E. M. FORSTER

BY LIONEL TRILLING

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The preface to a new edition of this little book must take note of two things that have happened since its original publication. The first is that Mr. Forster has added to the canon of his work as it existed when I wrote about it. In 1951 he brought out *Two Cheers for Democracy,* a collection of his literary and miscellaneous essays written since *Abinger Harvest;* in 1953 he gave us *The Hill of Devi,* a memoir of the Indian sojourn of his youth, and in 1956 *Marianne Thornton,* a biography of his great-aunt which is in effect a history of his family. The second occurrence is that in the intervening years a quite formidable body of criticism has grown up around Mr. Forster's novels. When I wrote my study, Mr. Forster was already a cherished author, and his work had called forth, especially in England, a critical literature of some size. Since that time, Mr. Forster's work has become ever more widely known, and, we may say, known in a new, a more public, way—where once it had been admired by many who found pleasure in thinking that it was known to them alone, a private experience to be kindly but cautiously shared with a few others of like mind, it has now become a general possession, securely established in the literary tradition of our time, and something like required read-

ing for educated people. The growth of Mr. Forster's fame is being matched, expectably enough, by the increase of the critical attention that is paid him. This development is especially marked in America, where he is now one of the approved subjects for the university scholar of literature.

No doubt this work of mine would have the appearance of being more nearly complete if I were now to bring into its purview Mr. Forster's three latest books and take into account the augmented corpus of criticism. But when I consider the nature and purpose of my study, I am not able to convince myself that by this revision I should be contributing to much more than an appearance. Of the essays that are gathered together in *Two Cheers for Democracy,* some were available to me upon their first publication; those that appeared after I wrote are valuable indeed, but they do not lead me to revise my description of the temper of Mr. Forster's mind when he speaks in his own person as a critic of literature and society. *The Hill of Devi* and *Marianne Thornton* do certainly deepen our awareness of Mr. Forster as a personality and a "figure" in our culture, and of course I had not failed—could scarcely have failed—to respond to him in that aspect. But even though this interest was strong, it was ancillary to my primary concern, which was with the author of the novels, and although the two delightful new books do in a sense bear upon Mr. Forster's art, for they suggest some of the personal circumstances which the novelist used as "material," yet neither of them has worked any essential change in the view of the novelist which I had set forth before they appeared.

When I began my study, I naturally made myself aware of the critical climate in which Mr. Forster's work then

existed, but it was far from my purpose to take particular account of it, and it does not seem appropriate that I should now revise my old intention. Of the critical writings that have appeared in the intervening time, some disagree with what I said, and many go beyond me in complexity or ingenuity of perception and interpretation. I could only seem contentious if I were to attempt to deal with the differences of opinion. And although I do indeed recognize that some new readings of the novels are more developed than mine, I suppose that the close student of Forster will wish to consult all the opinions, the old and the new, at first hand. As for the beginning reader of Forster, he could only be burdened and confused by an account of the multiplicity of views, and, indeed, for him there may even be some advantage in my by now primitive simplicity.

For this edition, then, I have expanded the bibliography to apprise the reader of what he may want to consult in the way of critical opinion beyond my own book. I have corrected a few literal or factual errors in the text but have made no other changes in it.

I should add that even if I had convinced myself that revision was necessary, I would probably have had to decide that it was neither possible nor right for me to undertake it. Most of the book was written, as I well remember, in a concentrated rush, and although much of the enthusiasm and pleasure of its composition is to be attributed to my liking for the subject, I have no doubt that I was benefited by the special energies that attend a polemical purpose. To some readers it will perhaps seem strange, even perverse, to have involved Mr. Forster in polemic, but I did just that—I had a quarrel with American literature as at that time it was established, and

against what seemed to me its dullness and its pious social simplicities I enlisted Mr. Forster's vivacity, complexity, and irony. It was a quarrel that was to occupy me for some years; from the title of the introductory chapter of this book I took the name of my first volume of essays, *The Liberal Imagination.* The occasion of that cultural contention no longer exists, at least not in its old form, but it was an event of some importance in my intellectual life and I would not wish to interfere with what I said in the course of it. I feel this the more for a reason which is not personal—the old quarrel, which of course I did not engage in alone, is part of our literary history, and even the smallest historical document ought not to be tampered with.

One other circumstance would stand in the way of revision. When I wrote the book, I was not acquainted with Mr. Forster and there was no communication between us. Since then we have become—I hope Mr. Forster will allow me to say—friends. Friendship, I am sure, does not necessarily make disinterested criticism impossible, but sometimes makes it difficult; and perhaps this is most likely when the critic sees a very close consonance between the author and his work. I find that when I now think of the novels, certain affectionate recollections of Mr. Forster himself intrude upon my judgment. I have no wish to drive them away, but I think that the reader, and Mr. Forster's art, and criticism itself, are best served by my early and impersonal opinions.

L.T.

New York
1964

E. M. FORSTER

Isherwood and Cyril Connolly—hold him in great esteem and have written well about him; I. A. Richards' remarks about Forster are sometimes perceptive, Elizabeth Bowen has spoken of him briefly but well, and the late Peter Burra's essay (now the introduction to the Everyman edition of *A Passage To India*) is a sound appreciation. But both Rose Macaulay and Virginia Woolf, who write of Forster with admiration, perceive the delicacy but not the cogency of his mind. As for the judgment canonized in *The Concise Cambridge History Of English Literature,* it is wholly mistaken; the "shy, unworldly quality" of work "almost diffidently presented" by a man who is "at heart a scholar" simply does not exist. The author of this comment has taken an irony literally and has misinterpreted a manner.

It is Forster's manner, no doubt, that prevents a greater response to his work. That manner is comic; Forster owes much to Fielding, Dickens, Meredith and James. And nowadays even the literate reader is likely to be unschooled in the comic tradition and unaware of the comic seriousness. The distinction between the serious and the solemn is an old one, but it must be made here again to explain one of the few truly serious novelists of our time. Stendhal believed that gaiety was one of the marks of the healthy intelligence, and we are mistakenly sure that Stendhal was wrong. We suppose that there is necessarily an intellectual "depth" in the deep tones of the organ; it is possibly the sign of a deprivation—our suspicion of gaiety in art perhaps signifies an inadequate seriousness in ourselves. A generation charmed by the lugubrious—once in O'Neill, Dreiser and Anderson, now in Steinbeck and Van Wyck

Brooks—is perhaps fleeing from the trivial shape of its own thoughts.

Forster is not only comic, he is often playful. He is sometimes irritating in his refusal to be great. Greatness in literature, even in comedy, seems to have some affinity with greatness in government and war, suggesting power, a certain sternness, a touch of the imperial and imperious. But Forster, who in certain moods might say with Swift, "I have hated all nations, professions and communities, and all my love is for individuals," fears power and suspects formality as the sign of power. "Distrust every enterprise that requires new clothes" is the motto one of his characters inscribes over his wardrobe. It is a maxim of only limited wisdom; new thoughts sometimes need new clothes and the seriousness of Forster's intellectual enterprise is too often reduced by the unbuttoned manner he affects. The quaint, the facetious and the chatty sink his literary criticism below its proper level; they diminish the stature of his short fiction and they even touch, though they never actually harm, the five novels; the true comic note sometimes drops to mere chaff and we now and then wish that the style were less comfortable and more arrogant.

But while these lapses have to be reckoned with, they do not negate the validity of the manner of which they are the deficiency or excess. Forster's manner is the agent of a moral intention which can only be carried out by the mind *ondoyant et divers* of which Montaigne spoke. What Forster wants to know about the human heart must be caught by surprise, by what he calls the "relaxed will," and if not everything can be caught in this way, what is so caught cannot be caught in any other way. Rigor will not do, and

Forster uses the novel as a form amenable to the most arbitrary manipulation. He teases his medium and plays with his genre. He scorns the fetish of "adequate motivation," delights in surprise and melodrama and has a kind of addiction to sudden death. Guiding his stories according to his serious whim—like the anonymous lady, he has a whim of iron—Forster takes full and conscious responsibility for his novels, refusing to share in the increasingly dull assumption of the contemporary novelist, that the writer has nothing to do with the story he tells and that, *mirabile dictu,* through no intention of his own, the story has chosen to tell itself through him. Like Fielding, he shapes his prose for comment and explanation, and like Fielding he is not above an explanatory footnote. He summarizes what he is going to show, introduces new themes when and as it suits him to do so, is not awed by the sacred doctrine of "point of view" and, understanding that verisimilitude, which more than one critic has defended from his indifference, can guarantee neither pleasure nor truth, he uses exaggeration and improbability. As a result, the four novels up to *A Passage To India* all suggest that they have been written after a close application to the dramatic principles of *The Winter's Tale.*

In all this Forster is not bizarre. He simply has the certainty of the great novelists that any novel is a made-up thing and that a story, in order to stand firmly on reality, needs to keep no more than one foot on probability. Against this belief is opposed our increasingly grim realistic prejudice: we have learned to believe that *The Winter's Tale* is great poetry but bad dramaturgy. Our literal and liberal intelligence jibs at an interruption of sixteen

years, at what we are convinced is an improbability not only of event but of emotion—we think it wrong that Mamillius and Antigonus should die so casually, or that anyone should "exit, pursued by a bear," or that Polixenes should fly into his brutal rage after having so charmingly taken part in Perdita's great flower scene, for it confuses us that good and evil should co-exist and alternate. To accept Forster we have to know that *The Winter's Tale* is dramatically and morally sound and that improbability is the guide to life.

This means an affirmation of faith in the masters of the novel, in James, Meredith, Dickens—and in Hawthorne, whose notion of the "romance" (for he was forced to distinguish his own kind of novel from the more literal kind) is here so suggestive.

> When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former—while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.

Hawthorne is no doubt the greater artist and perhaps the greater moralist, yet Forster stands with him in his unremitting concern with moral realism. All novelists deal with morality, but not all novelists, or even all good novelists, are concerned with moral realism, which is not the awareness of morality itself but of the contradictions,

paradoxes and dangers of living the moral life. To the understanding of the inextricable tangle of good and evil and of how perilous moral action can be, Hawthorne was entirely devoted. Henry James followed him in this devotion and after James, though in a smaller way, comes Forster, who can say of one of his characters that he was "cursed with the Primal Curse, which is not the knowledge of good and evil, but the knowledge of good-and-evil."

It is here that the precise point of Forster's manner appears. Forster's plots are always sharp and definite, for he expresses difference by means of struggle, and struggle by means of open conflict so intense as to flare into melodrama and even into physical violence. Across each of his novels runs a barricade; the opposed forces on each side are Good and Evil in the forms of Life and Death, Light and Darkness, Fertility and Sterility, Courage and Respectability, Intelligence and Stupidity—all the great absolutes that are so dull when discussed in themselves. The comic manner, however, will not tolerate absolutes. It stands on the barricade and casts doubt on both sides. The fierce plots move forward to grand simplicities but the comic manner confuses the issues, forcing upon us the difficulties and complications of the moral fact. The plot suggests eternal division, the manner reconciliation; the plot speaks of clear certainties, the manner resolutely insists that nothing can be quite so simple. "Wash ye, make yourselves clean," says the plot, and the manner murmurs, "If you can find the soap."

Now, to the simple mind the mention of complication

world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil.

And the irony is doubled when we think how well the great conservative minds have understood what Milton meant. Dr. Johnson and Burke and, in a lesser way at a later time, Fitzjames Stephen, understood the mystery of the twins; and Matthew Arnold has always been thought the less a liberal for his understanding of them. But we of the liberal connection have always liked to play the old intellectual game of antagonistic principles. It is an attractive game because it gives us the sensation of thinking, and its first rule is that if one of two opposed principles is wrong, the other is necessarily right. Forster will not play this game; or, rather, he plays it only to mock it.

This indifference to the commonplaces of liberal thought makes the very texture of Forster's novels and appeared in the first of them. The theme of *Where Angels Fear To Tread* is the violent opposition between British respectability and a kind of pagan and masculine integration. D. H. Lawrence, who played the old game of antagonistic principles for all it was worth—and it was worth something in his hands—gave us many characters like Forster's Gino Carella, characters who, like Gino, were cruel (the scene of Gino's cruelty is, incidentally, one of the most remarkable in modern fiction) or, like Gino, indifferent to the "higher" and romantic emotions. But here Lawrence always stopped; from this point on all his effort went to intensifying his picture, and by this he no doubt gained, as against Forster, in sheer coercive power. For the poor, lost, respectable British people, Gino may serve as the embodiment of the masculine and pagan principle, but For-

ster knows that he is also coarse, dull, vain, pretentious, facilely polite and very much taken with the charms of respectability.

And it is irritating to be promised a principle and then to be given only an hypothesis. The hypothesis, having led us to criticize respectability, is useful, but we had wanted it to be conclusive. And Forster refuses to be conclusive. No sooner does he come to a conclusion than he must unravel it again. In *A Room With A View*, to take another example, he leads us to make the typical liberal discovery that Miss Bartlett, the poor relation who thinks she is acting from duty, is really acting from a kind of malice—she has been trying to recruit the unawakened heroine into "the armies of the benighted, who follow neither the heart nor the brain." But Forster does not stop at this conventionality, even though in 1908 it was not quite so conventional. For when the heroine at last fulfills her destiny, deserts Miss Bartlett and marries the man she had unconsciously loved (this is, to all appearance, a very modest little novel), she comes to perceive that in some yet more hidden way Miss Bartlett had really desired the union. And we have been prepared for this demonstration of the something still further "behind" the apparent by the action of the tolerant and enlightened clergyman, Mr. Beebe, who has ceased to be the angel of light and has set himself against the betrothal.

Forster's insistence on the double turn, on the something else that lies behind, is sometimes taken for "tolerance," but although it often suggests forgiveness (a different thing), it almost as often makes the severest judg-

ments. And even when it suggests forgiveness it does not spring so much from gentleness of heart as from respect for two facts co-existing, from the moral realism that understands the one apple tasted. Forster can despise Gerald of *The Longest Journey* because Gerald is a prig and a bully, but he can invest Gerald's death with a kind of primitive dignity, telling us of the maid-servants who weep, "They had not liked Gerald, but he was a man, they were women, he had died." And after Gerald's death he can give Agnes Pembroke her moment of tragic nobility, only to pursue her implacably for her genteel brutality.

So much moral realism is rare enough to be a kind of surprise, and Forster, as I have said, likes to work with surprises mild or great. "Gerald died that afternoon," is the beginning of a chapter which follows immediately upon a description of Gerald full of superabundant life. We have to stand unusually far back from Forster's characters not to be startled when they turn about, and the peculiar pleasure to be had from his books is that of a judicious imperturbability. He is always shocking us by removing the heroism of his heroes and heroines; in *A Passage To India*, Mrs. Moore, of whom we had expected high actions, lets herself be sent away from the trial at which her testimony would have been crucial; Cyril Fielding, who as a solitary man had heroically opposed official ideas, himself becomes official when he is successful and married; and Dr. Aziz cannot keep to his role of the sensitive and enlightened native. It is a tampering with the heroic in the manner not of Lytton Strachey but of Tolstoy, a kind of mithridate against our

being surprised by life. Let us not deceive ourselves, Forster seems to say, it is with just such frailties as Mrs. Moore and Mr. Fielding, and with and for such unregeneracies as Dr. Aziz that the problem of, let us say, India must be solved. The moments of any man's apparent grace are few, any man may have them and their effects are not easily to be calculated. It is on a helter-skelter distribution of grace that Forster pins what hopes he has; but for years after *A Passage To India*—it is still his latest novel—he has had the increasing sense of possible doom.

Perhaps it is because he has nothing of the taste for the unconditioned—Nietzsche calls it the worst of all tastes, the taste that is always being fooled by the world—that Forster has been able to deal so well with the idea of class. The liberal mind has in our time spoken much of this idea but has failed to believe in it. The modern liberal believes in categories and wage-scales and calls these class. Forster knows better, and in *Howards End* shows the conflicting truths of the idea—that on the one hand class is character, soul and destiny, and that on the other hand class is not finally determining. He knows that class may be truly represented only by struggle and contradiction, not by description, and preferably by moral struggle in the heart of a single person. When D. H. Lawrence wrote to Forster that he had made "a nearly deadly mistake glorifying those *business* people in *Howards End*. Business is no good," he was indulging his own taste for the unconditioned. It led him to read Forster inaccurately and it led him to make that significant shift from "business people" to "business."

But Forster, who is too worldly to suppose that we can judge people without reference to their class, is also too worldly to suppose that we can judge class-conditioned action until we make a hypothetical deduction of the subject's essential humanity. It is exactly because Forster can judge the "business people" as he does, and because he can judge the lower classes so without sentimentality, that he can deal firmly and intelligently with his own class, and if there is muddle in *Howards End*—and the nearly allegorical reconciliation is rather forced—then, in speaking of class, clear ideas are perhaps a sign of ignorance, muddle the sign of true knowledge; surely *Howards End* stands with *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Princess Casamassima* as one of the great comments on the class struggle.

To an American, one of the most notable things about Forster's work is the directness and consciousness of its connection with tradition. We know of Forster that he is a Hellenist but not a "classicist," that he loves Greece in its mythical and naturalistic aspects, that Plato has never meant much to him, perhaps because he mistrusts the Platonic drive to the absolute and the Platonic judgment of the body and the senses. He dislikes the Middle Ages and all in Dante that is medieval. He speaks of himself as a humanist and traces his descent to Erasmus and Montaigne. He is clearly in the romantic line, yet his admiration for Goethe and Shelley is qualified; Beethoven is a passion with him but he distrusts Schumann. He has no faith in the regenerative power of Christianity and he is frequently hostile to the clergy, yet he has a tenderness for religion because it expresses, though it does not

derson, for all his great explicit impulse toward actuality, never had—the sense of what houses, classes, institutions, politics, manners and people are like. Forster knows, as Anderson never knew, that things are really there. All his training has helped bring his impulses to consciousness, and the play of consciousness over intuition and desire gives him his curious tough insight.

The great thing Forster has been able to learn from his attachment to tradition and from his sense of the past is his belief in the present. He has learned not to be what most of us are—eschatological. Most of us, consciously or unconsciously, are discontented with the nature rather than with the use of the human faculty; deep in our assumption lies the hope and the belief that humanity will end its career by developing virtues which will be admirable exactly because we cannot now conceive them. The past has been a weary failure, the present cannot matter, for it is but a step forward to the final judgment; we look to the future when the best of the works of man will seem but the futile and slightly disgusting twitchings of primeval creatures: thus, in the name of a superior and contemptuous posterity, we express our self-hatred—and our desire for power.

This is a moral and historical error into which Forster never falls; his whole work, indeed, is an implied protest against it. The very relaxation of his style, its colloquial unpretentiousness, is a mark of his acceptance of the human fact as we know it now. He is content with the human possibility and content with its limitations. The way of human action of course does not satisfy him, but he does not believe there are any new virtues to be dis-

covered; not by becoming better, he says, but by ordering and distributing his native goodness can man live as befits him.

This, it seems to me, might well be called worldliness, this acceptance of man in the world without the sentimentality of cynicism and without the sentimentality of rationalism. Forster is that remarkably rare being, a naturalist whose naturalism is positive and passionate, not negative, passive and apologetic for man's nature. He accepts the many things the liberal imagination likes to put out of sight. He can accept, for example, not only the reality but the power of death—"Death destroys a man, but the idea of death saves him," he says, and the fine scene in *The Longest Journey* in which Rickie forces Agnes to "mind" the death of Gerald is a criticism not only of the British fear of emotion but also of liberalism's incompetence before tragedy. To Forster, as to Blake, naturalism suggests not the invalidity or the irrelevance of human emotions but, rather, their validity and strength: "Far more mysterious than the call of sex to sex is the tenderness that we throw into that call; far wider is the gulf between us and the farmyard than between the farmyard and the garbage that nourishes it."

He is so worldly, indeed, that he believes that ideas are for his service and not for his worship. In 1939 when war was certain and the talk ran so high and loose about Democracy that it was hard to know what was being talked about, Forster remarked with the easy simplicity of a man in his own house, "So two cheers for Democracy; one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is

no occasion to give three. Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that." He is so worldly that he has always felt that his nation belonged to him. He has always known that we cannot love anything bigger until we first love what Burke called "the little platoon" and so it has been easy for him to speak of his love for his country with whose faults he has never ceased to quarrel; and now he has no void to fill up with that acrid nationalism that literary men too often feel called upon to express in a time of crisis. He is one of the thinking people who were never led by thought to suppose they could be more than human and who, in bad times, will not become less.

2. SAWSTON AND CAMBRIDGE

EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER WAS BORN ON JANUARY 1, 1879. The place of his birth and the origin and position of his family have at least a symbolic bearing on his development. The place was London and although Forster has been anything but a lover of the city, his culture, with its accessibility to new ideas, is essentially metropolitan. His father, an architect, was on the paternal side of Anglo-Irish extraction and through his mother was descended from a family which for some generations had been notable members of the intellectual middle class—originally, indeed, of the Clapham Sect of wealthy Evangelicals. In his essay, "Battersea Rise," [1] Forster speaks of his great-grandfather's London house in whose library William Wilberforce, James Stephen, Zachary Macaulay, Thomas Babington and, sometimes, Hannah More met to

[1] In *Abinger Harvest*. Unless otherwise noted, all the essays to which I refer are included in this volume.

transact their religious and philanthropic business. Very sensitive to the evils of the slave trade which they were instrumental in abolishing, quite impervious to the evils of the manufacturing system, these were people who lived by public spirit and by ideas, however narrow.[1] Forster was to attack much of what they stood for, but he had been born in the intellectual citadel of a solid and powerful class and he drew strength and confidence from it. He undertook with peculiar ease at an early age the profession of the intellectual life, and in his latter age, in a time when intellectuals are not in good repute even with themselves, he continues to be unwearied of his profession and to justify it.

The young Forster was schooled at Tonbridge, which figures as the "Sawston" of his two first novels. In *Where Angels Fear To Tread* the town of Sawston stands as the stronghold of genteel, snobbish philistinism, the source of all illusion, and in *The Longest Journey* Sawston School plays a large and dreadful part. The latter novel is at least obliquely autobiographical[2] and testifies to the unhappiness of Forster's school days. He was a day-boy, a

[1] In an essay in *The New Statesman and Nation* (April 1, 1939), Forster writes at some length of Henry Thornton, his great-grandfather, and speaks of his two very successful books. One was a volume of family prayers, posthumously collected, which "between 1834 and 1854 . . . ran into as many as thirty-one editions." The other was a work on banking, *Essay On Paper Credit*, still regarded as sufficiently useful to be recently republished in an edition by Professor F. A. von Hayek (Allen and Unwin). Between them, the two books, as Forster implies, neatly comprehend the nature of Clapham Evangelicism.

[2] The history of Sawston School in Chapter IV follows very closely the actual history of Tonbridge School.

antithesis to Sawston-Tonbridge exactly because it resolved for him, as for Dickinson before him, all the false antitheses the public school had contrived.

> Body and spirit, reason and emotion, work and play, architecture and scenery, laughter and seriousness, life and art—these pairs which are elsewhere contrasted were there fused into one. People and books reinforced one another, intelligence joined hands with affection, speculation became a passion, and discussion was made profound by love.

Dickinson, seventeen years older than Forster, was a Fellow of King's when Forster entered that college in the autumn of 1897. The two were to become close friends and Dickinson's influence was eventually to be considerable, but their relationship began late and was never the formal one of student and teacher. Forster took a classical degree in 1900[1] and when, in his fourth year, he turned from classics to history, intending to do his essay work with Dickinson, he was cajoled by Oscar Browning into coming to him instead.

Browning, the legendary "O.B.," has been called (by E. F. Benson) "a genius flawed by abysmal fatuity." Hugely fat (he could not tie his own shoes), monumentally and comically snobbish, alternately brilliant and silly, he had a passion for educating young men, and Forster, while testifying to the erroneousness of Browning's information and to the intolerable way he conveyed it, testifies also to his talent for teaching. Forster himself

[1] The official details of Forster's Cambridge career include his being an Exhibitioner, a Prizeman, his taking a Second Class in the Classical Tripos, Part I, in 1900, and a Second Class in the Historical Tripos, Part II, in 1901. He took his M.A. in 1910; he was elected Fellow of his College in 1927.

came toward the end of Browning's glory and was not much influenced by him, but his existence in King's suggests something of the liveliness of the college. The decisive influence on Forster was his classics tutor, Nathaniel Wedd, a cynical, aggressive, Mephistophelean character who affected red ties and blasphemy. "It is to him rather than to Dickinson—indeed to him more than to anyone —that I owe such awakening as has befallen me," Forster says in his biography of Dickinson. "It is through him that I can best imagine the honesty and fervour of fifty years back."

From Wedd Forster acquired much of that feeling for the classics and for Greece which, colored by Wedd's political and social ideas, was to be his chief instrument against Sawston. His Greece is his own Greece, or Wedd's Greece, or Cambridge's Greece—every Greece is different from every other, each being shaped for a particular purpose. Forster's is the Greece of myth and mystery, of open skies and athleticism, of love and democracy. It is not the "true" Greece, but no Greece is, and at least it is not the Greece of moral precept, not the Greece that, as Mr. Jackson says in *The Longest Journey,* produced an enlightened bishop named Sophocles and other poets who were Broad Church clergymen.

It was under the Cambridge influence of Wedd and Dickinson that Forster made his first and lasting political choice. In 1903 Wedd and Dickinson, together with a group that included the historian G. M. Trevelyan, founded *The Independent Review.* "The main aim of the review was political," Forster writes in the Dickinson biography. "It was founded to combat the aggressive Im-

perialism and Protection campaign of Joe Chamberlain; and to advocate sanity in foreign affairs and a constructive policy at home. It was not so much a Liberal Review as an appeal to Liberalism from the left to be its better self—one of those appeals which have continued until the extinction of the Liberal party." An appeal to the Liberal party—to the middle class—from the left was to be the mode of Forster's political action from this time on.

And with the founding of *The Independent Review* Forster took his first step into the literary life with a political élan that has continued to be an element of all his writing. When he bought the first issue of the *Independent*, he "thought the new age had begun." He was soon contributing to its pages.

Forster was twenty-four when his writing began to appear and he brought out his first novel at twenty-six. The quality of maturity which he exhibited is no doubt an evidence of his own powers, but it is also an evidence of the success Cambridge had had in educating him. According to the American myth, less powerful now than formerly, which assumes a mortal antagonism between the creative and the intellectual life, the university is a particularly deadly influence upon the creative mind. Of the dominant figures of American literature in the last forty years, most have not been university men, or, if they have, they have usually been indifferent to or scornful of their university careers. But in England forty-odd years ago, a student at Cambridge was not likely to suppose that the university of Marlowe, Milton, Dryden and Coleridge was going to desiccate him by scholarship or make him into a don when he wanted to be a poet. The

security of this literary-academic connection must have meant much in Forster's development.

But perhaps even more important was the centrality to the national life which Cambridge shares with Oxford. No American university has a similar relation to its country. For one thing, the ancient English universities have a quasi-national foundation. Each elects a member to Parliament and both hold an institutional and traditional place in a nation which is more cohesive than ours. For England is not only smaller but more familial than America. Class no doubt makes great divisions and the English classes are more sharply marked off than our own, but the divisions of class are in some respects not so wide, and certainly not so various, as our own divisions of regions and sections. A young man who is a member of an institution so ancient and so central as Cambridge might well acquire the sense of a nation in whose life he can participate, about which he can generalize and to which he can address himself.

Forster's own sense of his nation is acute and it greatly influences his treatment of the theme of the undeveloped heart. "His concern is with the private life," says Virginia Woolf in her essay on Forster in *The Death Of The Moth* and in substantiation she quotes one among the many sentences Forster has written about the claims of the private life. But Mrs. Woolf's statement suggests that the interest in the private life is cultivated at the expense of the public life, whereas the very opposite is so. Forster is always concerned with the private life in its public connection and in "Notes on the English Character" his comments on the undeveloped heart conclude with the

statement that the undeveloped heart is largely responsible for England's political difficulties. The private life is self-justified, but the right private life is further justified by its effect upon public life: privacy for Forster is never a personal provincialism. Passionately as he is aware of the delicacies of the private life, he is as passionate in his investigation of the complex relation between public and private and he has brought every subtle criterion of personality to bear upon the gross difficulties of politics. He makes his private judgments under the aspect of the nation—or of all the nations. This constitutes his uniqueness and his intellectual heroism.

And if, as I have said, some large part of the credit for Forster's sense of connection between the public and the private must go to Cambridge, then also to Cambridge must go some part of the credit for his early-developed literary manner, which is largely the result of his sense of a familial relation with his country. Forster's style at its best—and that is in the novels—is the style of personal discourse, a middle style, easy and lucid. It presupposes a reader, and it is intended to set the reader at ease and to convince or persuade without bullying. At its best it is simple and direct, as in the passages I have quoted in this chapter. This is a style that flourishes more easily in England than in America. Nothing determines style like the writer's sense of his audience, and in America the audience is less easily "seen," the voice must travel farther and it becomes less intimate.

The flowering of social criticism in England in the 19th century must surely have resulted from the feeling that England, however deranged, could still be talked to. A

visited Greece and lived in Italy, returning to England in 1902. The Mediterranean world captured his young imagination as the Oriental world captured his mature years; his early essays and tales are suffused with the ancient sunlight, and his first published story, "Albergo Empedocle," [1] tells of a dull young Englishman who finds on a visit to Acragas that in a former incarnation he had been an inhabitant of the town.

In Italy it was the Renaissance that spoke to Forster, in Greece it was some vaguely ancient pagan time. He joined the two in his essay on Gemistus Pletho, the Renaissance Greek who loved the pagan gods and did his part in the revival of Greek learning in Italy.[2] Touching at Cnidus, the young Forster's thoughts are of Demeter, "who alone among gods has true immortality."

> The others continue, perchance, their existence, but are forgotten, because the time came when they could not be loved. But to her, all over the world, rise prayers of idolatry from suffering men as well as suffering women, for she has transcended sex. And Poets too, generation after generation, have sung in passionate incompetence of the hundred-flowered Narcissus and the rape of Persephone, and the wanderings of the Goddess, and her gift to us of corn and tears; so that generations of critics, obeying also their need, have censured the poets for reviving the effete mythology of Greece, and urged them to themes of living interest which shall touch the heart of today.

Harold, the hero of "Albergo Empedocle," says of his Greek existence, "I was better, I saw better, heard better,

[1] This story has not been reprinted. It appeared in *Temple Bar*, December, 1903.

[2] In *A Room With A View*, Forster will mock an Englishman who lives in Florence and who, in dilettante fashion, writes about Gemistus Pletho.

thought better." And he adds, "I loved very differently . . . Yes, I also loved better too." For Forster, the Greek world challenged modernity and it challenged Christianity, even in their best and tenderest sensibilities. The essay "Macolnia Shops" describes a little toilet box of ancient Grecian workmanship and speaks of the old morality, the old emotions, which were so simple and so sound.

> Another [figure in the relief] has hastened back to the *Argo* and he is pouring water down the throat of a sick friend. But he has drunk himself first. That man is as many centuries from self-denial as he is from self-consciousness. . . .
>
> Thus the motives go: the Praise of Water and the Praise of Friendship. The second is greater than the first; but it must needs come after it in place.

The ruffianism of the Renaissance was a different matter, but it too was a challenge to the modern world, and Forster writes of Cardan, the 16th century physician, astrologer and mathematician, not because he was admirable but because he was passionate in life and in thought and because "those ghosts who are still clothed with passion or thought are profitable companions." As Greece was to stand for truth, Italy was to stand for passion, and with these two ideals and these two symbols, Forster returned to the England whose heart was the public school.

3. THE SHORT STORIES: A STATEMENT OF THEMES

SURELY THE GREEK MYTHS MADE TOO DEEP AN IMPRESSION on Forster: of the twelve stories that have been reprinted in *The Celestial Omnibus* and *The Eternal Moment*,[1] only two, "The Road from Colonus," and "The Eternal Moment," are not in the genre of mythical fantasy and these two endure best. The others have, sometimes, wit or point or charm, one of them, "The Story of the Siren," has power, and all of them are "true," but none of them is wholly satisfying. The two non-fantastic stories, however, succeed entirely. And they are of particular interest because they contain in embryo the themes, symbols and ideas of Forster's five novels.

[1] *The Celestial Omnibus* (1911) contains "The Story of a Panic," "The Other Side of the Hedge," "The Celestial Omnibus," "Other Kingdom," "The Curate's Friend," and "The Road from Colonus;" *The Eternal Moment* (1928) contains "The Machine Stops," "The Point of It," "Mr. Andrews," "Co-Ordination," "The Story of the Siren," and "The Eternal Moment."

"The Road from Colonus" is about old age and death, but chiefly it is about modern life: it tells of a commonplace English Oedipus who does not die properly at his Colonus and who therefore loses the transfiguration he might have had. The elderly Mr. Lucas is a tourist in Greece, travelling by donkey with his daughter and a party. One day, riding ahead of his companions, he arrives at a tiny hamlet. In a scorching landscape the hamlet is a deeply shaded spot, sheltered by great plane-trees. The greatest tree of all overhangs the primitive inn; it is hollow and from its roots gushes a spring of living water. The symbolic juxtaposition of hot rocks and flowing water we have encountered in *The Waste Land;* the sheltering plane-tree might recall Handel's great song in *Xerxes* and the scene in Herodotus which Handel was dramatizing. It is a votive tree and its hollow has been hung with tiny images of arms, legs, hearts and brains, "tokens of some recovery of strength or wisdom or love." To Mr. Lucas, who in this moment has "discovered not only Greece, but England and all the world and life, there seemed nothing ludicrous in the desire to hang within the tree another votive offering—a little model of an entire man." For he has stepped into the tree, the living spring is at his feet, and as he leans back into the huge hollow trunk his peace is so great that he is almost unconscious. He is aroused by a shock —"the shock of an arrival perhaps, for when he opened his eyes, something unimagined, indefinable, had passed over all things, and made them intelligible and good."

There was meaning in the stoop of the old woman over her work, and in the quick motions of the little pig, and in her diminishing

globe of wool. A young man came singing over the streams on a mule, and there was beauty in his pose and sincerity in his greeting. The sun made no accidental patterns upon the spreading roots of the trees, and there was intention in the nodding clumps of asphodel, and in the music of the water.

Meaning, intention, no accidental pattern—and a little further on we are told of the *coherent* beauty Mr. Lucas saw: 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 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 the quiet contemplation of Nature or of the ancient, traditional life of humanity. They hoped to believe, and sometimes they could (Wordsworth more easily than Arnold) what Mr. Lucas now believed as he looked at the votive images in the tree, that "there was no such thing as the solitude of nature, for the sorrow and joys of humanity had pressed into the bosom of the tree." Arnold wrote of the man who has passed beyond the demands of the modern will:

> Tears
> Are in his eyes, and in his ears
> The murmur of a thousand years:
> Before him he sees Life unroll,
> A placid and continuous whole;

love Death—not morbidly, but because He explains. He shows me the emptiness of Money. Death and Money are the eternal foes. Not Death and Life."

Death and Money—death and a money-civilization from which the roots of life have been removed. Mr. Lucas lives, but in a way so base that we grieve he did not die. It could be objected, of course, that a petulant and degraded old age can come in any civilization and that the Greeks whom Forster so often invokes dreaded old age extravagantly. But this would not be to the point, which is that death and the value of the good life are related, that death is in league with love to support life: death, indeed, is what creates love. This is what Wordsworth is saying rather obscurely in his Immortality Ode: it is the thought of death that makes the meanest flower that blows bring thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. The meanest thing is valuable to a mortal man, as the proudest thing could not be to an immortal.

The nature of death in Forster's novels has often been commented on; it is invariably sudden and invariably told about in the most casual way. But this is not, as one critic suggests, merely a bad habit. It is deeply related to Forster's view of life and it is significant that not only in "The Road to Colonus" but in two other of the early stories Forster has already begun to deal with it. In "The Point of It," a grim fantasy, one young man's early death in a spurt of physical energy is glorified as against his friend's living out a mildly honored life of respectable compromise. And in "The Story of the Siren," perhaps the best of the fantastic stories, the siren is death, and the young man who sees her in the Caves of the Sea becomes

unhappy to the point of madness because he knows that every living thing must die; yet he marries a girl who has also seen the siren, and it is prophesied of their child that he will fetch up the siren into the air for all to see. "And thus, the prophecy goes on, the world will be saved." But the girl who was carrying this unborn savior was, at the instance of a priest, pushed into the sea and drowned.

Death punctuates all of Forster's novels and it is not until *A Passage To India* that he suggests that death is anything but benign, and even here his judgment is at least ambiguous. Mrs. Moore's vision of death in the Marabar Caves breaks and perhaps deteriorates her; nullity and the void are too much for her, but it is hinted that some good is to come of her despair. Roger Fry, in a letter quoted in Virginia Woolf's biography of him, wrote of *A Passage To India,* "I think it's a marvelous texture—really beautiful writing. But Oh Lord I wish he weren't a mystic, or that he would keep his mysticism out of his books." Fry was wrong about his old friend—Forster is not a mystic in any precise sense of the word. Yet there is an element in his work that does give the appearance of mysticism: it is his sense of life being confronted by death. A money-civilization chooses not to consider this confrontation; it is one of our most pertinacious refusals and we support it by calling "mystical" anyone who does consider it.

The theme of the inadequacy of modern civilization, implied in "The Road from Colonus," is dealt with explicitly in the second of Forster's non-fantastic stories "The Eternal Moment" is about a middle-aged novelist.

Miss Raby, who after many years is visiting the Alpine town where, in her youth, she had had what seemed a trivial love adventure. A young man, a porter and guide, had put his pack down on the road and declared his love. The Miss Raby of years before had acted the insulted lady and the young fellow had apologized; the incident had ended. But like other such incidents in Forster's plots, it had not ended at all. And Miss Raby has another connection with the town, for tourists had "discovered" it when she had described and named it in her successful novel and the town had become prosperous. With prosperity had come corruption and crassness. The immemorial peasant life had been transformed to take advantage of the tourist trade. The old warm simplicity had chilled into the swank and the aggression of class—of money-class and of snobbery, the eternal vice which so particularly marks the "modern" era of any civilization, the vice which Forster was to find even in India.

. . . Sexually, [Aziz] was a snob. This had puzzled and worried Fielding. Sensuality, as long as it is straightforward, did not repel him, but this derived sensuality—the sort that classes a mistress among motor cars if she is beautiful, and among eye-flies if she isn't—was alien to his own emotions, and he felt a barrier between himself and Aziz whenever it arose. It was, in a new form, the old, old trouble that eats the heart out of every civilization: snobbery, the desire for possessions, creditable appendages; and it is to escape this rather than the lusts of the flesh that saints retreat into the Himalayas.

Miss Raby, a passionate democrat, feels that it is through her that the little town has so sadly altered. Her horror of the new town runs parallel with her recol-

lection of the young porter's offer of love: her response to his declaration had sprung not only from an as yet undeveloped heart but also from her sense of class. She seeks out her former admirer. The athletic Italian porter has become the fat concierge of the most glittering of the new hotels. His gauche impulsiveness has given way to the diplomacy of the hotel lobby. When she recalls to him the vanished moment of their youth, he is at first frightened of blackmail, then he thinks her lewd. And she, desperate that a generous heart should have so dried and that a human town should have become an emptiness, makes of him the extraordinary request that he give her one of his children so that he may be reared free from the killing "stupidity" of the modern snob-world. He thinks her mad. And in this Miss Raby's traveling companion, up to that moment perhaps to be her husband, the intelligent and chaste Colonel Leyland, quite agrees with the vulgar hotel official. From the snob-world, the world of the undeveloped heart, of no-feeling or of only class-feeling, death is the only escape. And it is to old age and death that Miss Raby turns for comfort in her despair.

Here, then, in these early stories are the clearly stated themes which Forster will develop through his career as a novelist—the basic theme of the inadequate heart, the themes of the insufficient imagination, of death, money, snobbery and salvation. And not only are Forster's persisting themes announced in these early works but also the character types which we shall encounter in all his novels. Thus Miss Raby is the delicate ancestress of Forster's most notable heroines, women elderly, or

middle-aged, or moving toward middle age—Mrs. Wilcox of *Howards End* and Margaret Schlegel of the same novel, Rickie's dead mother in *The Longest Journey*, Mrs. Moore of *A Passage To India*. She is the woman wise but powerless, in some way triumphant, in some way defeated, often confused yet gifted with an obscure certainty, as if remembering some ancient sibylline wisdom that the world no longer knows. Although three of the heroines are mothers of sons, their connections with their sons are tenuous. Mrs. Wilcox is far removed from her Paul and Charles, who are quite of another spirit; so is Mrs. Moore from her Ronny. Mrs. Wilcox finds her heir in Margaret Schlegel, Mrs. Moore finds a truer son than Ronny in Dr. Aziz.

The implication seems to be that the sons have betrayed their mothers. Yet actually the mothers have remarkably little impulse toward their sons. Mrs. Wilcox seems never to have had a vital connection with Charles and Paul, which perhaps accounts for the masculine stupidity of the two men; Mrs. Moore is so easily alienated from Ronny and her tie with him so quickly broken that she seems never to have had an animal relation with him at all; Rickie Elliot's mother, although very tender, was late in coming to love her son and never seems wholly attached to him. Margaret Schlegel, Mrs. Wilcox's "heir," declares that she does not love or want children. In the counter-Wellsian fantasy of the future life, "The Machine Stops," it is the son who sins against the mechanical dispensation by discovering the forbidden filial affection; his mother does not match it with maternal feeling. This remote quality in Forster's elder hero-

physical life; they have the gift of love and as old Mr. Emerson says in *A Room With A View,* "love is of the body—not the body, but of the body."

The Pans of Forster's fantastic stories state, in various ways, this eternal lesson. Modern life—it is to be D. H. Lawrence's theme—can kill the masculine power and tenderness; Pan inhabits the woods and fields which men have forsaken. That is why Gino must be a provincial Italian and Stephen a rustic, just as Stephen's dead father had been a farmer who saved with love a loving and unhappy woman. George Emerson is of the city and he is a prey to philosophical despair, but he is freed by nakedness and sunlight. Inhabiting the woods and fields, Pan can bring about the liberation of an adolescent boy ("The Story of a Panic") or the salvation of a formerly facetious and insincere clergyman ("The Curate's Friend").

Colonel Leyland is the faint prototype of the man who betrays the female spirit. He combines a certain enlightened official insensitivity with an old-maidish fussiness. The old-maidishness will turn up in Philip Herriton and, in *A Room With A View,* in Cecil Vyse. The insensitivity is to appear in Herbert Pembroke and Gerald Dawes of *The Longest Journey,* in the Wilcox men of *Howards End* and in Ronny of *A Passage To India.*

These men and women, some of them shaped for greatness, some of them born for quiet, mediocre lives, are constantly being led through trifles to a confrontation with the largest possible matters. I have mentioned the part which death plays in the novels; there is also the portentous theme which I. A. Richards speaks of as the "sur-

vival theme"—"a special preoccupation, almost an obsession, with the continuance of life." Appearing first, in "The Eternal Moment," in the strange request Miss Raby makes of the concierge, that he give her one of his children to bring up, it dominates *Where Angels Fear To Tread,* a novel in which the great struggle is for the ownership of a baby, and in which parenthood is the strongest passion; or it appears in *The Longest Journey,* in the use made of Stephen Wonham's little girl and in the repeated play with the themes of heredity; or again in *Howards End,* with the son of Leonard Bast and Helen Schlegel, who is to inherit the disputed house. Even in *A Passage To India* the children of Mrs. Moore's second marriage are introduced to carry on, in some way, their mother's spirit.

It would appear that the theme of survival supplements the theme of death, and serves to heighten in Forster's work the effect of what Roger Fry called "mysticism." But if mysticism is not the word, the right word is hard to find. We might say of Forster's ideas that they are marked by a natural and naturalistic piety. This is a difficult emotion to deal with; there is always the danger of a lapse into religiosity: an 18th century deistic sentimentality lies in wait for the writer who expresses large emotions about life and death, even if he is determined to be wholly naturalistic. With orthodox religion as an expression of natural piety Forster has considerable sympathy and in *The Longest Journey* and *A Room With A View* he deals tenderly with it. Yet he always regards with hostility the repressive morality of orthodoxy and his bitterness against the clergy is unremitting. In the

short stories, the clergy is represented as stupid or trifling ("The Story of a Panic," "The Curate's Friend") or as malign ("The Story of the Siren"); later, the Harriet Herriton of *Where Angels Fear To Tread,* the Mr. Eager and the Mr. Beebe of *A Room With A View,* the imperialistic parsons at Simpson's in *Howards End,* the pointless missionaries of *A Passage To India* will all continue to express Forster's antipathy to organized faith.

As far back as 1920, Katherine Mansfield, in a review of "The Story of the Siren," [1] spoke in protest against the omnipresence of clergymen, in company with spinsters, in Forster's writing. "Mr. Forster's novels are alive with aunts and black with chaplains," she wrote, and went on to wonder "why there must always be, on every adventure, an aunt and a warbling chaplain. Why must they always be there in the boat, bright, merciless, clad from head to foot in the armour of efficiency?" We may reply that as often as truth, fertility and sensuality are to have their opposites, aunts and chaplains must, in the logic of Forster's imagination, appear on the scene.

Yet all the characters of Forster's fiction are in the shadow of religion, the complex and "advanced" people as well as the simple. Whatever their mature beliefs, they will all have been brought up in an atmosphere suffused with religious feeling—after all, they were born in the 19th century, in a time when, in *Robert Elsmere,* a young man's religious difficulties and his liberalistic solution of

[1] The story appeared in a pamphlet of the Hogarth Press. Katherine Mansfield's review appeared (over her initials) in *The Athenaeum* of August 13.

them could charm millions of readers. It is appropriate, too, that these people who are still in the late 19th century tradition of religion should find their largest emotions not in religion itself but in art, for, in the 19th century, art was raised nearly to the level of religion and endowed with a quasi-religious function.

And this is an insight for which Forster is perhaps unique among modern novelists—his understanding of the part played by art in the life of the middle classes. On the one hand, art is salvation and Forster appeals again and again to the freedom of imagination and to the disinterestedness of the true lover of art. But on the other hand, if art approaches religion, then its cultivation can approach the religious vices of hypocrisy, respectability and mere piousness, and Forster is the anatomist of the British tourist, with his Baedeker and his Alinari prints, and of the British intellectual with his Pater, his Symonds, and his Symons. He understands that art can be the instrument of an enormous snobbery and he enjoys the comedy of this fact; he knows, as we all know when we enter the perfectly decorated room, that taste can be an aggressive weapon.

And so, defender of the arts as he is, Forster cultivates a deep suspicion of good taste and is even inclined to find in tastelessness a kind of benevolence and vitality. The first defense of tastelessness, or even of bad taste, occurs in "The Eternal Moment" when Forster remarks that a Carlo Dolce or a Carracci, "a debased style—so the superior person and the textbooks say," is sometimes preferable to a Fra Angelico. He loves the baroque, even

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