty defiled by a man. She would not continue. That mystic rose and the face it illumined meant nothing. The stream--he was above it now--meant nothing, though it burst from the purest turf and ran forever to the sea.[17]

Shortly after the scene outside the inn, Rickie is fatally injured saving Stephen's life, an act he considers only a "man's duty." Later Stephen marries, and has a child,

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[15]Journey, p. 309.

[16]Journey, p. 317.

[17]Journey, p. 319.

and moves on to a Wiltshire farm. In the final pages of the book Stephen, the "good" man of the book, delivers a significant attack on Henry Pembroke, Rickie's brother-in-law and the master of Dunwood House, Sawston School. Stephen, like Lucy Honeychurch, has grown up amid the beauty of the English countryside and he, unlike Rickie, is not a man whose heart is underdeveloped, is not a man who cannot accept life and realize personal relationships. He is a man who can see into the falsity of the "familiar" world and its values as well as recognize the values of the true world. The speech echoes the gentler comments of Lucy when she tells Cecil why she cannot marry him and those of Caroline Abbott when she cautions Phillip that he must get involved in life. Above all, the speech is an affirmation of the essentialness of Nature to man's life, just as its speaker exemplifies the kind of man Forster believes develops under the healthy ministrations of Nature:

> 'Awretched devil at your school once wrote to me [Stephen tells Henry] and he'd been done. Sham food, sham religion, sham straight talk--and when he broke down, you said it was the world in miniature.' He snatched at him roughly. 'But I'll show you the world.' He twisted him around like a baby, and through the open door they saw only the quiet valley, but in it a rivulet that would in time bring its waters to the sea. 'Look even at that--and up behind where the Plain begins and you get on the solid chalk--think of us riding some night when you order your hot bottle--that's the world, and there's no miniature world. There's one world, Pembroke, and you can't tidy men out of it.[18]

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[18] Journey, pp. 323-4.

Reflected in this speech, of course, is Forster's hatred of the world of Henry Pembroke, his conviction that it is an agent actively destroying men's souls.

Stronger even than this hatred, firmer, if possible, than this conviction, is Forster's hatred of, and conviction about London. Forster baldly says that it is an overwhelmingly destructive force: Stephen, when he is exiled from Wiltshire, takes a job at a London furniture warehouse. In reporting upon it, Forster delivers a polemic against London worthy of a Ruskin:

> . . . he loathed the foreman, a pious humbug who allowed no swearing, but indulged in something more degraded--the Cockney repartee. The London intellect, so pert and shallow, like a stream that never reaches the ocean, disgusted him almost as much as the London physique, which for all its dexterity is not permanent, and seldom continues into the third generation. His father, had he known it, had felt the same; for between Mr. Eliot and the foreman the gulf was social, not spiritual: both spent their lives trying to be clever. And Tony Failing* had once put the thing into words: 'There is no such thing as a Londoner. He's only a countryman on the road to sterility!'[19]

It should be noted in passing that, as in the Italian novels, Forster often uses water both as a symbol and as a term of metaphor. Almost certainly this is a reflection of his indebtedness to the "vocabularies" of the Romantic poets,

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*Tony Failing was Stephen's uncle, a philosopher. A book of his essays is posthumously published during the course of the novel and excerptsfrom it are used by Forster somewhat as Meredith used the maxims of Sir Austin Feverel.

[19] Journey, p. 280.

particularly Shelley, in whose "Epipschidion" he found the title for this novel. We will find as we look at his last two novels, and particularly at A Passage to India, that defining things in terms of water is a continuing mode of thought for Forster.

II

Forster's very evident concern with Man and Nature in The Longest Journey does not eclipse his concern with man's need for a home even if in one sense the Wiltshire countryside is the most important "home" in the novel. Rickie, like Forster, is a wanderer, and one of the things which he searches for is, quite literally, a home--a place where he can feel he belongs, a place which has about it an aura of permanence and continuity and love. This is one of the things which Cambridge gives him. He realizes his rooms at Cambridge are a "perishable" home, yet at times he loved them "better than any person." He takes pleasure even in reading the painted-over name of his predecessor on the door. One of the more poignant moments of the books occurs when he reflects on the "seemly" disposition of the furnishings of these rooms among the teak and plush of Dunwood House. Perhaps he best expresses his feeling about this aspect of Cambridge in an argument with his friend Ansell. Rickie has been talking about the great world outside Cambridge, and Ansell asks him where it is and what it is like. He tries to convince him that there is no great world but rather many

tiny societies, some good like Cambridge, some not. To clinch his argument he offers this metaphor: To compare the world to Cambridge is like comparing the outsides of houses with the inside of a house. To this Rickie responds in a quivering voice, first reminding him that he will probably stay on at Cambridge as a Fellow:

> 'It's well enough for those who'll get a Fellowship, but in a few weeks I shall go down. In a few years it'll be as if I've never been up. It matters very much to me what the world is like. I can't answer your questions about it; and that's no loss to you, but so much the worse for me. And then you've got a house--not a metaphorical one, but a house with father and sisters. I haven't, and never shall have. There'll never again be a home for me like Cambridge. I shall only look at the outside of homes. According to your metaphor, I shall live in the street . . .[20]

Ansell's home--the one to which Rickie refers--serves Forster in this novel much as Windy Corner served in Where Angels Fear to Tread: Through describing it, he delineates what he believes a home must be. Its physical features he pens in with a few strokes--a series of crayons of Rickie's friend Ansell drawn at various stages of his life, a harp in luminous paint with the printed exhortation "watch and pray." The physical appearance he basically disregards. Yet he does make one telling observation about it, an observation which directly parallels his comments about the role of the bone and the dowdy drawing room furniture in giving Windy Corners its character: Confronted with the studied properness of

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[20]Journey, pp. 77-8.

Dunwood House--"Nothing in the house was accidental, or there merely for its own sake!--he suddenly realizes that the Ansells' "resolute ill-taste had given unity to the house."

What is most important about the house, however, is only reflected in the unity of its furnishings. What is most important is the love and acceptance which binds the family one to the other and which infuses the very atmosphere of the house. It is to this house that Rickie goes to recover from the spiritual rot of Sawston School. Later as he leaves for his last trip to Wiltshire, he looks from the train window back at the town "that was now his home" and then,

> up its chief street [to] the Ansells' memorable facade. The spirit of a genial comedy dwelt there. It was so absurd, so kindly. The house was divided against itself and yet it stood. Metaphysics, commerce, social aspiration--all lived together in harmony.[21]

Forster sets this house in contrast to Mrs. Failing's house, Cadover, which he ironically comments is "the largest house with which this story has dealings, and must always be thought of with respect." In this house, this potential home, Rickie never feels love nor harmony but instead "the most awful feeling of insecurity." In a respect the house is an interloper in the land, and Forster not so gently mocks the pretension and inappropriateness of its psuedo-neoclassical architecture. He writes that it

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[21] Journey, p. 298.

> favored the architecture of ancient Rome--chiefly by means of five lank pilasters, which stretched from the top of it to the bottom. Between the pilasters was the glass front door, to the right of them the drawing room windows, to the left the windows of the dining room, above them a triangular area, which the better-class servants knew as a "pendiment," and which had in its middle a small round hole, according to the usage of Palladio. The classical note was also sustained by eight grey steps which led from the building down into the drive, and by an attempt at a formal garden on the adjoining lawn. The lawn ended in a Ha-ha (Ha! ha! who shall regard it?), and thence the bare land sloped down into the village.[22]

Its owner, Mrs. Failing, had lived there during a loveless marriage and when her husband died she kept it only because she could neither rent nor sell it. She disliked the house and Wiltshire, and the people of Wiltshire. She, finally, only took year-round residence there when illness forced her to. Significantly when she banishes Stephen he breaks windows at Cadover with lumps of chalk--and as, significantly, she keeps the chalk, for she is not a stupid woman and sees the significance.

Mrs. Failing's relationship with Cadover and Wiltshire parallels her relationships with people. At one point she orders the windows of the house closed against the wind and rain which is sweeping the countryside, much as Harriet Herriton had closed the windows against the night air of Monteriano--and life. Similarly, she too has shut out life with its viable relationships. She tells Rickie that men "do not live for

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[22]Journey, p. 114.

great passions or for great memories, or for anything great," and adds finally (and solemnly) "that the important things in life are little things, and that people are not important at all."[23]

It is in Mrs. Failing's house, in the aftermath of her maliciously conceived disclosure to Rickie that Stephen is his brother and Rickie's subsequent rejection of him, that Rickie most deeply feels his need for a home. Agnes has just dissuaded him from acknowledging Stephen: the danger of public scandal has passed. At this point, Forster writes,

> They embraced passionately. The danger had brought them very near to each other. They both needed a home to confront the menacing tumultuous world. And what weary years of work, of waiting, lay between them and that home![24]

Rickie, of course, is never to find such a home. In his future lies only the teak monkey and the framed certificates of Dunwood House with only a brief, healing respite among the Ansells' crayons.

The major house--the major home in the novel--is of course, Wiltshire itself. The home which Rickie most truly seeks, although he is not totally conscious of it, is the land itself with its beauty and continuity and permanence. This is the home which the exiled Stephen Wonham finally returns to, and

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[23]Journey, p. 312.

[24]Journey, p. 160.

this return is the book's triumphant ending. In the final pages of the novel Stephen takes his young daughter to sleep in the fields where he had "often slept alone, and on his wedding night . . . " As he looks out over the countryside, his thoughts turn to Rickie who had made his return possible, to Rickie who could never know a home, yet had given a home:

> Out in the west lay Cadover and the fields of his earlier youth, and over them descended the crescent moon. His eyes followed her decline, and against her final radiance he saw, or thought he saw, the outline of the Rings. He had always been grateful, as people who understood him knew. But this evening his gratitude seemed a gift of small account. The ear was deaf, and what thanks of his could reach it? The body was dust, and in what ecstasy of his could it share? The spirit had fled, in agony and loneliness, never to know that it bequeathed him salvation.[25]

While it is true that the "body was dust" and "the spirit had fled," this aspect of Rickie's long journey had meaning in that it had accomplished for another what it could not accomplish for him.

III

Rickie, Forster tells us, " . . . was extremely sensitive to the inside of a house, holding it an organism that expressed the thoughts, conscious and subconscious, of its inmates." Forster, as we noticed in looking at the Italian novels, is equally sensitive, seeing man's response to beauty, be it man-made or natural, as an indication of his character. Thus in

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[25]Journey, pp. 226-7.

the earlier novels, particularly in The Longest Journey, he is for this reason careful to record his character's physical surroundings and their reaction to them. One of the first indications that we are given, for example, that Agnes Pembroke is not quite "right," is that she doesn't have the curiosity to turn around pictures just brought from the framers which are leaning against a wall of Rickie's study at Cambridge. A few pages later this impression is confirmed when she finds the presence of Arundel prints on the walls of Madingley Hall chapel a "pity" and responds to Rickie's comment " . . . that nothing beautiful was ever to be regretted" with a whispered, "You're cracked on beauty." Later, Forster attempts in some measure to reveal the sterility of her soul and of her brother Henry's, by describing Dunwood House, their home at Sawston School, in malicious detail.

Interestingly, Forster is so taken with this concept that he provides a home other than Dunwood House for the Pembrokes during the early stages of the story, one that displays none of the other's bad taste. It would seem Forster felt that if the reader were to accept the love affair between Agnes and Rickie, he would have to see Agnes in a setting less garish and sterile than Dunwood House. This second home, Forster tells us,

> had an air about it which suggested a certain amount of money and a certain amount of taste. There were decent watercolors in the drawing room. Madonnas of acknowledged merit hung upon the stairs. A replica of the Hermes of Praxiteles--of course only the bust--stood in the hall with a real palm behind it.[26]

He ends the description with an imagined, somewhat enigmatic speech by the house itself. This speech and Forster's introduction to it is quoted here because it succinctly summarizes Forster's convictions about man's aesthetic sense as it is expressed in the things with which he surrounds himself:

> . . . if a house could speak--and sometimes it does speak more clearly than the people who live in it--the house of the Pembrokes would have said, 'I am not quite like other houses, yet I am perfectly comfortable. I contain works of art and a microscope and books. But I do not live for any of these things or suffer them to disarrange me. I live for myself and for the greater houses that shall come after me. Yet in me neither the cry of money nor the cry for money shall be heard.'[27]

In revealing the Pembrokes' characters through the medium of their lack of aesthetic sense, Forster is at worst ironically malicious; in dealing with the only truly evil character in the novel, Rickie's dead father, through this medium, he is brutal. Mr. Eliot, whose eyes had a "peculiar flatness, as if the soul looked through dirty window-panes, "is" a pretender, a poser." He is a man totally devoid of virtue. Of the possessions which graced his rooms Forster says:

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[26]Journey, p. 44.

[27]Journey, pp. 44-5.

> He gathered the pictures and the books and the flower-supports mechanically, not in any impulse of love. He passed for a cultured man because he knew how to select, and he passed for an unconventional man because he did not select quite like other people. In reality he never did or said or thought one single thing that had the slightest beauty or value.[28]

Here, then, is a man to be assigned to the lowest circle of the Moorean hell.

Mrs. Failing, who in a sense might be thought villainous, in matters aesthetic, shows a fault of Philip Herriton and Cecil Vyse of the Italian novels and, to some degree, of Rickie: however great her sense of beauty is, she tends to impose the strictures of art on nature and thereby to lose the full experience of life. Forster ironically comments that,

> Mrs. Failing's attitude toward nature was severely aesthetic--an attitude more sterile than the severely practical. She applied the test of beauty to shadow and odour and sound; they never filled her with reverence or excitement; she never knew them as a restless trinity that may intoxicate the worshipper with joy. If she liked a ploughed field, it was only as a spot of color--not also as a hint of the endless strength of the earth. And today she could approve of one cloud and object to its fellow.[29]

Her opposite, the great man of the novel, Stephen Wonham, true to his Romantic prototype, the noble savage, worships the beauty of nature with an almost pagan and indiscriminate passion. The fine passage quoted earlier which describes him sailing a burning paper flower on a Wiltshire stream shows

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[28] Journey, p. 34.

[29] Journey, pp. 120-1.

this certainly. So, too, does the phrasing of his attack on Herbert Pembroke. This sense holds for things man made too. Forster carefully describes the Spartan simplicity of Stephen's bedroom at Cadover, with its single picture, a photograph of the Demeter of Cnidus, hanging from a rafter, free to move with the slightest breath of air. Forster also playfully writes of his reluctance to admit, as a professing atheist, his reaction to the beauty of Salisbury's spire.

Rickie, of course, is intensely sensitive to beauty. This sense is marred only by his forementioned tendency to see, for example, Agnes during the early days of their relationship "with the eyes of Blake," as a "virgin widow, tall, veiled, consecrated, with her hands stretched out against an everlasting wind."

The only character who falls outside this pattern, the only one Forster allows virtue without an aesthetic sense, is Ansell, Rickie's philosopher friend. There seems to be no reason to hang the walls of Ansell's home with exhorting harps nor to have him confess that he didn't "like carved stones." Perhaps it is to make bolder the contrast between Stephen and Ansell; perhaps--and this is the writer's preferred interpretation--it is Forster slyly gibing at Bloomsbury and at Moore, whose philosophy it is that Ansell professes.

IV

Forster admits, as noted before, that The Longest Journey deals with genius loci. In the novel itself he says, in talking about getting into the swim at Cambridge:

> The direction of the swim was determined a little by the genius of the place--for places have a genius though the less we talk about it the better . . . [30]

Then too, Rickie, like Forster, has written a collection of stories, his collection to be called "Pan's Pipes," which Rickie explains to Agnes grew out of his concern with contacting nature as the Greeks conceived of it:

> . . . I had a great idea of getting in touch with Nature, just as the Greeks were in touch; and seeing England so beautiful, I used to pretend that her trees and coppices and summer fields of parsley were alive. It's funny enough now, but it wasn't funny then, for I got in such a state that I believed, actually believed, that fauns lived in a certain double hedgerow near the Gog Magogs, and one evening I walked a mile sooner than go through it alone.
>
> It's alright now. I've changed those follies for others. But while I had them I began to write, and even now I keep on writing, though I know better. I've got quite a pile of little stories, all harping on the ridiculous idea of getting into touch with nature.[31]

The dell near Madingley was, we discover, the inspiration for one of Rickie's stories (Forster's "Other Kingdom" is the story Rickie outlines) and in spite of his disavowal of still believing in its supernatural qualities, he is reluctant to

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[30] Journey, p. 71.

[31] Journey, pp. 86-7.

enter it with Agnes. Forster explains that,

> It was too beautiful. All he had read, all he had hoped for, all he had loved, seemed to quiver in its enchanted air. It was perilous. He dared not enter it with such a woman.[32]

Enter it, of course, he does, and the spirit of the dell triumphs: in the dell's enchanted air he tells Agnes that he loves her.

Far more important than the genius loci of the dell, of course, is that of the immense Rings at Cadbury. But quite similar, perhaps, is it in its nature. Mrs. Failing talks about the "ghosties" that inhabit the "curious fields." They, she tells Rickie, worship the chief "ghostie," "D.," when especially as of a Sunday afternoon he leans against the tree in the center of the Rings. Rickie protests that the dead of the Rings were decent people and have no ghosts. "They worshipped," he continues, "Mars or Pan-Erda perhaps, not the devil." Mrs. Failing shifts the conversation to a discussion of soldiers and shepherds. Later we discover that the devil she talks about is similar to Rickie's Pan or Erda--that she and Rickie have each correctly identified the genius loci of the Rings. The revelation comes shortly after the mystic moment when Rickie and Stephen had sent the flaming flower on its journey, when Rickie had, he felt, committed himself to the earth, a commitment to be consecrated at the Rings. It

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[32]Journey, p. 88.

is after dinner and Rickie is reading from the edition of Tony Failing's essays which Mrs. Failing has just had published.

> Let our children, physical and spiritual, love one another. It is all we can do. Perhaps the earth will neglect our love. Perhaps she will confirm it, and suffer some rallying point, spire, mound, for the new generations to cherish.
>
> He wrote that [Mrs. Failing comments] when he was young. Later on he doubted whether we had better love one another, or whether the earth will confirm anything. He died a most unhappy man.
>
> . . . Not knowing [Rickie replied] that the earth had confirmed him.
>
> Has she? It is quite possible. We meet so seldom these days, she and I. Do you see much of the earth?
>
> A little.
>
> Do you expect she will confirm you?
>
> It is quite possible.
>
> Beware of her, Rickie, I think.
>
> I think not.
>
> Beware of her, surely. Going back to her is really going back--throwing away the artificiality which (though you young people won't confess it) is the only good thing in life. Don't pretend that you care for anything but for clever talk such as this and for books.[33]

The spirit of the Rings, then, is an earth spirit, a distinctly English spirit, a spirit disconcerting, indeed devilish, to those who have rejected the earth or who have built their lives without knowing her--to those whose hearts are underdeveloped. Such a one, of course, through circumstances rather

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[33] Journey, p. 311.

than culpabilities is Rickie. This Mrs. Failing recognizes when at the very beginning of the excursion to the Rings she fancifully compares Stephen, over whose room Dimiter presides, to the young pagans buried in the Rings and Rickie to the cracked church bell whose tolling accompanies their progress.

Mrs. Failing is, of course, prudent in cautioning Rickie about the earth, for he is not prepared, nor can he prepare himself, to accept the full implications of what he learns in the Rings under the aegis of their genius loci. Stephen can lean against the tree in their center; Rickie cannot with impunity even breach their outer works. The familiar world has done its job too well. This, although he does not completely recognize it, is what he is admitting when he says to Mrs. Failing during the last moments of his life, "you have been right."

In The Longest Journey then, Forster's concern with the interaction between man and his physical world and the consequences of this interaction on the whole of his life is expressed in darker tones than it had been expressed in his earlier novels. He still sees with the eyes of a Romantic ironist, but he is seeing more deeply now into the tragedy beneath the surface show.

CHAPTER IV

HOWARDS END

I

Early in the pages of Howards End, Helen Schlegel comments that she expects to end her days caring more for a place than for people. She seems to be echoing Forster's own thoughts at least during the period when he was writing the novel, for the novel is above all about places; the people with whom it is concerned are secondary. While he gives the novel for its epigraph the phrase "only connect . . . ," while he fills many of its pages with talk of personal relationships, he has written a novel, finally, neither about "connection" nor personal relationships, but rather about the relationship between man and place.

The major settings of the novel are, of course, London and Howards End. However, the minor settings, almost without exception rural, are worth considering because one of the important aspects of this novel is the eloquent homage Forster pays in it to all of that England not yet blighted by commerce and the motor car. He imagines for us, for instance, all of the beauty of the country spread beneath the foreigner's feet as he stands on the Purbeck Hills. Again, he becomes rhapsodic

and speculative as he considers the tide returning to Poole Harbour:

> The water crept over the mud-flats towards the gorse and the blackened heather. Branksea Island lost its immense foreshores, and became a sombre episode of trees. Frome was forced inward towards Dorchester, Stour against Wimborne, Avon towards Salisbury, and over the immense displacement the sun presided, leading it to triumph ere he sank to rest. England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through all the mouths of her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary motion, blew stronger against her rising seas. What did it mean? For what end are her fair complexities, her changes of soil, her sinuous coast? Does she belong to those who have molded her and made her feared by other lands, or to those who had added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing as a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity?[1]

At one point Forster speaks of Michael Drayton and his Poly-Olbion And he has given us in Howards End, indeed, in a sense a Poly-Olbion in miniature, for he interposes throughout the novel passages which can almost be described as prose poems in praise of the English countryside. Here, for example, is in part what he writes in describing a motor trip which Margaret Schlegel takes through Shropshire.

> Shropshire had not the reticence of Hertfordshire. Though robbed of half its magic by swift movement, it still conveyed the sense of hills. They were nearing the buttresses that force the Severn eastward and make it an English stream, and the sun, sinking over the Sentinels of Wales, was straight in their eyes. Having picked up another guest, they turned southward, avoiding the greater mountains, but conscious of an occasional

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[1]Howards End, New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1911, p. 213.

> summit, rounded and mild, whose colouring differed in quality from that of the lower earth, and whose contours altered more slowly. Quiet mysteries were in progress behind those horizons: the West, as ever, was retreating with some secret which may not be worth the discovery, but which no practical man will ever discover.[2]

Here are two selections from his description of Oniton, a Shropshire country house, and its environs:

> The air grew cooler; they had surmounted the last gradient, and Oniton lay below them with its church, its radiating houses, its castle, its river-girt peninsula. Close to the castle was a grey mansion, unintellectual but kindly, stretching with its grounds across the peninsula's neck--the sort of mansion that was built all over England in the beginning of the last century, while architecture was still an expression of national character.[3]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Next morning a fine mist covered the peninsula. The weather promised well, and the outline of the castle mound grew clearer each moment that Margaret watched it. Presently she saw the keep, and the sun painted the rubble gold, and charged the white sky with blue. The shadow of the house gathered itself together and fell over the garden. A cat looked at her window and mewed. Lastly the river appeared, still holding the mist between its banks and its overhanging alders, and only visible as far as a hill, which cut off its upper reaches.[4]

The most important of the rural descriptions, of course, are the descriptions of Howards End itself. In such detail does he describe this house and its wych-elm and its meadow that it is impossible to more than suggest within the limits

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[2]Howards End, p. 257.

[3]Howards End, p. 258.

[4]Howards End, p. 265.

of this chapter the richness and beauty of the description. No other English novelist, with the possible exceptions of Thomas Hardy and Emily Brontë, has more completely succeeded in realizing a setting, if indeed we can so term Howards End or Egdon Heath or Wuthering Heights. If Forster has accomplished nothing else, this alone would have assured him of a place among English novelists.

Among the passages one might choose to epitomize Forster's treatment of Howards End, a description of the garden as Margaret sees it while she stands on the front porch of the house, serves well. We find in it the same Romantic luxuriance which we found in similar passages in the earlier novels, but while in them we might question this luxuriance, here it seems unquestionably right:

> There were the greengage-trees . . . , there the tennis lawns, there the hedge that would be glorious with dog-roses in June, but the vision now was of black and palest green. Down by the dell-hole more vivid colors were awakening, and Lent Lilies stood sentinel on its margin, or advanced in battalions over the grass. Tulips were a tray of jewels. She could not see the wych-elm tree, but a branch of the celebrated vine, studded with velvet knobs, had covered the porch. She was struck by the fertility of the soil; she had seldom been in a garden where the flowers looked so well, and even the weeds she was idly plucking out of the porch were intensely green.[5]

It is obvious from this passage, and the others, that the rural England with which Forster is concerned is the rural England

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[5]Howards End, pp. 242-3.

of a young Romantic--nothing is red in tooth and claw--an England forever under benign skies, her hedgerows in brilliant blossom.

Against this England, Forster juxtaposes London. The threat it poses to the other England he had already alluded to in Where Angels Fear to Tread; now he gives it full statement. One morning as Margaret and her sister Helen are looking out over the meadow of Howards End, Helen says,

> '. . . London's creeping.' She pointed out over the meadow--over eight or nine meadows, but at the end of them was red rust. 'You see that in Surrey and even Hampshire now,' she continued. 'I can see it from the Purbeck Downs. And London is only part of something else, I'm afraid. Life is going to be melted down, all over the world.'[6]

If Howards End is the hero of this novel, London, Forster makes clear, is unquestionably its villain He writes of London's white winter air that "tasted of pennies," of its smoke which blots out the rising of the moon, of its formlessness, impermanence, and of its chaos. The whole of his attitude, his concept of London which dictated the details with which he chose to describe the city, he explains to the reader speaking as author,

> One visualizes it as a tract of quivering grey, intelligent without purpose, and excitable without love; as a spirit that has altered before it can be chronicled; as a heart that certainly beats, but with no pulsation of humanity. It lies beyond everything: Nature, with all her cruelty, comes nearer to us than do these crowds of

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[6]Howards End, p. 418.

> men. A friend explains himself: the earth is explicable--from her we came, and we must return to her, But who can explain Westminster Bridge Road or Liverpool Street in the morning--the city inhaling; or the same thoroughfares in the evening--the city exhaling her exhausted air?[7]

Later in his life Forster repudiated these lines of Blake about London for going too far:

> I wander thro' each charter'd street,
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
> And mark in every face I meet
> Marks of weakness, marks of woe.[8]

At the time of the writing of Howards End, he had no such reservations. He saw London as Blake and Wordsworth and Ruskin saw it--as a monstrous thing, a destructive force--and he so described it.

II

Of all of London's qualities, the ones Forster most frequently calls to the reader's attention are its instability and impermanence. The "nomadic" civilization of the city, he believes, is changing human nature and is threatening personal relationships. The only defense that can be thrown up against it, he tells us, is the strength of a home. This Thorntonian contention is one of the major contentions of the novel. Here, Forster gives full voice to those feelings which he writes were inherited from the Thorntons and reinforced by

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[7] Howards End, p. 132.

[8] "London is a Muddle," Two Cheers, p. 356.

the halcyon days he spent with his mother at the house in Hertfordshire that became the model for Howards End.

Early in Howards End we learn that Margaret, Helen Schlegel, and their brother Tibby are to be turned out of the only home they had ever really known, a house on Wickham Place; a large part of the narrative of the novel deals with Margaret's concern with finding a new house. Initially she is convinced that they will "easily find another," for she still conceives of a house as an arrangement of brick and wood. Perhaps the most important thing that happens to Margaret during the course of the novel is that she discovers she is wrong. This is the knowledge Ruth Wilcox, the owner of Howards End, tries to give her; it is in part what motivates Ruth, at one point, to insist that Margaret visit Howards End. Margaret at the time, while she is sensitive enough to understand Mrs. Wilcox's feelings, is so little appreciative of the truth of these feelings that, Forster tells us, she would really have rather gone to a concert than to have visited the house.

The novel chronicles Margaret's coming into wisdom. At first she fears only losing the security of Wickham Place, cut off as it is from the "welter of London" by a huge block of flats. Later, as the time to leave comes nearer, she comes to suspect that as Howards End was the "woof" of Mrs. Wilcox's life, so too is Wickham Place of hers. In time she becomes

truly Thorntonian and is constantly haunted by the heart-break and loneliness attendant on leaving the house.

Margaret comes into full wisdom, however, only after she has visited Howards End as the fiancee of the then widowed Henry Wilcox. Forster writes that when at Henry's home in Shropshire she thinks of the marriage which is to be. She realizes that if it is to survive the difficulties which she will face, the difficulty on the one hand of remaining herself and on the other of being assimilated into Henry's world, she must rely on the power of a home:

> Her only ally was the power of Home. The loss of Wickham Place had taught her more than its possession. Howards End had repeated the lesson. She was determined to create new sanctities among these hills.[9]

She is, in point of fact, not to create new sanctities in Shropshire but rather to rededicate an old "sanctity," Howards End. It is here that she is to pick up the pieces of life in the days after Charles Wilcox, Henry's eldest son, killed Leonard Bast, the father of Helen Schlegel's unborn child. It is here that she will take Henry to recover from the tragedy; here that she will make a home for Helen and her son. She realizes finally that Howards End is the end of her quest on that fine autumn day on which the novel closes. She tells Helen that she believes that Howards End will be their permanent home, and then adds, "There are moments when

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[9]Howards End, p. 270.

I feel Howards End peculiarly our own."[10]

A few moments later she discovers, of course, how peculiarly her own Howards End is. She learns that Ruth Wilcox, her early mentor, had bequeathed her the house and that the Wilcoxes had chosen to destroy the bequeathing document and keep the house from her, giving her instead a silver vinaigrette. When she learns this, "Something shook her life in its inmost recesses and she shivered."[11] This "something" is not the recognition of the Wilcoxes' perfidy but rather the recognition that while she had been seeking for a home, Howards End had been seeking for her. This is the second major theme of the novel: it is the expression of Forster's belief that places may have about them a spirit transcending their physical reality.

III

When the Wilcoxes, shortly after Mrs. Wilcox's death, are discussing what was to be done about her strange bequest, Forster comments:

> 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 farther 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 off-

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[10] Howards End, p. 418.

[11] Howards End, p. 422.

> spring? A wych-elm 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.[12]

Forster, of course, does perceive a problem, and he attempts to work it out in the pages of the novel. In working it out, he deals by and large with the concept of genius loci. First, he makes it clear that Howards End is no place for the surviving Wilcoxes--one or the other is forever saying the house simply "won't do," and soon after Mrs. Wilcox's death, Mr. Wilcox lets the house and takes up residence in Ducie Street. The tenant lasts barely a month--he has trouble sleeping--and he apparently leaves the house to the care of a neighboring farm woman, Miss Avery, a friend of the first Mrs. Wilcox and her mother. She, it turns out, is to tend the house until Margaret claims it or, perhaps more accurately, it claims Margaret.

Miss Avery is far more, however, than a caretaker. She is in a sense the house's acolyte; its votary. She is at one and the same time a prophet who foretells the future of Howards End and an active agent in making this future. On Margaret's first visit to Howards End, Margaret mistakes Miss Avery's footsteps for the heartbeat of the house, and Miss Avery greets her with the strange comment, "Oh! Well, I took

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[12]Howards End, p. 119.

you for Ruth Wilcox."[13] Later, thinking back on the visit, Margaret realizes that the visit has subtly changed her and that the catalysts of the change were Miss Avery and the house:

> 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 the one this with the joys of the flesh, and on that with the inconceivable. Helen and her father had known this love, poor Leonard Bast was grasping 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. [italics mine][14]

Miss Avery and Howards End had begun to work out its destiny.

It is Miss Avery who brings about Margaret's second visit to Howards End, and it is she who sets the stage for the house's final triumph: When the Schlegels' home on Wickham Place is finally broken up, the furnishings are crated and shipped to Howards End for storage. Contrary to the instructions given her, Miss Avery, who has been retained by Margaret to look after them, unpacks the furnishings and distributes them about the rooms of Howards End. When Margaret arrives to insist that the things be repacked, Miss Avery adamantly maintains that Margaret must come and live in the house--that

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[13] Howards End, p. 245.

[14] Howards End, p. 249.

it has been empty long enough. She tells Margaret "You think that you won't come back to live here, Mrs. Wilcox, but you will." Later she adds, "You are living here now."

All of this could, of course, be put down to the half-mad obstinacy of an old woman fiercely loyal to a house and its dead owner, and to a way of life. But there is too much evidence against this reading. To begin with, there is the strange initial encounter between the two women. Then there are the details of her arrangement of the Wickham Place furnishings: She unsheathed a sword which had been Margaret Schlegel's father's and hung it "naked" among the Schlegel books--an arrangement which particularly bewildered Margaret and which Helen noticed almost as soon as she entered the house. Further, in the room which Helen had occupied during her first visit to the house, Miss Avery places Tibby Schlegel's bassinette and announces to Margaret that it is to be the nursery.

The room, of course, does become the nursery for Helen's expected child--a child that Miss Avery could not possibly have known about--and the sword, because of the very place where it is hung, becomes the weapon with which Charles Wilcox kills Leonard Bast. Finally, as the Schlegel girls and Charles stand over Leonard's body, Miss Avery appears from the house, the sword in her hands, at the moment Charles recognizes that Leonard is dead. He tells Helen, who has been trying to

revive Leonard with water, "That's enough." Miss Avery picks up the phrase and says, "Yes, murder's enough." Enough for what? There seems to be only one possible answer. Enough to bring Margaret to the house permanently--and, of course it is. In Leonard's death Miss Avery and Howards End triumph.

Certainly, then, to an appreciable degree, there is a genius loci at Howards End. We encounter in the novel not only these prophecies of Miss Avery and the inexplicable management--inexplicable in natural terms--of events to insure Howards End's perpetuation but also direct references to magical folklore and nature mythology--each connected with Howards End and its owners. During her initial meeting with Margaret, almost the first thing that Ruth talks to her about is the wych-elm and the magical powers which have been given it by driving pigs' teeth into its trunk. Margaret is rather arch about the matter, but Ruth is deadly serious when she talks of having known cases where the magic works. (This becomes particularly important when we remember that Ruth Wilcox is in one respect interviewing Margaret as a prospective spiritual heir to Howards End.) Later, when Henry suggests to Margaret for the first time that they visit Howards End, her first question is about the magic of the tree. When Henry tells her he knows nothing of the pigs' teeth and dismisses the matter, she responds: "Perhaps I have confused it with some other tree. There are still a great number of sacred trees in

England, it seems."[15] When the visit is finally made, of course, she shows Henry that indeed the Howards End wych-elm is a sacred tree. More significant, perhaps, as Margaret walks toward Howards End on the fatal day when the process that will bring the house to life again is to begin, Forster prepares the way for what is to come by discussing magic and myth. First, he tells a charming legend about the village church having attracted so many worshippers that the devil had transported it to a knoll three-quarters of a mile away from the village. Then, in a very significant passage, he discusses the slightness of English mythology. Clearly, it seems, in this passage he is explaining part of the rationale that lies behind his writing of the novel and is telling us how we are to interpret the events that are to follow; certainly, he conceives of himself as one of the little poets of whom he writes, just as Rickie had so conceived of himself when he wrote the stories of "Pan's Pipes."

> Why, [Forster asks] has not England a great mythology? Our folklore has never advanced beyond daintiness, and the greater melodies about our country-side have all issued through the pipes of Greece. Deep and true as the native imagination can be, it seems to have failed here. It has stopped with the witches and the fairies. It cannot vivify one fraction of a summer field, or give names to half a dozen stars. England still waits for the supreme moment of her literature--for the great poet who shall voice her, or, better still, for the thousand little poets whose voices shall pass into our common talk.[16]

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[15] Howards End, p. 190.

[16] Howards End, p. 327.

We can assume, it would seem, that Forster hoped that Howards End would pass into this English folklore, would pass into Englishmen's common talk, and that this was one of the principles on which the book is based.

Margaret's most extensive reflection on the tree and the house, its companion, reinforces this magical, romantic, perhaps mythical view of Howards End which Forster and Margaret hold and which Forster wishes the reader to hold:

> . . . the wych-elm that she saw from the window was an English tree. No report had prepared her for its peculiar glory. It was neither warrior, nor lover, nor god; in none of these roles do the English excel. It was a comrade, bending over the house, strength and adventure in its roots, but in its utmost fingers tenderness, and the girth, that a dozen men could not have spanned, became in the end evanescent, till pale bud clusters seemed to float in the air. It was a comrade. House and tree transcended any similes of sex. Margaret thought of them now, and was to think of them through many a windy night and London day, but to compare either to man, to woman, always dwarfed the vision. Yet they kept within the limits of the human. Their message was not of eternity, but of hope this side of the grave. As she stood in the one, gazing at the other, truer relationships gleamed.[17]

The genesis of this revery, this reflection, is almost certainly in Forster's tale, "The Road from Colonus," a tale which he has admitted was inspired by genius loci. The genius loci which dwelt in the great plane tree--and the little Khan of the story--brought to Mr. Lucas, the aged English pilgrim to Greece, the same kind of knowledge: knowledge that there was hope "this side of the grave." As Mr. Lucas stands among

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[17] Howards End, pp. 250-1.

the votive offerings inside the hollowed out tree, Forster comments that,

> To Mr. Lucas, who, in a brief space of time, had discovered not only Greece, but England and all the world and life, there seemed nothing ludicrous in the desire to hand within the tree another votive offering--a little model of an entire man.[18]

III

Strangely, however, the effect of Howards End on the characters with whom it interacts is not to make them more whole or even to make them more aware of the value of wholeness. Italy in the Italian novels awakens Caroline Abbott and Lucy Honeychurch to richer possibilities of life than they had imagined. The dell at Madingley and the Cadbury Rings have a similar effect on Rickie. Howards End has a diametrically opposite effect. It offers a retreat from the fullness of life, not an invitation to it. Early in Forster's introduction to us of Helen and Margaret he writes,

> They . . . attended public meetings. In their own fashion they cared deeply about politics, though not as politicians would have us care; they desired that public life should mirror whatever is good in the life within. Temperance, tolerance, and sexual equality were intelligible cries to them; . . . Not out of them are the shows of history erected: the world would be a grey and bloodless place were it composed entirely of Miss Schlegels. But the world being what it is, perhaps they shine out in it like stars.[19]

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[18]"The Road from Colonus," The Collected Tales of E.M. Forster, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959, p. 130.

[19]Howards End, p. 32.

Considering the patterns of the other novels, we would expect that Helen and Margaret would, during the course of the novel, be confronted with a brightness and warmth of life and that on this confrontation would pivot the action of the novel. If anything, however, the life which they build at Howards End, particularly in Margaret's case, is more bloodless than the life they led at Wickham Place.

This is very clear at the end of the novel when Margaret and Helen confess each to the other her inability to appreciate fully human love. For Helen it is her inability to experience "a woman's love for a man." She is deeply distressed for she believes, "that, for good or evil, love must be the great thing," and she asks Margaret if this lack in her is " . . . some awful, appalling, criminal defect . . . "[20] Margaret's reply is startling. It shows how far she has retreated from life. In it she reveals how different she is now from the girl who believed that personal relationships were the acme of human experience. To Helen's question she answers,

> It is only that people are far more different than is pretended. All over the world men and women are worrying because they cnnot develop as they are supposed to develop. Here and there they have the matter out and it comforts them. Don't fret yourself, Helen. Develop what you have; love your child. I do not love children. I am thankful to have none. I can play with their beauty and charm, but that is all--nothing real, not one scrap

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[20] Howards End, p. 46.

> of what there ought to be. And others, others go forth still, and move outside humanity altogether. A place, as well as a person, may catch the glow. Don't you see that all this leads to comfort in the end. It is a part of the battle against sameness. Difference--eternal difference, planted by God in a single family so that there may always be color; sorrow perhaps, but color in the daily grey.[21]

What is important about this speech in light of our concerns is that in it Margaret rather clearly suggests that not only has she discovered that for love she must "move outside humanity altogether," but also that she is perfectly contented with her lot. The final effect of Howards End for Margaret then is not the stirrings of an underdeveloped heart, but rather an acceptance of devotion to the house as an alternative to the complexities of human emotion. This is the Margaret Schlegel who in her Wickham Place days had said, "It is sad to suppose that places may ever be more important than people."

Margaret, in accepting--if indeed she had a choice--custodianship of Howards End recognizes that she has undergone a great change, that for one thing she is capable of accepting the responsibility for causing pain and suffering without a qualm, if the pain and suffering serve the cause of Howards End. When Henry finally gives her the house, Forster comments, "There was something uncanny in her triumph. She who had never expected to conquer anyone, had charged straight

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[21] Howards End, p. 416.

through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives."[22] The use of the word "uncanny" is, of course, significant, particularly because only a few pages earlier Margaret talked about things "which she couldn't phrase" helping her to establish Howards End as a home and to untangle the lives of Helen and Henry. More significant, however, is the fact that she is totally without remorse about anything that has happened. The only emotion which she reveals during the final scene, prior to the revelation about Ruth Wilcox's bequest, is annoyance when Paul Wilcox accidentally scratches the paint on the front door of the house. Howards End, itself, with its "things" unphrasable, the home which she has established, these are apparently to her "goods" so overriding in importance that a few broken lives are insignificant.

Even her very mode of behavior changes when she becomes at once mistress of and priestess to Howards End. She who once had argued that "discussion keeps a house alive," now, like the first Mrs. Wilcox, grows "less talkative." She who had once cared so much for pictures and concerts and people, now, again like the first Mrs. Wilcox, appears to focus all her care, all her affection, all her interest, on Howards End. Forster envisions the "little events" of the cycle of the year at Howards End becoming "part of her year after year."[23]

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[22] Howards End, pp. 420-1.

[23] Howards End, p. 414.

> Every summer she would fear lest the well should give out, every winter lest the pipes should freeze; every westerly gale might blow the wych-elm down and bring the end of all things, and so she could not read or talk during a westerly gale.[24]

Clearly Ruth Wilcox has found the spiritual heir she sought. The house has triumphed and the genius loci is preserved.

Even the unquestionably beneficent influence the house has on Helen and Henry is a strange kind of beneficence. While it is true that during her fourteen months at Howards End Helen recovers from the shock of her experience with Leonard Bast, she is left completely dependent on Margaret and the house. Further, as was mentioned earlier, she is incapable of loving a man. Henry's case is rather similar. Under the aegis of Howards End and Margaret, he recovers from the shock of his son's arrest, but he remains a broken man who, although when he talked he "used the same old phrases, . . . their effect was unexpected and shadowy." We last see him shuttered up in the house because of his hay fever, pitiably afraid that he has offended Margaret. To suggest, as Helen does, that there is a strong bond of love, in the normal sense of the term, between Margaret and Henry is absurd.

Lionel Trilling finds the picture presented at the end of the novel not "entirely a happy picture" because "the male is too thoroughly gelded."[25] It seems unhappier still when we

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[24] Howards End, p. 414.

[25] Forster, p. 135.

consider that the final effect of Howards End is to geld each of its inhabitants in one fashion or another. The house has gained its guardian and her attendants, and it has given them peace and security; it has taken from them, in Henry's case his masculinity, and in Margaret's and Helen's, the very qualities of heart and mind that made them "shine out," granted in an imperfect world, "like stars."

IV

This malignancy that taints the spirit of Howards End is perhaps signaled early in the novel, at the point when we first meet the Wilcox children. In all of the earlier novels Forster has held that given a world infused with beauty and love, the human heart will develop in good measure. Growing up in such a world, he certainly intends us to see, is what sets Lucy Honeychurch apart from Caroline Abbott, and Stephen Wonham from Rickie Elliot. Even in Howards End Forster gives implicit statement to this thought when he writes such a passage as this,

> In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect--connect without bitterness until all men are brothers.[26]

Certainly, too, he wants us to believe that under the benevolent influence of Howards End, Helen's baby will grow to be a man worthy to accept the legacy of the house. Yet, when we

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[26]Howards End, pp. 328-9.

meet the Wilcox children, we see that Howards End has worked no alchemy on them. Shallow, insensitive, slightly vulgar, they might as well have grown up in Sawston as at Howards End. Indeed, even for the house itself, they have few feelings other than materialistic ones.

Forster does not attempt to explain this apparent contradiction in his thought, even while he gives full treatment to its antithetical aspect, with his treatment of Leonard Bast. In The Longest Journey, Forster, through the words of Tony Failing, had described the Londoner as "a countryman on the road to sterility";[27] in Howards End he portrays such a man, making a casual link between what he is and what London is. Leonard Bast, Forster tells us,

> . . . is a young man, colourless, toneless, who had already the mournful eyes above a drooping mustache that are so common in London, and that haunt some streets of the city like accusing presences. One guessed him as the third generation, grandson to the shepherd or plough-boy whom civilization had sucked into the town; as one of the thousands who had lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit. Hints of robustness survived in him, more than a hint of primitive good looks . . .

He adds that Margaret, looking at him,

> . . . noting the spine that might have been straight, and the chest that might have broadened, wondered whether it paid to give up the glory of the animal for a tailcoat and a couple of ideas.[28]

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[27] Journey, p. 280.

[28] Howards End, pp. 140-1.

Strive as Leonard will against the city, he cannot win for he is too much a part of her "tinted wonders." So stark does Forster see the effect of London to be, so spiritually debilitating, that he has Margaret callously remark that the "adventure" Leonard had--and this not his affair with Helen but rather a night-long walk through the woods of suburban London--was quite sufficient to justify his life.

V

Leonard, of course, tries to free himself from some of the effects of his life in London as the urbanites and suburbanites of the earlier novels had--Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott, for example, or Rickie Elliot. Like them, too, he fails ultimately. What is particularly interesting is the way he tries to make his escape--through books, pictures, and music. "He felt," Forster writes, " . . . that if he kept on with Ruskin, and the Queen's Hall Concerts, and some pictures by Watts, he would one day push his head out of the grey waters and see the universe."[29] This would seem to be a program of which G. E. Moore and Bloomsbury would at least to some degree approve. Not so Forster. He treats the situation satirically, if gently. His tendency to distrust art as a source of aesthetic excitement and to glorify nature as such--a tendency which we noticed in the earlier novels, particularly

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[29]Howards End, p. 58.

in The Longest Journey--is clearly evident in Howards End.

It is most strikingly presented during the scene in which Helen visits Howards End for the second time. One of the things which she notices as she examines Miss Avery's arrangement of the Schlegel furnishings is that the piano is missing (it was stored in London) and that their art books had not been unpacked. She makes this comment about the books: "She hasn't unpacked the Art books, in which she may show her sense."[30] Certainly Forster through Helen is hereby suggesting the hollowness of the world of art when it is matched against the world of Howards End. In the earlier novels, Forster had written of the danger he saw in substituting art for life. Never does he totally discount the value of the aesthetic experience; however, now he apparently does discount it, or at least sees such experience as so inferior to the experience to be gained at Howards End, that it pales to insignificance. In the future, of course, he will change his opinion and will write such essays as "Anonymity: An Inquiry" or "Art for Art's Sake," but at this time, caught up in an adulation of the beauty of the English countryside and the house with the wych-elm and the vine and the life which was and could be lived there, he has little time for pictures or statuary or music. Later he is to write:

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[30]Howards End, p. 363.

> Our problem, as I see it, is this: is what we have got worth passing on? What we have got is (roughly speaking) a little knowledge about books, pictures, tunes, runes, and a little skill in their interpretation.[31]

At the time when he was writing Howards End, he apparently held quite different doubts.

This is not to say that even in Howards End he does use the device, very Moorean, of course in nature, of revealing a character through his aesthetic reaction to the things about him, be they natural or manmade. But when he does, he does it with a kind of ambivalence. The Wilcoxes, we learn, "collect houses as . . . [a child] collects tadpoles"; Henry Wilcox makes the comment of Howards End that "inside the house, the beams--and the staircase through a door--[is] picturesque enough, but not a place to live in"; and Forster with rather studied humor remarks that the chairs in the smoking room of the Wilcoxes' house on Ducie Street suggested "a motor car had spawned." Margaret and Helen, of course, are deeply sensitive to the beautiful, to the red poppies of Howards End's meadow, to the roughhewn beam of its drawing room ceiling, to sunlight on the backs of chairs, yet the Schlegel with the most pronounced aesthetic sense is their brother Tibby--perhaps one of the most unattractive characters Forster ever created.

The most interesting use of setting in the novel as a means of revelation is only partially involved with person; primarily

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31"Does Culture Really Matter," Two Cheers, pp. 104

it is concerned with revealing the nature of the life of Leonard Bast's London. Here is Forster's description of the Bast's sitting room:

> The sitting-room contained, besides . . . [an] armchair, two other chairs, a piano, a three-legged table, and a cozy corner. Of the walls, one was occupied by the window, the other by a draped mantelshelf bristling with Cupids. Opposite the window was the door, and beside the door a bookcase, while over the piano there extended one of the masterpieces of Maud Goodman. It was an amorous and not unpleasant little hole when the curtains were drawn, and the lights turned on, and the gas-stove unlit. But it struck that shallow makeshift note that is so often heard in the modern dwelling-place. It had been too easily gained, and could be relinquished too easily.[32]

This passage, of course, sounds once more those charges against contemporary life which echo throughout Howards End; it points out the lack in it of the permanence and continuity which Forster felt essential to life; it presents once more that foil against which life at Howards End is set.

VI

Alan Wilde rightly believes that Howards End is Forster's last "efforts to keep himself from yielding to a bitter and pessimistic view of the universe."[33] Looking back over its pages it seems clear that these efforts led him away from that belief in personal relationships (which is popularly thought to be his most characteristic turn of mind); it led him back

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[32] Howards End, p. 56.

[33] Art and Order, p. 123.

in time to the imagined world of the Thorntons and to his own romanticized memory of his few years in Hertfordshire; it led him to find whatever hope he had not in human love, but in that love which man can feel for a country house or wych-elm--or for Cambridge. Midway through Howards End Forster comments that "It is impossible to see modern life steadily and see it whole, and . . . Margaret had chosen to see it whole." Perhaps as Forster conceived the novel, it was to deal with such a theme. In the end, he wrote a very different kind of novel, a novel which in its way is as disturbing as A Passage to India, for it raises the question of the very possibility of any semblance of wholeness in life.

CHAPTER V

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

Forster made two trips to India--the first in 1912-13 and the second in 1921. A Passage to India, which he began to write after the initial trip and completed after the other, in large measure reflects his Indian experiences. It is not a novel concerned primarily with the problems of British-ruled India, as has been so often alleged. Rather, in this novel Forster once more takes up the matter of the effect of a foreign environment on the sensitive middle class Englishman.

The major characters of A Passage to India are wanderers. The world in which they move is inhospitable; they find nature malevolent or indifferent, personal relationships impossible. What beauty they encounter is hopelessly mixed with illusion and ugliness. Their passage to India, which Forster calls the "strangest experience of all," is a passage into disillusionment, if not despair.

The famous description of Chandrapore with which the novel opens foreshadows fittingly the India they are to encounter. Chandrapore's few fine houses, Forster tells us, date from days when Upper India was imperial. Of the present city he writes:

> Abased, so monotonous everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil.

Yet from the civil station on the rise, the city appears beautiful because the trees that umbrella it, so "glorify it" that "newcomers cannot believe it to be as meager as it is described, and have to be driven down to acquire disillusionment." He ends the description by turning from the city itself to the sky over it.

> The sky settles everything--not only climates and seasons but when the earth shall be beautiful. By herself she can do little--only feeble outburst of flowers. But when the sky chooses, glory can rain into the Chandrapore bazaars or a benediction pass from horizon to horizon. The sky can do this because it is so strong, so enormous. Strength comes from the sun, infused in it daily; size from the prostrate earth.[1]

The India Forster here describes is an India of ugliness and illusionary beauty, an India where man is constantly reminded of the power and indifference of elemental nature. These are the aspects of India which Forster stresses in most of the descriptions of setting in the novel. An additional example occurs in his descriptions of the mosque which gives its name to the first section. Here he stresses the aura of illusion about the building:

> The covered part . . . was deeper than is usual; its effect was that of an English parish church whose side has been taken out . . . The front--in full moon light--had the appearance of marble.[2]

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[1] A Passage to India, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924, pp. 2-3.

[2] Passage, pp. 18-19.

Illusionary, too, is the beauty of the Ganges, which in the moonlight "stood like a luminous sheaf upon fields of darkness," but simultaneously would be the highway for dead bodies floating down from Benares if the crocodiles did not interrupt their journey.

The squalor of India he suggests through the squalor of the room in which Dr. Aziz, the Moslem doctor, lived with its light cord on which eye-flies massed, and the beauty amid squalor through his description of the court yard of the palace of Mau. Of it Forster writes:

> It was of beautiful hard white stucco, but its pillars and vaulting could scarcely be seen behind coloured rags, iridescent balls, chandeliers of opaque pink glass, and murky photographs framed crookedly.[3]

In the greatest of the descriptive passages of the novel, that in which Forster described Marabar and its caves, he stresses the elemental, primal qualities of the land. The high places of the area, he tells us,

> . . . are older than anything in the world. No water has ever covered them, and the sun who has watched them for countless aeons may still discern in their outlines forms that were his before our globe was torn from his bosom. If flesh of the sun's flesh is to be touched anywhere, it is here . . .[4]

The caves themselves, he continues, are totally alien to man,

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[3]Passage, p. 283.

[4]Passage, p. 123.

> They are like nothing else in the world, and a glimpse of them makes the breath catch. They rise abruptly, insanely, without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen. To call them 'uncanny' suggests 'ghosts,' and they are older than all spirit. Hinduism has scratched and plastered a few rocks, but the shrines are unfrequented, as if pilgrims, who generally seek the extraordinary, had found too much of it. Some saddhus did once settle in a cave, but they were smoked out, and even Buddha, who must have passed this way down to the Bo Tree of Gya, shunned a renunciation more complete than his own, . . .[5]

While certainly in these passages Forster is writing in the Romantic tradition, he has strikingly departed from the idyllic Romantic descriptions of his earlier novels. Significantly, we know that at least at times he saw India as idyllic as Italy or rural England. Here, for example, is an exerpt from a letter he wrote from India in 1921.

> The Guest House stood on a steep ridge close outside the city, and, as the morning mists thinned, the spires of Hindu and Jain temples appeared through the white and the three tops resembled green cushions. Beyond the city were hills. Monkeys scampered up and down the slope--black-faced because they had not helped Rama in his wars--tigers and leopards were near . . . Agriculture as usual but more diversified; for instance, betel-leaf was cultivated--delicate creepers turned round strings in a wattled enclosure . . . near at hand the lyrical beauties of Mau. Mau is a half-ruined palace by the side of a lake. One passes through a pillared hall on to a terrace, and the water is reached by steps at the roots of a great tree. The water is full of growth but clear, and when the sun sets duck fly over and hundreds of fowl beat the surface with their wings far away, making thunder. On the further side are tombs: a nymph haunts one of them; she used to eat lotus and walk on lotus leaves.[6].

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[5]Passage, p. 124.

[6]The Hill of Devi, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965, p. 126.

Only twice do we find descriptive passages of this sort in the novel. He writes in this manner when he is describing a festival commemorating the birth of Krishna, and again when he is describing the environs of Mau in sunlight. The first ends with all the gaudy array being soaked through and ruined by monsoon rains. He ends the second with the comment,

> . . . the scenery, though it smiled, fell like a gravestone on any human hopes.[7]

Forster has chosen then to set his novel in that part of India most antithetical to the England which the major characters know. That this is his intention becomes clear when we consider what Forster tells us of the reactions of one of the characters, Felding, as he reaches Venice when returning from India.

> In the old undergraduate days he had wrapped himself up in the many-colored blanket of St. Mark's, but something more precious than mosaics and marbles was offered to him now: the harmony between the works of man and the earth that upholds them, the civilization that has escaped muddle, the spirit in a reasonable form, with flesh and blood subsisting. Writing picture post-cards to his Indian friends, he felt that all of them would miss the joys he experienced now, the joys of form, and that this constituted a serious barrier.[8]

The India of the novel is an India, then, totally foreign to the Westerner. Forster's letters, including the one quoted above attest that he knew that other Indias existed.

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[7]Passage, p. 321.

[8]Passage, p. 282.

II

Like The Longest Journey, A Passage to India is to an appreciable degree concerned with the question of whether viable personal relationships are possible; in the novel at hand, particularly between Indians and Englishmen.

The novel opens shortly after the arrival in India of Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested. Adela has come to India, chaperoned by Mrs. Moore, to determine if she should marry Mrs. Moore's son. Both women are untouched by the fear and prejudice which has caused most of the resident English to retreat from India into the civil station on the high ground above Chandrapore. They believe strongly in personal relationships, and they further believe that it is possible to make a "passage to India." Their belief is shared by only one Englishman in Chandrapore, Cyril Fielding, a schoolmaster. In the beginning, it seems that perhaps they are right: when Mrs. Moore meets Dr. Aziz in the moonlit courtyard of a lovely mosque, it appears to be the beginning of such a relationship. Later, at a tea party Fielding gives, this relationship seems to develop and another between Aziz and Fielding seems to begin. Both, as it turns out, are as illusionary as the beauty of Chandrapore when seen from the civil station.

The second section, "Caves," like the "Sawston" section of The Longest Journey, deals with disillusionment with the possibility of personal relationships. The section relates the events of a picnic which Dr. Aziz gives at the Marabar

Hills and the consequence which follow from these events. The English find everything about Marabar unpleasantly alien and threatening, even the sky. Forster writes:

> The sky dominated as usual but seemed unhealthily near, adhering like a ceiling to the summits of the precipices. It was as if the contents of the corridor (through which the picnic party was passing) had never been changed.[9]

The experiences of the two women in this alien world dramatically alter the personal relationships which we watched beginning in the first section. Mrs. Moore has a strange psychic reaction in the cave she visits, a reaction that makes her incapable of caring about personal relationships. Adela has the halucination in one of the caves that Aziz has attempted to molest her. From the moment she charges Aziz through the subsequent trial, the relationship between Aziz and Fielding, who is convinced of his innocence, deepens. However, in the aftermath of the trial, Aziz's ill-treatment of Adela and his suspicion that Fielding will marry her bring the two men to the point of estrangement, the possibility of their relationship developing, dead.

In the final section of the novel, Aziz and Fielding are given a second chance as are Ronnie and Stephen in the final section of The Longest Journey. They meet once more two years later in Mau, the native state in which Aziz now lives. The old misunderstanding is cleared up, yet even friendship eludes

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[9]Passage, p. 141.

them. It is Fielding who asks the question of Aziz, "Why can't we be friends now?"; it is Forster who answers it:

> 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 here.'[10]

The final effect of India on the several characters who make the "passage" is to defeat them in their search for personal relationships. The final picture which Forster paints is of the very earth of India keeping man from man.

The only hope he offers is that at some time in the future the passage may be made by people like Mrs. Moore's younger children--two strange young people who for some unexplained reason feel an empathy with India and the Indians.

III

Of course, the most dramatic effect which India has on a major character is the effect that it has on Mrs. Moore. From the very beginning of her visit, India apparently troubled her. While she tells her son of his God-decreed duty to be "pleasant" to the Indians and evokes God's name, she admits to herself that although " . . . he [sic] had been constantly in her thoughts since she entered India, . . . oddly enough he

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[10] Passage, p. 322.

satisfied her less."[11] At the very point where it seems that through Aziz she will learn to know India, her duty done (she believes that Adela will marry her son), she wants nothing more than to book passage back to England.

The crucial moment of her interacting with India comes as she stands inside the cave at Marabar, when in the crush and the stench "some vile naked thing struck her face," when a moment later an "influx" of natives prevents her from leaving the cave, at that instance when "she went mad, hitting and grasping like a fanatic."[12] Of all the horrors she encounters in the cave the greatest is its echo--the "ou-boum"--that sound which is the cave's response to utterances of undescribable vileness and loftiest poetry.

The effect on Mrs. Moore of her experience in the cave is not immediate. After she leaves the cave she still has concern for Aziz's feeling and thinks as she talks to him "how very good, he was, how deeply she desired his happiness." Shortly after, however, as she looked at the "queer valley," the full meaning of the experience breaks over her:

> If one had spoken [in the cave] with the tongues of angels and pleaded for all the unhappiness and misunderstanding in the world, past, present, and to come, for all the misery men must undergo whatever their opinion or position, and however much they dodge or bluff--it would amount to the same thing, the serpent would

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[11] Passage, p. 52.

[12] Passage, p. 147.

> descend and return to the ceiling. Devils are of the North, and poems can be written about them, but no one could romantisize Marabar because it robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness, the only quality that accommodates them to mankind.[13]

This knowledge fills her with horror, and from this moment on she . . . "lost all interest, even in Aziz, and the affectionate and sincere words that she had spoken to him seemed no longer hers but the air's."[14]

The woman who returns to Chandrapore is totally different from the woman who left it--totally different from the woman who met a Moslem doctor in a moonlit mosque. The structure of her world has collapsed; its foundations crumbled before the vision of a world without meaning or ethical structure. She passes on herself this judgment, couched in part in terms which, ironically, no longer have relevance for her:

> A bad old woman, bad, bad, detestable. I used to be good with the children growing up, also, I met this young man in his mosque, I wanted him to be happy. Good, happy, small people. They do not exist, they were a dream.[15]

Mrs. Moore's experience in the cave, then, essentially destroyed her faith in God and in man's relationship with man. Far more important, however, it robbed her of her vision of how the universe was structured when it "robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness."

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[13] Passage, pp. 149-50.

[14] Passage, p. 150.

[15] Passage, p. 205.

Of this Forster writes that before she arrived in India,

> She had come to that state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time--the twilight of the double vision in which so many elderly people are involved . . . a spiritual muddledom is set up for which no high-sounding words can be found; we can neither act nor refrain from action, we can neither ignore nor respect infinity. Mrs. Moore had always inclined to resignation. As soon as she landed in India it seemed to her good, and when she saw the water flowing through the mosque tank, or the Ganges, or the moon, caught in the shawl of night with all the other stars, it seemed a beautiful goal and an easy one. To be one with the universe! So dignified and simple. But there was always some little duty to perform first, some new card to be turned up from the diminishing pack, and while she was pottering about, the Marabar struck its gong.[16]

Adela Quested's experience is quite different. Whatever happened to her in the cave--she accuses Dr. Aziz of molesting her--certainly it is intimately connected with her sudden recognition that her sensible marriage with Mrs. Moore's son, Ronnie, was an inadequate substitute for a marriage growing out of love and, particularly, physical attraction. As she and Aziz walk up a path toward a group of caves, Forster tells us that she thinks,

> What a handsome little Oriental he was, and no doubt his wife and children were beautiful too, for people usually get what they already possess.[17]

He adds that,

> She did not admire him with any personal warmth, for there was nothing of the vagrant in her blood, but she

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[16] Passage, pp. 207-8.

[17] Passage, pp. 152-3.

> guessed he might attract women of his own race and rank, and regretted that neither she nor Ronnie had physical charm. It does make a difference in a relationship--beauty, thick hair, a fine skin.[18]

Later when Adela looks back on this episode she is terrified that she will be questioned about it, for she believes that she asked Aziz what marriage was like. In fact, she did not, although in her mind she compared her imaginings about his marriage with what she knew her marriage would be. When after the trial Fielding suggests that she had an hallucination in the cave, she responds in part: ". . . the sort of thing--though in an awful form--that makes some women think they've had an offer of marriage when none was made."[19]

As in Mrs. Moore's case, so too in Adela's: it is her most closely held beliefs that the caves reveal to be illusions. Adela Quested, a new woman, who could sit at ease and smoke cigarettes with Indians, who came to India almost coldbloodedly to see whether marriage with Ronnie Heaslop could work out, discovers as she reaches the fatal cave that she has a passionate nature. Unlike Mrs. Moore, she cannot accept what she learns. Her mind on the conscious level rejects the knowledge and substitutes the hallucination of Aziz's attempted molestation. This is clearly revealed in Adela's first encounter with Mrs. Moore after the incident in the cave.

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[18] Passage, p. 153.

[19] Passage, p. 240.

Mrs. Moore, now a bitter, irritable woman, does not console Adela, but complains about the meaningless duties which keep her in India, particularly about Ronnie's and Adela's marriage:

> Why all this marriage, marriage? . . . The human race would have become a single person centuries ago if marriage was any use. And all this rubbish about love, love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the least difference . . .[20]

The effect of the speech on Adela is immediate. "An extraordinary expression," Forster tells us, "was on her face, half relief, half horror."[21] In a moment she tells Ronnie that she has made a mistake, that Aziz is innocent. Once she realizes this, the ou-boum of the cave which had echoed in her head since the day at Marabar suddenly goes away. She has for a moment seen the essential nature of her experience. But that knowledge she cannot retain, and she later renews her charge against Aziz and the farce of the trial proceeds. But early in the trial, the natives begin to chant Mrs. Moore's name, transposed into Esmiss Esmoor, and as they do, Adela, who had been close to collapse, suddenly begins to feel better. When she takes her place in the witness chair, she is fully in control of herself and in a sense relives rather than remembers the day at Marabar. She concludes by denying that Aziz had attacked her. Certainly there is reason to see a strong casual relationship between the natives' chant, and Adela's

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[20] Passage, p. 194.

[21] Passage, p. 202.

psychological experience while giving testimony, particularly so since Adela has insisted throughout that Mrs. Moore could tell her what actually happened in the cave. Further, from the very beginning of the episode, she is convinced that the evil of the experience echoing in her head in the form of the ou-boum of the cave can only be controlled by Mrs. Moore:

> The sound had spouted after her when she escaped, and was going on still like a river that gradually floods the plain. Only Mrs. Moore could drive it back to its source and seal the broken reservoir. Evil was loose . . . [22]

Finally, in revealing at least one aspect of the nature of the evil that is loose, Forster identifies it with the kind of experience Mrs. Moore had. While he tells us that neither Adela nor Fielding are capable of receiving the kind of insight Mrs. Moore did, he says this of one of their brushes with this evil:

> A friendliness, as of dwarfs shaking, 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, 'I want to go on living a bit,' or, 'I don't believe in God,' the words were followed by a curious backwash as though the universe had displaced itself to fill up a tiny void, or 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, because as soon as honest people think they are wrong, instability sets up. Not for them was an infinite goal behind the stars, and they never sought it. But wistfulness descended on

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[22] Passage, p. 194.

> them now, as on other occasions; the shadow of the shadow of a dream fell over their clean-cut interests, and objects never seen again seemed messages from another world.[23]

The evil of the echo is that it forces one to question the unquestionable: the basic beliefs on which one's life is built.

IV

When dealing with the questions of whether the Marabar echo is a manifestation of genius loci, it is profitable to compare Mrs. Moore's experience with the experience of Mr. Lucas, the old man in Forster's early short story "The Road from Colonus." The two experiences are exactly parallel, yet opposite: Mr. Lucas, visiting in a strange land, enters a huge, hollowed out tree, a shrine to the local people, a shrine hung with votive offering. Inside, he suddenly, mystically, realizes how fine and rich life can be. The hollowed rock that Mrs. Moore enters in the strange land of India is sacred to no one and it is devoid of any sign of the hand of man. Her realization of the total error of her life-view, a realization as suddenly upon her as his upon him, is as inexplicable as his in rational terms. The identicalness of plan of the two episodes is obvious. The difference between the two episodes is a difference of setting and outcome.

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[23] Passage, pp. 264-65.

The nature of Mrs. Moore's experience has never been adequately explained and has been the source of all but endless critical speculation. This is not, however, the case with Mr. Lucas's. Forster has plainly stated that in "The Road from Colonus" he was writing about an encounter between a man and the spirit of a place. Considering his feelings about Greece and India, the first, being part of what he calls the "Mediterranean harmony," the second being beyond the Bosphorus, where like beyond the Pillars of Hercules, men "approach the monstrous and extraordinary," it is at least tenable to interpret the episode in the cave in light of the episode in the tree-shrine; to see that in fact, the echo is a genius loci. Considering further that Forster's description of the landscape of Marabar suggests a physical embodiment of the message of the echo, as Mrs. Moore interprets it, the degree of tenability of this interpretation significantly increases. Note, for example, the phrase "itch for the seemly" in these lines about Marabar:

> Bland and bald rose the precipices; bland and glutinous the sky that connected the precipices; solid and white, a Brahminy kite flapped between the rocks with a clumsiness that seemed intentional. Before man, with his itch for the seemly, had been born, the planet must have looked thus.[24]

If the echo is indeed a genius loci, it is a genius loci indigenous to Hindu India rather than to the India of the

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[24]Passage, pp. 146-7.

Moslem or of the British, for it speaks out of a cosmology that did not develop from an "itch for the seemly," but rather one that accepted the unseemly. That it is of Hindu India is made clear in the novel by the fact that although all of Chandrapore call the caves famous, of the Chandraporeans who appear in the novel, only Dr. Godbole, the Hindu teacher, knows in what their fame lies. Forster tells us that Gadbole has this knowledge and indicates that it is distinctly Hindu knowledge when he recounts Aziz's attempt to convince Godbole to reveal what was extraordinary about the caves. He writes that " . . . Aziz realized that he [Godbole] was keeping back something about the caves," but that all his efforts to discover what were thwarted because " . . . the comparatively simple mind of the Mohammedan was encountering Ancient Night."[25]

The identification of the echo through Dr. Godbole with Hindu India is strengthened when we remember that both women are in strange psychological states even before the echo itself is heard. Each of these states begins at the moment Dr. Godbole sings a hymn to Shri Krishna for them. Mrs. Moore is disturbed by the song because, although the milk maiden of the song cries again and again for Krishna to come to her, He does not come. Mrs. Moore comments to Godbole, "But He comes

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[25]Passage, p. 76.

in some other song, I hope?", and Godbole replies "Oh no, he [sic] refuses to come." This is, of course, a shocking conception of God to either Christian or Moslem, and the hymn has a singular effect upon the ladies. Forster tells us of the effect when he describes how they felt on the morning of the picnic at Marabar:

> Ever since Professor Godbole had sung his queer little song, they had lived more or less inside cocoons, and the difference between them was that the elderly lady accepted her own apathy, while the younger one resented hers.[26]

The difference of reaction to the hymn foreshadows their different reactions to the echo: Mrs. Moore will accept the echo's apparent message while Adela will fight it through hallucination. Further evidence that Forster wishes to link the echo to Godbole and through him to Hinduism is the comment he makes shortly after Mrs. Moore has left the cave. He writes, "Professor Godhole had never mentioned an echo . . . ," and then he adds " . . . it never impressed him, perhaps."[27] What is significant, of course, in this comment is the fact that Forster suggests that the echo would not have had the same effect on a Hindu as it had on the two English ladies. The Hindu, as Forster presents him in the novel through Dr. Godbole, does not have the "itch for seemliness" that the

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[26] Passage, p. 133.

[27] Passage, p. 147.

Westerner does. Dr. Godbole would hardly have found there was much to disturb him in the knowledge that no difference existed between love in a church and love in a cave.

This aspect of Godbole's thought is made clear in an interview between Fielding and Godbole shortly after Aziz has been imprisoned. It is an interview which Fielding finds infuriating because Godbole does not share his overwhelming concern about Aziz, and Fielding accuses him of seeing good and evil as the same. Godbole sums up how Forster believes a Hindu would interpret the message of the echo:

> Good and evil are different, as their names imply. But, in my own humble opinion, they are both of them aspects of my Lord. He is present in the one, absent in the other, and the difference between presence and absence is great, as great as my feeble mind can grasp. Yet absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence, and we are therefore entitled to repeat, 'Come, come, come, come.'[28]

It would seem then that the evil that results from Adela's and Mrs. Moore's encounter with what would seem to be the genius loci of Marabar is an evil that, in fact, grows out of their inability to accept or to interpret a wisdom that runs counter to the conventional thought of the West. As had occurred with Aziz earlier, they encounter Ancient Night, and they are not prepared to deal with it. Mr. Lucas in his hollowed tree in Greece encountered a genius loci that was essentially in harmony with the tradition in which he lived; the

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[28]Passage, p. 174.

English ladies encountered one which was totally alien to the one in which they lived.

V

Forster's Thorntonian obsession with man's need for a home, and his espousement of Moore's beauty-goodness doctrine are of slight consequence in A Passage to India. While it is true that the English of the civil station try to create an enclave that to some measure resembles England, the England that they try to recreate is the England of Sawston and, thus, only negatively falls within this concern. Mrs. Moore's desire to return to England seems in no sense to grow out of love of her country or her home there. Initially, Forster ironically comments, she wants to return in order to help others; her reward: to be informed that she was "sympathetic." Later, after the episode in the cave, she simply wants to escape from India with its heat and the rigamorole of the trial and the supposed marriage. Adela's reason for returning is equally negative. The most positive thing she says of England is that there she is not "astray."

Fielding, for all his love of the harmony of Venice, seems quite content to roam across India, a Government inspector of schools living in Guest Houses. Even in the beautiful garden house in which he lived in Chandrapore he is only a guest. It was the audience hall of a high official of 18th century India and of it and its ownership Forster writes,

> Beautiful certainly, and the Englishman had not spoiled it . . . Yet there was no doubt to whom the room really belonged.[29]

Aziz, who is often filled with longing for a place in which he truly belongs, is thinking basically in terms of time: it is for the India of the Mogul emperors he longs, not for a place in contemporary India. When in the aftermath of the trial he moves to a native Hindu state, a place where he most definitely does not belong, Forster tells us that there for him "Life passed pleasantly . . ." With the writing of Howards End, it appears that Forster had said the last he had to say of man's need for a home. There is no way of knowing, however, whether he still believed in the centrality of home to man's happiness or simply had nothing more to say about it.

There is little question, however, that by the time Forster wrote A Passage to India, he had for the most part lost his faith in Moore's doctrine that an aesthetic sense and goodness are interdependent. In the opening pages of the novel it seems quite the contrary. It appears that the erosion of Forster's faith in this dogma, which we had particularly observed reflected in Howards End, had been arrested. Each of the good people--Mrs. Moore, Aziz, Fielding--each is shown to have aesthetic sensitivity. Conversely, the Philistines of the civil station are exposed in all their crassness. Of

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[29]Passage, p. 70.

them Forster writes,

> Their ignorance of the Arts was notable, and they lost no opportunity of proclaiming it to one another; it was the Public School attitude; flourishing more vigorously than it can yet hope to do in England.[30]

It is only at Fielding's tea that it becomes clear how completely Forster has broken with Moorean ethics. The first suggestion of this is a remark Forster makes about Aziz. He stressed Aziz's deep-felt response to the building, but after he comments that Fielding " . . . had not spoilt it," he adds that "Aziz in an occidental moment would have hung Maude Goodman's on the walls." In other words Forster is pointing out the culture-bound nature of one's sense of beauty.

Forster's belief in the culture-boundness of a sense of beauty is made even clearer when Dr. Godbole sings his song. The non-Hindus are confronted with music alien to them--non-music really--but obviously beautiful to a member of the culture of which it is a part. Forster comments,

> 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 had been 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.[31]

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[30] Passage, p. 40.

[31] Passage, p. 79.

Later, in the final section of the novel, Forster stresses that even what delights us in nature may be conditioned by circumstance. Writing of the response of Aziz and his children to the rain-soaked landscape of Mau, Forster says,

> The scenery, according to their standards, was delightful --the sky grey and black, bellyfuls of rain all over it, the earth pocked with pools of water and slimy with mud. A magnificent monsoon--the best for three years, the tanks already full, bumper crops possible.[32]

Quite certainly Forster is pointing out here the most serious weakness in Moore's ethical position concerning beauty and man's response to it. For if what we deem beautiful and our response to it is a result of learning, it is difficult to consider seriously either a matter of ethical import.

A Passage to India, then, is in this and other respects a rebuttal to the earlier novels. Before he wrote the novel, Forster had, himself, made passages not only to India but to Egypt as well. He had obviously come to recognize the parochialism of his own and of Bloomsbury's ideas, and out of this recognition came the pessimism which pervades the novel.

Finally, with this novel Forster comes full cycle from the exuberant optimism of the Italian novels. The anguish of the characters of the novel is his own anguish. It is Forster's own cry that we hear in these lines which might serve as the novel's epigraph.

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[32] Passage, p. 297.

How indeed is it possible for one human being to be sorry for all the sadness that meets him on the face of the earth, for all the pain that is endured not only by men, but by animals and plants, and perhaps by the stones? The soul is tired in a moment, and in fear of losing the little she does understand, she retreats to the permanent lines which habit or chance have dictated, and suffers there.[33]

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[33] Passage, pp. 247-8.

CHAPTER VI

~~CONCLUSION~~

In his novels E. M. Forster questions how man can make his life most meaningful. One aspect of this inquiry is an investigation of the relationship between man and his physical environment. Forster avers that to a large extent what man is, is determined by the world in which he lives.

The Italian novels, A Room with A View and Where Angels Fear to Tread, examine the effect of the richness of life in Italy on a number of Englishmen. In these novels Forster contends that Italy can serve as a catalyst to make man aware of the possibilities which life offers. The Longest Journey is concerned in large measure with the effect on man of a sterile environment and the regenerative effect of a more wholesome one. In Howards End Forster treats the environment most personally important to him, that of an English country house, and holds that in such an environment man can most fully reach his spiritual potential. Finally, in A Passage to India Forster argues that to place man in a totally alien environment is to place him in risk of losing his entire concept of the universe and his place in it, for this concept is intimately connected with his perception of the physical world about him.

Each of the novels focuses on a particular place--from the "magic" pool of A Room with A View to the Marabar caves of A Passage to India--places with which the characters significantly interact. In every case, Forster implies that the place is possessed of a genius loci, its own spirit, which causes this interaction. The most pronounced example of this feature of the novels is, of course, Howards End, whose spirit, it seems, wills that Margaret Schlegel shall take up residence there.

Howards End is significant in another aspect found in Forster's first four novels. It represents to Forster the end of a quest which is pursued by characters in each of these novels, the search for a home. Deeply imbued with the Thorntonian reverence for a home, homeless himself, Forster pays tribute in the novel Howards End to the virtues to be found in life centered around an English country house.

Place has an important role in these first four novels also because at the time of their writing Forster was under the influence of the ethical thought of G. E. Moore. He held with Moore not only the conviction of the pre-eminence of personal relationships in human affairs, but also the belief that man's aesthetic reaction to the beautiful reflected the state of his moral nature. Hence, how a character in one of these novels reacts to a country house or to a piece of china is of singular importance in understanding his character.

In A Passage to India neither the search for a home nor the concern with aesthetic reaction is of much moment. By the time Forster completed the novel, he had seen war and its aftermath destroy the civilization he had written of in the earlier novels; he, himself, had been exposed to worlds far larger than the world of Bloomsbury; and the dual experience drew him into a deep pessimism. He seems to have totally lost faith in Moore's ethics and apparently to have lost hope that man could be ever more than a homeless wanderer. Man's interaction with place is still central to A Passage to India, but whereas in the earlier novels the interaction resulted in a character recognizing the rich possibilities of life, in this novel it leads him to recognize his own limitations.

In one sense, then, we can view Forster's five novels as notebooks recording his own longest journey from the Romantic England of Bloomsbury at its height to the bleak England of the post-World War I decade. We can see in them the full flowering of Bloomsbury optimism and its total dissolution. Personal relationships, aesthetic experience--in the end the value of each is called into question, and with this questioning comes the pessimism of A Passage to India.

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