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Introduction: The Phenomenology of Domestic Life

The domestic world acts not only as the setting for much of the fiction of E.M. Forster, but is responsible as well for a good deal of the novels' imaginative content. Domesticity as a literary medium builds upon an experimental approach to the modes of myth, romance, epic, low mimetic, and irony¹ that together make up the complete bundle of Forsterian materials. Moreover, Forster's contribution to the literature of domestic modernism must be assessed not only in terms of the significance of his humanist realism² or his role as romancer³--the two critical perspectives that have generated the most discussion--but also from the point of view which emphasizes the importance to his works of myth and epic.⁴ And while fantasy has been assumed commonly to be part and parcel of Forster's interest in romance, it has not been considered usually as an integral aspect of his domestic vision.

¹ These categories of literary modes come from Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (1957; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 33-35.

² Among those critics who stress Forster's humanist realism are Frederick Crews, Frederick McDowell, and Lionel Trilling.

³ The critic who has done most to advance the idea of Forster as a writer of romance is George H. Thomson, The Fiction of E.M. Forster (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967).

⁴ My own discussion of voice and myth in Howards End implicitly assumes that the work's structural principle is clearly presented in terms of the epic journey.

Domesticity insists on an egalitarianism which is both aesthetic and moral. Narrowness of perspective and intensity of focus allow for an apprehension of the universe that is detailed and highly particular. Significance is everywhere. Indeed, the objects and rituals of domestic life provide the substance of what Forster called his "living material." A comment of his, with regard to his affection for The Longest Journey, gives one some idea of just how important such material is. Furbank says:

It was the one book of his, he felt, that had given more back to the world than it had taken from it. "Stephen Wonham—that theoretic figure—" he said later, with much insight, "is in a sense so dead because he is created from without, in a sense so alive because the material out of which he was constructed is living."⁵

The degree to which the material of Forster's fiction is developed--is autonomous--suggests a starting point for the formulation of the division between the pre-domestic works and the more mature accomplishments.

Although his domestic imagination does not really begin to develop its own mythology until The Longest Journey, an awareness of the world full of reciprocity between various kinds of living materials is evident from Forster's earliest years. . . Surely hints of domestic phenomenology can be found in the titles of his first attempts at story telling--titles revealing a certain childish excitement in the power of creation:

"Excited Maids under the Clothes line"; "Dancing Bell"; "Chattering Haasocks"; "Scuffles in the Wardrobe"; "The Earring in the Keyhole."⁶

⁵ P.N. Furbank, E.M. Forster: A Life (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, 1978), I, 149.

⁶ E.M. Forster, Marianne Thornton (London: Edward Arnold, 1956), p. 271.

In every case, it is the familiar paraphernalia of daily life which contains forces suggestive of some energetic mysteriousness.

Forster's domestic fiction characterizes itself by qualities which are closely related: intimacy, fantasy, and the sense of containment. Intimacy is fundamental to the formation of the "common meeting-ground" that is so important to Forster's psychological landscape. Its components are sexual⁷, emotional, possibly political and certainly moral. Such intimacy exists not only within the world of the novel itself but achieves as well an even wider life in the relations established between the authorial presence and the reader. However, as reader and author grow more intimate, it is never at the expense of the character.

Intimacy is inseparable from trust and Forster does not betray the people in his fiction. As he makes clear in Aspects of the Novel, betrayal of this sort is not only literary but moral.

. . . may the writer take the reader into his confidence about his characters? Answer has already been indicated: Better not. It is dangerous, it generally leads to a drop in the temperature, to intellectual and emotional laxity, and worse still to facetiousness, and to a friendly invitation to see how the figures hook up behind. . . . Intimacy is gained but at the expense of illusion and nobility.⁸

From the beginning, Forster's fiction has insisted that the intimate and the mysterious can exist simultaneously. Moments of shared experience always reveal but in doing so they hint at what is not known and what cannot be known. Characteristically, the mystery of Forster's

⁷ See Judith Scherer Herz, "The Double Nature of Forster's Fiction: A Room With a View and The Longest Journey," English Literature in Transition, 21, No. 4 (1978), p. 260.

⁸ E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), p. 56.

"eternal moments" often springs from actions overtly domestic: for example, the sharing of milk. The motif appears twice in his novels and is mentioned again in the biography of his great-aunt.

"Latte! latte!" cried Perfetta, hilariously ascending the stairs. . . .

"That milk," said Caroline, "need not be wasted. Take it, Signor Carella, and persuade Mr. Herriton to drink."

Gino obeyed her, and carried the child's milk to Philip. And Philip obeyed also and drank.

"Little boy, what do you want?"

"Please, I am the milk."¹⁰

The mysteriousness of the scene from Where Angels Fear to Tread is essentially conventional in the sense that its archetype—the sacramental act of communion—establishes, from outside the novel as it were, the reconciliation of the estranged men. The intimacy of the passage from Howards End, on the other hand, works in a much different way. The moments which re-connect the separated sisters and lead to a renewed habitation of the house are of such intensity that they seem to generate within themselves the appearance of the boy with the milk. Indeed, the milk does not even have to be drunk in order that it may nourish and sustain; it is enough that it simply comes into existence. And the way in which it manifests its existence is characteristic of the domestic Forster. Boy and milk are metonymically inseparable.

⁹ E.M. Forster, Where Angels Fear to Tread, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), pp. 138-39.

¹⁰ E.M. Forster, Howards End, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), p. 296.

That sacramental milk appears again in Marianne Thornton. Forster mentions a letter written by his great-aunt to a member of the family from whom she had been estranged.

A week before she died she wrote an extraordinary letter to Emily Thornton. She asked for some milk. No biographer could have foretold such a request, no novelist before Proust could have invented it. After thirty-five years of alienation she asked for some milk. . . .

But it is more probable still that Marianne was writing not to a person but to a place. The milk was a sacrament.

One has no way of knowing whether Forster's awareness of this piece of family history acted as the impetus for the scenes in Where Angels Fear to Tread and Howards End. However, if he did not invent the act, he certainly invented its significance.

At the heart of Forster's work lies something that can be called the fusion of the two forces that, he says, inhabit the novel: "human beings and a bundle of various things not human beings."¹² That bundle of things is how he describes the powers of fantasy and prophecy, the "bar of light" that "cuts across" time, people, and logic, "that is intimately connected with them at one place and patiently illumines all their problems, and at another place shoots over or through them as if they did not exist."¹³ Such power is crucial to Forster's fiction and it manifests itself in, among other things, his sense of atmosphere and place and in the importance he attaches to the continuity of all life. His greatest fictional dilemma lies in his attempts to reconcile the

11 Marianne Thornton, p. 287.

12 Aspects, p. 73.

13 Aspects, p. 74.

condition of being cut off, estranged, alienated from one's physical and spiritual home, with his conviction that behind this world lies another whose wholeness, harmony and order is inviolate.

The particularity of Forster's language is fantastic in the ways in which it vivifies¹⁴ its material in order to create a personal and highly domestic mythology. Action becomes continuous--indeed, this is the major difference between the use of fantasy in the early fiction and its manifestation in the later novels. In the earlier works, fantasy is most often associated with landscape; in the later ones it becomes an integral aspect of human behavior. The scenes with the milk are a case in point. In Where Angels Fear to Tread, milk makes an appearance at a symbolically appropriate moment, is drunk, and then disappears from the action. Howards End is more sophisticated in its approach. The appearance of the boy with the milk is fantastic; the milk--and the human love with which it is associated--has a past, present and future. Its sacramental quality is continuous. Having been called into existence, its life is perpetual. Moreover, it exists outside the context from which it is evoked.

The same process of fantasy is at work in Marianne Thornton--in many ways the most domestic of Forster's works--when he mentions how his rather stern great-uncle amused the children by sitting on a burning newspaper.

The vision of that substantial extinguisher descending
cheers me, the sun comes into the library again, the trees
wave freshly on the lawn, tiny cousins collide and
jump . . . ¹⁵

¹⁴ I am thinking of Forster's comment about the failure of English mythology to "vivify one fraction of a summer field, or give names to half a dozen stars." Howards End, p. 264.

¹⁵ Marianne Thornton, p. 150.

Continuity, of course, is an essential concern of comedy and the humour of Henry Thornton's behavior is inseparable from the continuous actions that Forster allows it to invoke: sun shining, trees waving, cousins (tiny) colliding. Indeed, the more one finds of domestic fantasy in Forster's novels, the greater the likelihood that their themes will be essentially comic.¹⁶

However, as Forster's material world becomes more complex, there is a corresponding increase in its moral complexity. Ethical alignments are not as straightforward as they are in the earlier works. Forster always spends more time on his "good" characters than he does on his "bad" ones, but in The Longest Journey, Howards End, and A Passage to India good characters sometimes engage in wrong actions and tragedy, if not always realized, is always possible. In the later novels, one encounters an ever-increasing atmosphere of moral carelessness—not evil, not deliberate wrong-doing, but rather a supreme indifference to the problems of human connection.

An antidote to the dilemma of carelessness is provided by Forster's emphasis on containment, on creating a world where all things are able to be accounted for in a way that makes moral misplacement more and more difficult. However, the containment associated with domestic structures is only effective if there are living forces—moral, spiritual, sexual—against which it pushes continuously.

In The Longest Journey, literal language struggles with the metaphorical; the mythic figures of the past confront the heroes of the present;

¹⁶ With The Longest Journey, Forster begins to move more and more in the direction of domestic comedy. Maurice is the one exception. It is fundamentally a work of romance not comedy and fantasy exists almost wholly as an aspect of landscape.

and at times there is considerable tension between the controlling narrative voice and the behavior of a character such as Rickie Elliot. But, the conflict between the universals of classical myth and a characteristically detailed sense of English domesticity raises the work to the level of magic. That an incompetent hero can become a tragic one somehow reinforces one's need to believe in the largeness of life. Howards End pits the grandness of archetype and myth against the small world of domestic life that lends so much significance to the house itself. The desire for disrupting experience contends with an equally strong desire for peace. The fall into knowledge of the world juxtaposes itself with the corresponding inward movement towards self-understanding. In the final novel, A Passage to India, the containing forces are found in human acts of invitation and entertainment. Every social and domestic ritual is a microcosm of a larger universe. Comedy occurs when the universal and the particular pass through their common membrane into the sphere inhabited by each other, but it is a comedy frequently close to despair. In this case, Forster is aware ironically that the forces are unequal. Universal formlessness can penetrate at will the carefully ordered and catalogued domestic realm. Attempts by the domestic to push against the universal are ultimately as ineffectual as a pin attempting to pierce the hide of an elephant. A more manageable, more controllable, kind of struggle produces the highly comic tension that results from the juxtapositioning of the domestic enclosure, that is associated with the concept of home, with the expansiveness that is part of the gesture of invitation.

In the earlier novels, the tension of opposing forces is somewhat dissipated. Forster seems not so interested in containing his material,

quite possibly because he still mistrusts the conventionally domestic and sees it as enervating. Consequently, Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room With a View tend to go outside the domestic experience for confirmation of their ethical and symbolic meanings. Intimacy tends to be precluded; fantasy usually exists as a kind of landscape, and containment, if it exists at all, expresses itself not in terms of contending forces within the novel, but as a series of moments which are to a certain extent isolated from the rest of the narrative action.

Where Angels Fear to Tread provides a particularly interesting example of what I mean by unrealized containment. Its significant moments come to life, not so much because of their relations with the rest of the text, but because a connection is made with the world of symbol and archetype which lies outside the work itself and which, for the most part, remains outside. Angels is a highly pictorial novel, frequently presented in the language of spectacle. Its most striking quality is the way in which significant scenes are presented as a series of tableaux vivants. There is, however, a crucial distinction to be made between the tableau vivant and Forster's later creation of a phenomenological domesticity. Look at the picture Philip Herriton sees when he comes upon Gino and Caroline Bathing the baby:

She sacrificed her own clean handkerchief. He put a chair for her on the loggia, which faced westward, and was still pleasant and cool. There she sat, with twenty miles of view behind her, and he placed the dripping baby on her knee. It shone now with health and beauty: it seemed to reflect light, like a copper vessel. Just such a baby Bellini sets languid on his mother's lap, or Signorelli flings wriggling on the pavements of marble, or Lorenzo di Credi, more reverent but less divine, lays carefully among flowers, with his head upon a wisp of golden straw. For a time Gino contemplated them standing. Then, to get a better view, he knelt by the side of the chair, with his hands clasped before him.

So they were when Philip entered, and was, to all intents and purposes, the Virgin and Child, with Donor.¹⁷

Although this is seemingly a domestic moment, its pictorial quality, its attitudes—certainly emphasized by the depiction of perspective and the painterly analogues supplied by the voice of the authorial presence—suggest not fiction but drama.¹⁸ The life in the scene has the potential to come from within but it stops as soon as it is realized.

However, in many ways, Where Angels Fear to Tread comes closer to the experience of domestic intimacy than does A Room With a View. One's expectation that the later novel's emphasis on family relationships is indicative of a considerable degree of domesticity proves not to be the case. Scenes of revelation are set outside domestic enclosures and while a certain intimacy is achieved with the appearance of an occasionally fantastic landscape, it is one that acts at fictional cross purposes to the major theme: marriage and the establishment of domestic life.

The bathing scene in chapter twelve offers a case in point. The sexual energy that, for the purposes of the story, should have existed between Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson never really emerges and becomes instead something shared among the men who bathe in the pond.¹⁹

17 Where Angels Fear to Tread, p. 112.

18 Aspects, p. 16. Forster says: ". . . in music fiction is likely to find its nearest parallel. The position of the drama is different. The drama may look towards the pictorial arts . . . for it is not so deeply committed to the claims of human beings. . . ." In fact, Where Angels Fear to Tread, as a whole, suggests an operatic fusion of drama and music.

19 See Herz's discussion of A Room With a View, esp. p. 258.

Domesticity cannot yet support such forces of attraction. No real intimacy of any kind is ever established between Lucy and George-- although he is intended obviously as a character with more potential for the intimate than Cecil Vyse. There is the domestic relationship of the work, yet the domestic world offers little comment. Tables and chairs do not breathe their approbation.

Indeed, there is little in A Room With a View that approaches the domestic intensity that one finds in the later novels. I am thinking, for example, of the scene in the first chapter of The Longest Journey when Agnes Pembroke's survey of Rickie's room at Cambridge is, as it were, neutralized by the prevailing forces of fantasy. Such forces make one believe that a photograph of Mrs. Elliot can become something alive, capable of presenting us with the woman herself standing on the mantelpiece. Howards End, too, is full of such moments. The reconciliation of Margaret and Helen animates the house and its contents to the extent that when Helen says of the dining-room chairs that "their dear little backs are quite warm" (chapter 37), one is quite ready to accept their living presence. The mystery of apprehended domesticity infuses A Passage to India and is made all the more effective by being conveyed through scenes that are designed to be highly comic: for example, Professor Godbole is invited to Fielding's (chapter 7) and owing to the demands of religious rituals is both aloof and yet curiously intimate, sitting apart from the others, eating, eating and eating his tea. The tea-party suggests both a festive mood, a comic gluttony that arises from an inclusiveness of spirit and a feeling that is almost ominous in its emphasis on some unknown and insatiable force lurking inside the most seemingly innocuous of social gatherings.

But the forces of domesticity are benevolent as well as malign. Most of all, they are permanent. Fantasy landscapes are transitory. Domestic structures, on the other hand, revolve around actions that are endlessly renewable. In The Longest Journey, Howards End, and A Passage to India, Forster closes off his fictional world in order to ensure that nothing escapes his, and the reader's, scrutiny. However, what is under examination is not static. The common ground shared by these novels is an intense fictional atmosphere through which an on-going process of reconciliation takes place. It is a process that equates formal conditions with the requirements of conscience and that insists ultimately on the novel's humanity.

The intensely, stiflingly human quality of the novel is not to be avoided; the novel is sogged with humanity; there is no escaping the uplift or the downpour, nor can they be kept out of criticism. We may hate humanity, but if it is exorcised or even purified the novel wilts, little is left but a bunch of words.²⁰

Towards the Realization of a Domestic Mythology:

The Longest Journey

The Longest Journey is Forster's first serious attempt at the working out of an original, domestic mythology. Certainly, its placement in his novelistic career is important. For the first time the domestic world begins to be given the significance of myth and that significance relies heavily on Forster's reshaping of some of the conventions of traditional literary forms.

An idea can be gained of some of the difficulties involved in the manipulation of conventional forms if one considers how best to define the work. A definition would have to include these elements: a tragicomic novel/romance, relying on a pastoral/domestic setting, incorporating actions of both fantasy and myth, and using a language which is lyrical and ironic in tone. The problems inherent in such a definition point to the problems in assessing the work itself. However, what is special about The Longest Journey is the way in which its fictional weaknesses are also components of its greatest strengths. The novel offers a particularly interesting point of departure to an understanding of Forster's works as a whole because of, not in spite of, its shifts in mode. Ultimately all of these modes, traditional though they may seem, reveal themselves as conveyors of a new kind of fiction: one which transforms the attributes of domestic life into a mythology.

In this work, Forster insists that the traditional and the innovative exist simultaneously. One result of this juxtapositioning

is that one's overall impression is something of a jumble. The distance between the reader and the events before him remains more or less the same, although the characters themselves may experience an enlargement or contraction of perspective; there is certainly not the dramatic alteration of focus that is present in A Passage to India. What this consistency does, however, is provide the work with a good deal of energy and tension, as if the unruly forces behind Forster's fictional materials were allowed to get slightly out of hand.

Part of the confusion arises from the fact that this is the work of an author whose treatment of his fiction is still relatively immature. Again a comparison suggests itself between that hint of waywardness in The Longest Journey and the authorial control that is evident in Howards End and, especially, A Passage to India. But there is more to be considered than just an immaturity of conception--and it should be emphasized that, despite technical and conceptual limitations, immaturity can have its own charm.

It is probable that one of the reasons for the novel's sameness of perspective is that there is simply no room for variation. What I mean is that a good deal of the space between the work and the reader is taken up by two narratives, not one. The first is composed of the traditional forms of pastoral, fantasy, myth and lyric, moving through what seems almost to be a dream world: always there but not always in focus. The inevitability that surrounds this sleepwalking procession of literary forms is strongly suggestive of the absolute world of romance. The second sort of narrative, and the one with which this chapter is most concerned, is much more modern in tone, more ironic, more comic, in short more like the usual conception one has of Forster.

It lowers the bucket,¹ to use one of Forster's terms for the working of the creative mind, into the stream of traditional literature and brings that material up to the level of the modern imagination. In The Longest Journey, these two narrative streams exist side by side, each to a certain extent reinforcing the other. I say "to a certain extent" because although their existence is simultaneous and symbiotic, there is also some area of conflict. Such conflict is a major part of Forster's determination to create his own, domestic, mythology and while he can acknowledge overtly his use of the conventions of the past, his originality insists that those conventions be subverted. Hence, tragedy and comedy trip each other up; the romance of the absolute is subject constantly to the novel's subject: reality; the pastoral setting is encroached upon by domestic structures; and unrestrained lyricism undergoes the firmly ironic control provided by the narrative voice. It is an aspect of Forster's genius that this rather schoolboyish undermining of the traditional never weakens the seriousness and dignity of those characters who are most closely associated with the greatness of the past.

The reshaping of literary mode that is such a major part of The Longest Journey's form has everything to do with its theme: the rival claims of objective and subjective modes of perception; the debate between the contending truths of realism and idealism; the question of whether things exist when they are not being looked at. Forster himself

¹ The image of lowering a bucket into the subconscious mind is found in "Anonymity: An Enquiry," and in "The Raison D'Être of Criticism." Both essays are in E.M. Forster, Two Cheers for Democracy, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1972).

would say with certainty that objective realism ensures the independent life of all things and Rosenbaum argues convincingly that the novel's debate follows in its essentials the ideas put forth by G.E. Moore in his paper, "The Refutation of Idealism," which had appeared in Mind, in October 1903.²

However, the problem concerning the existence of objects is not only an epistemological one. In Forster's hands, it carries reverberations that are, as we shall see, both ethical and linguistic. As Rosenbaum says: "In The Longest Journey Forster imaginatively converts an epistemological point from the essay into a moral one."³

One of the two central lessons taught in Forster's Bildungsroman has to do with the consequences of not believing in the objective existence of other people and other societies, of nature, and of time. The other lesson is concerned with love, as we shall see, where again Idealism needs refuting. At one time or another in The Longest Journey all the important characters, except possibly for Stephen Wonham, act like epistemological Idealists in denying the objective existence of people whom, for one reason or another, they do not wish to be aware of. The reasons are metaphysical, moral, psychological, social or sexual.⁴

Domestic myth-making is egalitarian in its insistence that all living things—objects as well as people—are equal. It refutes the moral carelessness that idealistically denies the existence of others and insists that the egocentric demands associated with ideal modes of perception be ignored. Indeed, what makes the novel's domesticity so

² S.P. Rosenbaum, "The Longest Journey: E.M. Forster's Refutation of Idealism," E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration, ed. John Bear and G.K. Das (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 32-54.

³ Rosenbaum, p. 38.

⁴ Rosenbaum, p. 39.

interesting is that its larger moments of revelation--such as Rickie's awareness that he has a brother and that his brother is the son of their mother--become subordinate to the accumulation of small but intense moments of discovery when the inanimate becomes alive and charged with moral significance.

There are a number of ways in which Forster realizes his material. One of these is his handling of fantasy, albeit fantasy is not a mode which is thought of traditionally as "real." Nevertheless, the fantastic world contains its own kind of realist epistemology and demands an ethical correlative. Partly defined as "a bundle of things not human beings,"⁵ fantasy also comments on the human experience in a manner which is particularly Forsterian. It paradoxically insists upon literal expression, upon what Herz calls the "primacy of the word. The idea, the statement, grows out of the implications of the word, it follows the logic of the metaphor."⁶ Indeed, fantasy is very much connected to the idea of growing out. Furbank says something similar: Forster has a "habit or principle of always 'realising' his metaphors and allowing them to take him where they should--another version of respect for what is real."⁷

⁵ E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), p. 73.

⁶ Judith Scherer Herz, "Listening to Language," in a collection of essays on A Passage to India, ed. John Beer, anticipated publication, London, 1981. Read in typescript.

⁷ P.N. Furbank, "The Philosophy of E.M. Forster," forthcoming in a collection of essays on EMF, edited by Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin, to be published by Macmillan (London), 1980.

Another aspect of Forster's realization of the story has to do with his treatment of classical myth. In this case, what is realized is the inanimate past. However, Forster is well aware of the implicit tension between realism and the idealism that characteristically attaches itself to any evocation of the traditional models of literary history. The resolution of that tension is one that debunks ideal antecedents by subjecting them to the scrutiny of the author's steadily ironic gaze. By making the ideal into something real, Forster ensures that the ethical attributes of the mythological past can also find life in a modern world.

A third, most important technique by which the work is realized lies in the relations between the narrative voice and the characters. The authorial presence frequently conducts a kind of dialogue, or duet, with a character in a way which emphasizes that their importance is equal. I am not suggesting that the Forsterian persona is not more mature, more experienced than a character such as Rickie Elliot; it is. What is being stressed is that a certain maturity of perspective (a relative maturity one might say) does not convey an innate moral, aesthetic, or emotional superiority. Rather the narrative voice shares its experience, and often its language, with the character in question, thus supplying both a literary solution to an ethical dilemma and a moral answer to a problem of fictional technique.

The setting for the realization of fantasy, myth, and the relations between narrative voice and character is largely pastoral and to a certain extent relies upon the traditional forms of the Theocritean idyll, with shepherds and sheep watched over by a Pan both beneficent

and malign.⁸ However, there is an English and domestic side to this rural vision and it is one that ceases to borrow from classical sources and instead takes characteristics from a more recent past. When Rickie Elliot, anti-imperialist that he is, finds it hard to "imagine a place larger than England,"⁹ one assumes that this is not only a political and ethical judgement, but is as well both epistemological and imaginative. A statement of ~~the~~ nature suggests a connection, made clear in both The Longest Journey and Howards End,¹⁰ between Forster's conception of England as a place, a setting, and John of Gaunt's hymn to the glories of her past:

This royal throne of kings, this scept'ed isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in a silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;¹¹

The pastoral forms of "this other Eden" are defined and embellished by figures of speech strongly suggestive of domesticity. As Forster works his way towards his culmination of the domestic vision in A Passage

⁸ Patricia Merivale, Pan the Goat God: His Myth in Modern Times (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), especially pp. 180-91.

⁹ E.M. Forster, The Longest Journey, World's Classics 578 (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 148.

¹⁰ The Longest Journey, p. 183; Howards End, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), p. 172. The reference in Howards End is somewhat modified to "a jewel in a silver sea."

¹¹ Richard II, II, 1, ll. 40-49.

to India, with its exploration of seemingly endless fictional possibilities that arise when the domestic life is taken outside and lived publicly, one can see that the origins of that vision lie in his early attempt to bring the pastoral--with its emphasis on the spirit of place--into some sense of containment.

The first critical question that poses itself with regard to the development of fantasy has to do with how a form which realizes itself by growing out can exist simultaneously with the containment which is so much a part of Forster's fictional structure. He provides one approach to the dilemma by locating fantastic action, which he frequently associates with the pastoral, in a setting undisputably domestic. And in doing so the sense of loss, characteristically a part of the pastoral mode,¹² becomes compensated to a certain extent by the spirit of life inherent in domesticity. An example is found in the cataloguing of the contents of Rickie's room at Cambridge. It should be emphasized that, although the scene begins and ends with Agnes Pembroke's survey of the room, the special quality of the literal view belongs to the narrative voice.

. . . She began to pace about Rickie's room, for she hated to keep quiet. There was nothing much to see in it. The pictures were not attractive, nor did they attract her--school groups, Watts' "Sir Percival," a dog running after a rabbit, a man running after a maid, a cheap brown Madonna in a cheap green frame--in short a collection where one mediocrity was generally cancelled by another. Over the door there hung a long photograph of a city with waterways,

¹² Raymond Williams, for example, discusses the pastoral in terms of its evocation of feelings of loss, dispossession, and displacement. More specifically, he says (of Virgil's Eclogue IX): ". . . the pastoral singing is directly related to the hopes and fears of the small farmers under threat of confiscation of their land. . . ." The Country and The City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 16.

which Agnes, who had never been to Venice, took to be Venice, but which people who had been to Stockholm knew to be Stockholm. Rickie's mother, looking rather sweet, was standing on the mantelpiece. Some more pictures had just arrived from the framers and were leaning with their faces against the wall, but she did not bother to turn them round. On the table were dirty teacups, a flat chocolate cake, and Omar Khayyam with an Oswego biscuit between his pages. Also a vase filled with crimson leaves of Autumn. This made her smile. (p. 8)

One's first impression of the passage is of something not at all fantastic. Indeed, the piling up of domestic detail, beginning with the sentence "the pictures were not attractive . . .", suggests initially a series of almost allegorical emblems for the tale to follow,¹³ particularly in its emphasis on the theme of pursuit and escape. The reference to the waterways of Stockholm foreshadows the discovery with regard to Rickie's family history that will follow.

At this point something unexpected happens: "Rickie's mother, looking rather sweet, was standing on the mantelpiece." This is the true spirit of fantasy, the moment which, in Forster's words, "merges the kingdoms of magic and common sense by using words that apply to both."¹⁴ And he continues, "to the end of time good literature will be made round this notion of a wish." If one comes to accept the literal realization of a photograph of Mrs. Elliot, a way of approaching The Longest Journey is gained, one which teaches that in the domestic world anything is possible, even the momentary resurrection of the dead.

¹³ Elizabeth Heine, "Rickie Elliot and the Cow: The Cambridge Apostles and The Longest Journey," English Literature in Transition 15 (1972), p. 116. Heine notes that The Longest Journey is "obviously allegorical" and that the weakness of the novel's symbolism is that "[Forster] allows [it] to dominate and contain his message so entirely that the lives of his characters are threatened by the allegory."

¹⁴ Aspects of the Novel, p. 80.

However, the evocation of Rickie's mother demands a simultaneity of response, an easy acceptance of the contending forces of tragedy and comedy. Such a response pits, for example, the pathos of Agnes's inability to see the unseen against Forster's vision of life—a vision which surrounds the unseen with the incongruities of comedy in order both to test one's ability to really see and to ensure that such ability is not accompanied by moral smugness.

Indeed, comedy serves as an effective rhetorical technique for persuading the reader that it is imaginatively acceptable, and ethically necessary, to experience the demands of realism—manifested by the independent existence of Mrs. Elliot—in terms that are both literal and fantastic. Knowing as he does that these moments when people and things objectively come to life can only be rare and brief, Forster relieves the tension of anticipated loss that is an integral part of fantasy by closing the scene with a more broadly comic, and somewhat less fantastic version of object realization. One is allowed to infer that Khayyam's loaf of bread can find a literal, if somewhat sticky, correlative in an Oswego biscuit. Not only are we asked to "pay something extra"¹⁵ in order to believe in the revelations of fantasy, we must pay yet again if we are to believe that, in Forster's case, the language of such revelations is often more literal than metaphorical.

Literality in The Longest Journey is not only associated with the realization of an image. It attains an even more immediate form in, for example, the conversation between Rickie and Stephen as they drive

15 Aspects, p. 75.

from the station at Salisbury to Mrs. Failing's house at Cadover. In this case, the realization of image is secondary to the realization of the word.

"Those verlands--" said Stephen, scarcely above his breath.

"What are verlands?"

He pointed at the dusk, and said, "Our name for a kind of field." Then he drove his whip into its socket, and seemed to swallow something. Rickie straining his eyes for verlands, could see only a tumbling wilderness of brown.

"Are there many local words?"

"There have been."

"I suppose they die out."

The conversation turned curiously. In the tone of one who replies, he said, "I expect that sometime or other I shall marry." (p. 311)

As a "tumbling wilderness" realizes "verlands," so "marry" is the realization of "words." Stephen's very literal act of compensation for dying words (and worlds) is marriage. Literalness of this sort is part of a mechanism for control, for the imposition of order on the chaos of death,¹⁶ albeit there is an implicit paradox in such controlling action. The literal springs from the freedom associated with fantasy and the word "marry" brings into existence the shadowy shapes of the not-yet-born representatives of continuity. Moreover, the course of naming an action--marriage--and bringing it into life removes some of the terror that is a part of the unknowable life to come.

In the traditions of English literature, marriage is a social act essential to the establishment of domesticity. From a more purely Forsterian perspective, to marry is to hope to escape from the condition central to his fiction; homelessness. It is an attempt to set some

¹⁶ Furbank, in "The Philosophy of E.M. Forster," talks at some length about Forster's preoccupation with death.

common meeting ground between human life and life inherent in all objects. It is also a condition which reveals the benevolent and malign mystery that resides inside the domestic, a mystery suggested by the description of a "slow stuffy tram that plies every twenty minutes between the unknown and the marketplace" (p. 66).

However, the conception of marriage as an antidote to homelessness is where Forster's domesticity encounters a considerable problem of form. While Rickie Elliot is both homeless and intuitively domestic (suggested by among other things his occupancy of the room described above)¹⁷ he most certainly is not marriageable. As Ansell puts it, he is "a person who ought not to marry at all" (p. 94). Given the extent of the problem faced by Forster with regard to the opposition between the traditional demands of the genre of domestic comedy and the creation of a character who was never intended to fit into that genre, it is not surprising that this exploration of the meanings of the domestic imagination should end in tragedy. Not until A Passage to India does marriage become treated confidently as a subject peripheral to domestic life: thus one can evade both marriage and tragedy.

For all of the emphasis on its tragic ending, The Longest Journey has a beginning that defines itself in terms of the comic domesticity associated with marriage plots. Forster's way out from the predicament posed by conventional literary usage is, as Herz says with regard to his handling of marriage in A Room With a View, "to take a tradition

¹⁷ Two good examples of Rickie's innately domestic personality are found in the opening chapter where he verifies the discussion of objects by turning to watch the life of the college court (p. 2); and in the description of how he settles down for his journey to Mrs. Failing's (ch. 33).

two hundred years in the forming and simultaneously accept and reject it."¹⁸ Colmer suggests that one of Forster's strategies for circumventing the traditions of comedy is to employ the "motif of the rescue party":

Forster showed great inventiveness and ingenuity in adapting the conventions of domestic comedy to express his personal vision in his early fiction, and the characters and stories develop a subterranean level of meaning, which is both psychologically complex and socially subversive, as a result of the tension between literary convention and the author's world view. The rescue-party and the escape from an unsuitable marriage, or liaison occupies a limited place in the domestic comedies of Jane Austen. . . . Forster's development of this minor motif of domestic comedy is one of his main methods of adapting the genre to his own needs.¹⁹

Indeed, the rescue-party, composed of Stephen and Ansell, which plays such a significant role in The Longest Journey, is designed to effect not only Rickie's escape from an unsuitable marriage to Agnes, but in fact from the condition of marriage itself. Forster's other main method, of course, has to do with his attempt to create a domestic mythology which can exist independently of the idea of matrimony.

In this novel any traditionally comic form designed to integrate the self into society is going to pose a problem. Convention, in both literary and social terms, becomes something not only to be subverted but transformed. If the ultimate form of subversive activity is the destruction of one's own creation, the transformative aspects of Rickie's

¹⁸ Judith Scherer Herz, "The Double Nature of Forster's Fiction: A Room With a View and The Longest Journey," English Literature in Transition 21 (1978), p. 258.

¹⁹ John Colmer, "Marriage and Personal Relations in Forster's Fiction," forthcoming in a collection of essays on EMF, edited by Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin, cited above.

death make him, as Stone argues, not so much a tragic hero as a prophetic one: "He lives and dies in no real hope of setting his present lands in order, but in the name of a future kingdom."²⁰

What Stone does not realize is that future kingdoms have their roots in present ones and Rickie's role as a prophetic hero gains a good deal of its substance from both the comic and tragic atmospheres through which it moves. One would expect that an author who quite deliberately reshapes the comic form will do the same for the tragic. For all its comic yearnings, The Longest Journey, as a whole, most exemplifies a mode that can best be called domestic tragedy. Forster's version of domestic tragedy, however, is not to be confused with Frye's definition of the mode as essentially a pathetic and Victorian form of literature.²¹ Some characteristics of Forsterian tragedy are suggested by his own comments on fantasy in Aspects of the Novel:

The stuff of daily life will be tugged and strained in various directions, the earth will be given little tilts, mischievous or pensive, spotlights will fall on objects that have no reason to anticipate or welcome them, and tragedy herself, though not excluded, will have a fortuitous air as if a word would disarm her.²²

The background against which the work's tragic drama is played is one which pits the fortuitousness of fantasy against the inevitability usually associated with classical myth. Forster's narrative voice

²⁰ Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 190.

²¹ Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (1957, rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 38-39.

²² Aspects, p. 76.

offers some seemingly conflicting evidence as to how the struggle for tragic realization is to be perceived:

... those who stray outside their nature invite disaster. (p. 230)

He only held the creed of "here am I and there are you,"
... and life no decorous scheme, but a personal combat
or a personal truce. (p. 281)

On the action of this man much depends. (p. 284)

The first statement tells us that certain actions make tragedy inevitable;²³ the second follows logically from the first and insists that the inevitable is still to be struggled against;²⁴ and the third, in seeming contradiction to the first, suggests that tragedy can be something anonymously accidental.

In Forster's view, life is both accidental--indeed, accident is one of the work's key terms²⁵--and predetermined. The finality associated with tragic events--"on the action of this man much depends"--is modified by the atmosphere of randomness: it could have been any man; this man has not been marked by the Gods as a messenger.²⁶ Thus

23 That same sense of inevitability is expressed ironically in A Passage to India, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 50. Aziz, with a kind of luxurious pleasure, loses himself in thoughts of his own failure. The narrative voice comments humorously, "since it was certain, he strove to avert it."

24 Significantly, the creed is Stephen's and assumes an ethical realism in its acknowledgement of the existence of an other - even if that other is an enemy.

25 Kenneth Burke talks about the concept of the "key term" in his essay, "Social and Cosmic Mystery: A Passage to India," Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 223-39. See especially p. 230 and p. 232.

26 Herz discusses the importance of the messenger or Hermes figure in "The Narrator as Hermes: A Study of the Early Short Fiction," E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration, pp. 17-28.

is the framework of Forster's domestic vision established, a modern vision which sees, ironically, that modern life has a random and accidental quality, an often fearful quality that is the natural breeding place for the consolations of comedy; that modern life, for all of the particularity that is a necessary adjunct to its series of random and seemingly unconnected things, people, places, events, nevertheless is built upon universal (hence inevitable) foundations; and that what connects the two is the realm of moral choice.

A major part of Rickie's tragedy is that although he is intuitively domestic and should, therefore, be at home with real forms, he consistently turns away from domestic literality in order to pursue forms that are ideal.²⁷ Those forms may be literary, as the dryads in Pan Pipes suggest, or they may be the motivation behind his attempts to set up housekeeping with Agnes. His greatest weakness is his tendency to reject what can be imaginatively (and morally) real in order to seek out the imaginatively false. It is particularly evident during a conversation at Cadover between Rickie and Stephen. Ostensibly, the subject under discussion is love. Responding to Stephen's matter of fact claim: "When I've a girl I'll keep her in line, and if she turns nasty, I'll get another" (the rhythm of which is appropriate to Stephen in its evocation of the cadences of a traditional English ballad),

Rickie smiled and said no more. But he was sorry that anyone should start life with such a creed—all the more sorry because the creed caricatured his own. He too believed that life should be in a line—a line of enormous length, full of countless figures, all well behaved. But woman was not to be "kept" to this line. Rather did she

²⁷ Rosenbaum points out that Rickie's "creative imagination tends to produce ideal forms." (p. 40).

advance it continually, like some triumphant general, making each unit still more interesting, still more lovable than it had been before. He loved Agnes not only for herself, but because she was lighting up the human world. But he could scarcely explain this to an inexperienced animal, nor did he make the attempt.

(p. 126)

This quite remarkable speech is a good example of the dangers of idealism, of what Rosenbaum calls "solipsism à deux."²⁸ Rickie's language, rather than fortuitously disarming his own potential tragedy, provides instead an abundance of metaphorical ammunition. Although he begins with a literal appropriation of Stephen's "line," his words are inimical to the spirit of the fantasy. A metaphorical expansiveness begins that is truly grotesque. The moral allegiance that had once belonged to Ansell's squares and circles now becomes transformed to something approaching the patterns of a military parade ground. Agnes becomes fully realized as a "triumphant general" and the culmination of this most unattractive metaphor indicates just how far she has advanced through the ranks of Rickie's imagination.

A connection is established between linguistic choice and ethical behavior. In using the kind of well disciplined figure of speech that would appeal to a Pembroke, Rickie establishes both an identification of himself with the "enemy" and the undercutting of that identification. One has the intimation that in the dimmest reaches of his subconscious he may be aware that his life ahead with Agnes is to be one of extreme trouble. His language, then, arms him against potential difficulties. It is also possible to speculate that the negative associations invoked by the military metaphor may reveal their source in some desire of his

for heroic wish fulfillment. In the Forsterian scheme of things, the army is not to be confused with the soldier and Rickie is being both truthful and serious when he says, while still at Cambridge, that "any profession may mean dishonour, but one isn't allowed to die instead. The army's different. If a soldier makes a mess, it's thought rather decent of him, isn't it, if he blows out his brains? In other professions it somehow seems cowardly" (p. 14).

Rickie's lamentable language ensures that he is neither inarticulate like the pathetic hero, nor given to the noble speech associated traditionally with the hero of tragedy. However, ideal forms, of which Rickie's speech is a good example, do lend themselves to classical analogues.²⁹ If one problem for Forster was how to treat the conventions of marriage fiction in his handling of domestic comedy, another equally demanding fictional dilemma resides in the lure of the conventions of the classical past. It is necessary, first of all, that Rickie can be given credibility as one who essentially is heroic. But Forster's own idiosyncratic view of domestic tragedy insists that the inevitability of his hero's fate be subjected to, indeed subverted by, the rituals of comic indignity.

Acting as a counterpart to Rickie's idealized vision of Agnes as a triumphant general, is Forster's introduction of a seemingly idealized and mythic analogue to Rickie and Stephen: their mythical progenitors are Dido and Aeneas. However, a distinction should be made with regard to the ways in which Rickie and Forster use mythic analogues. Rickie's struggle to formulate an ideal and classical Agnes unintentionally

²⁹ The term "classical analogue" is Heine's. She argues that Rickie seeks "a classical analogue for his ideal Agnes" (p. 125).

reaches comedy by its bestowal upon her of attributes which are more suited to the heroine of some Victorian domestic drama: "But he could think of no classical parallel for Agnes. She slipped between examples. A kindly Medea, a Cleopatra with a sense of duty—these suggested her a little" (p. 51).³⁰ Forster, on the other hand, deliberately domesticates Virgil's myth by presenting it in an ironically comic form.

The excursion to Salisbury was but a poor business—in fact, Rickie never got there. They were not out of the drive before Mr. Wonham began doing acrobatics. He showed Rickie how very quickly he could turn round in his saddle and sit with his face to Aeneas's tail. "I see," said Rickie coldly, and became almost cross when they arrived in this condition at the gate behind the house, for he had to open it, and was afraid of falling. As usual, he anchored just beyond the fastenings, and then had to turn to Dido, who seemed as long as a battleship. To his relief a man came forward, and murmuring, "Worst gate in the parish," pushed it wide and held it respectfully. "Thank you," cried Rickie; "many thanks." But Stephen who was riding into the world back first, said majestically, "No, no; it doesn't count. You needn't think it does. You make it worse by touching your hat. Four hours and seven minutes. You'll see me again." The man said nothing. (p. 124)

The initial source of the comedy lies in the incongruity between the names "Dido" and "Aeneas" and a pair of Mrs. Fielding's farm horses. But in performing their functions as beasts of burden, whose natural dignity is sorely tried by Stephen's high-spirited display of acrobatics, these horses convey Forster's conviction that the heroes of classical tragedy can "carry" modern and domestic myths. Certainly some conventions of the genre are rejected. The nautical imagery—suggested by "anchored" and "battleship"—surprisingly placed in this most pastoral of settings

³⁰ Insofar as Virgil associates Dido with Cleopatra, there may well be an ironic intimation of a Cleopatra image in Forster's analogy between Rickie and Dido. See N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard, eds. The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 1126.

is something of a tongue in cheek comment on classical sources of water motifs and sea voyages. The comic shakiness of Rickie's uncertain, and very undignified, seat upon his horse and his crankiness at his unfamiliar position become in retrospect a poignant commentary on his vulnerability as he begins the most important connection of his life—with the man who most matters.

What Forster achieves in the pairing of these two is a radical and subversive transformation of both classical and modern mythology. In insisting that the analogue is designed to give meaning to a story in which the lovers are of the same sex, he attains the intimacy that poses such a fictional problem: "How to make them intimate—that was Forster's chief difficulty in the novel."³¹ The transformation he effects is as important, insofar as the literary imagination is concerned, as that of Virgil upon Homer's material. Indeed, the parallel can be extended. If the Aeneid transcends the act of reviving a Greek myth and becomes instead "an epic of Rome," Forster in turn reinterprets the Virgilian myth in order to fashion a fiction of modern England.

Stephen Wonham's connection with the future makes him a suitable descendant of both the Greek and Roman Aeneas. Virgil realizes the Iliad's prophecy of a kingdom for the descendants of Aeneas and bases that realization on the divinely ordained separation of Dido and Aeneas; Forster makes that inevitable separation the major action of The Longest Journey and compensates, in part, for its sadness by concluding on a prophetic note.

31 Herz, "The Double Nature of Forster's Fiction: A Room With a View and The Longest Journey, p. 260.

In a similar fashion, Forster suggests that the analogy between Dido and Rickie is flexible enough to incorporate more than one source. Rickie's death evokes both the Greek Dido who dies by immolation in order to escape an unwanted marriage--suggesting a parallel to Rickie's desperate attempts to escape from his marriage to Agnes--and her Roman counterpart who kills herself after Aeneas leaves Carthage at the command of the Gods.

It is amazing that Forster's single reference to these classical analogues should infuse the mythic fabric of the story to the extent that it does. As is the case when he approaches fantasy through the comic muse, his treatment of the mythic aspects of tragedy is most effective when comedy is used to convince the reader that, although these mythic associations may seem to be incongruous, they are never false. Forster subverts tragedy, then, by introducing it in a comic form. However, in subverting the tragic form, in no way does he undermine its content. The problem of finding socially acceptable analogues for a story of homosexual love is part of the reason for his manipulation of the conventions. Moreover, the Edwardian reader (and author) understandably rebelled against a surfeit of the mythical and classical models that were so important to his Victorian predecessors.

Rickie's comic irritability emphasizes his bad behavior, particularly with regard to his failure to acknowledge the real legitimacy of his relation to Stephen. But behind the narrative voice's implicit chastisement of Rickie's inability to handle properly the moral conditions of his mythic life--demonstrated by his awkwardness in manoeuvring Dido--lies the implicit splendour of what should have been and what cannot be. Contrast this to the almost wholly domestic myth-making in Howards End

where the classical exists as only the faintest shadow suggesting, for example, some parallels between Mrs. Wilcox and Margaret and Demeter and Persephone, and between the events during the Oniton Grange chapters (frequently couched in terms of descent) and some kind of fall into the underworld. The avoidance in the later work of the overtly classical allows it to be more innovative in the creation of its own kind of mythology and results in the fuller emergence of its domestic and English attributes. Nevertheless, although marriage is seriously undermined in Howards End and the significant pairing is between the Schlegel sisters, its very English kind of domesticity offers, in some ways, less room for homosexual lovers than does The Longest Journey. Indeed, Forster's reshaping of myth in the earlier work lends to the subversive vision of homosexual romance a degree of power and credibility that is unique among his novels.³²

However, one problem still remains with regard to Dido and Aeneas: how much is the allusion to them representative of an ideal form of human love and how much is it real. After all, ideal forms do lend themselves to classical analogues. Countering this argument is Forster's claim, voiced by Rickie, that "the Greeks looked very straight at things" (p. 203). Myth in The Longest Journey is an analogous form; it need not be an idealistic one. Rather, the reality of the work is composed of a series of devices (of which myth is one) designed, as Herz argues, to bounce the reader "into realizing how much this sexual energy has been a component of Forster's fiction from the start, and how much the

³² To the anticipated argument that Maurice must usurp the position of The Longest Journey, I would reply that Maurice's vision of homosexual romance is certainly not subversive and that it is not as accomplished a work as The Longest Journey.

strategies invented to contain it—not necessarily to disguise it—are an important part of his accomplishment as a novelist" (my emphasis).³³

It is one of the major paradoxes of Forster's fiction that this sexual energy should be contained in an imaginative structure that, in the later fiction, is so domestic.³⁴ However, Herz's emphasis on containment rather than disguise offers some clues towards the understanding of the literary qualities of domesticity. For Forster, the act of closing off a portion of his fictional world, of subjecting it to the forces of contraction, is crucial. The energy, sexual or not, that could become dissipated instead becomes concentrated in detail and meaning. The life of the object that is so essential to domestic realms reaches its fullest intensity when the authorial gaze is most narrowly contracted. Such a moment occurs after Mrs. Failing tells Rickie that he has a brother.

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 the brain. (p. 153)

However, it is not only the sequence of images—"clods," "beetle," "blade"—which becomes realized. Interestingly enough, the literal realization of words, which is discussed above with regard to fantasy, finds a correlative here in the relations that are established between the authorial presence and the character of Rickie. Although in the context of this particular passage one would normally assume that it is

³³ Herz, p. 254.

³⁴ Herz points out: "The very earliest of the strategies Forster developed to contain this sexual energy was the creation of a fantasy landscape" (p. 255).

Stephen's hand which presses down on Rickie's neck, it is not difficult to imagine the author himself usurping Stephen's place and firmly forcing Rickie to accept the truths revealed in domestic containment.

In Forster's hands, the authorial presence becomes realized as a living force, another character with a voice of its own. The major difference between that voice and those belonging to the other characters is that the former voice is omniscient. Indeed, the omniscience, or intrusiveness, of Forster's narrative voice is for the most part taken for granted. What is not so easily recognized is that its presence is part of a shifting and subtle interplay with the characters themselves. The relations between author and character are essentially egalitarian and reveal their equality in various ways. Although the narrative voice frequently corrects a character's misapprehensions (and misconduct) it always allows that character to explore fully the implications of his own perceptions. The character, then, is allowed to learn through experience. There are obvious differences in the kinds of language used by the narrative voice and the character with whom it carries on a "conversation"; however, each has the ability to share his language with the other. And while the omniscience and experience of the narrative voice are incontrovertible, those attributes are never allowed to seem superior. They are modified by two characteristics typical of the Forsterian voice: a tone of modesty, almost of self-deprecation, and an ability to leave the scene altogether or to merge with it in such a way as to allow the character who is its principal focus the opportunity of being the intense object of the reader's attention. The passage quoted above is a case in point.

Another, and similar, process of authorial interference occurs during what is probably the work's most significant scene: Rickie's view of Gerald and Agnes embracing in the garden at Shelthorpe. It is a particularly interesting moment because it is almost perfectly balanced between the forces of comedy and tragedy. Moreover, in its rejection of traditional relations between the author and his character, it suggests as well the necessity of reshaping the forms of language.

He only looked for a moment, but the sight burnt into his brain. The man's grip was the stronger. He had drawn the woman to his knee, and was pressing her with all his strength, against him. Already her hands slipped off him, and she whispered, "Don't—you hurt—" Her face had no expression. It stared at the intruder and never saw him. Then her lover kissed it, and immediately it shone with mysterious beauty, like some star.

Rickie limped away without the sandwiches, crimson and afraid. He thought, "Do such things actually happen?" And he seemed to be looking down coloured valleys. Brighter they glowed, till gods of pure flame were born in them, and then he was looking at pinnacles of virgin snow. While Mr. Pembroke talked, the riot of fair images increased.

They invaded his being and lit lamps at unsuspected shrines. Their orchestra commenced in that suburban house, where he had to stand aside for the maid to carry in the luncheon. Music flowed past him like a river. He stood at the springs of creation and heard the primeval monotony. Then an obscure instrument gave out a little phrase.

The river continued unheeding. The phrase was repeated and a listener might know it was a fragment of the Tune of tunes. Nobler instruments accepted it, the clarinet protected, the brass encouraged, and it rose to the surface to the whisper of violins. In full unison was love born, flame of the flame, flushing the dark river beneath him and the virgin snows above. His wings were infinite, his youth eternal; the sun was a jewel on his finger as he passed it in benediction over the world. Creation, no longer monotonous, acclaimed him in widening melody, in brighter radiances. Was Love a column of fire? Was he a torrent of song? Was he greater than either—the touch of a man on a woman?

It was the merest accident that Rickie had not been disgusted. But this he could not know. (pp. 45-46)

There are some interesting similarities between this scene and the Dido/Aeneas passage. In both cases the comedy is set against a background which emphasizes that errors of perception are ultimately tragic.

The seriousness with which Rickie views Gerald and Agnes is juxtaposed against the mostly comic tone of the narrative voice, whose function it is to correct Rickie's vision by subjecting it to essentially domestic forces. However, it is not Rickie's unconscious attempts to formulate a homoerotic myth that make him a target for authorial correction, but rather the way in which he goes about that myth-making. The expansiveness of his language in fact disguises the importance of what is perceived. Herz makes the point that

[Forster] gave to Rickie a rhapsody purposely calculated to disguise his true response. It is Eros that is born, not Venus. Love is masculine, phallic, a column of fire, but it is necessary for Rickie's lonely and tragic journey that he mistake what he sees, that he fictionalize his feelings³⁵

Before the interplay of Rickie's voice with that of the narrator can be discussed, it must be emphasized that these voices are distinct and separate. The passage contains two different kinds of language (one domestic in the Forsterian sense and one not) whose differences reinforce each other. Furthermore, as Herz argues, they are the product of an "undivided author"³⁶ whose imaginative identification with Rickie [does] not violate the novel's integrity.³⁷ The point seems to have escaped some critics. Harvey, for example, argues that the scene in question illustrates the way in which "Forster's language betrays him,"³⁸

³⁵ Herz, p. 260.

³⁶ Herz, p. 260.

³⁷ Herz, p. 259.

³⁸ John Harvey, "Imagination and Moral Theme in E.M. Forster's The Longest Journey," Essays in Criticism VI (1956), p. 431.

insofar as this moment is conveyed by a "lamentable and vulgar piece of writing." Stone is able to separate the voices of Rickie and the narrator but is unable to reconcile them as the product of an undivided author. He says:

But we are disturbed by the feeling that Forster believes in both the passage and its retraction, that the irony is no literary device for making a thematic point but the inadvertance of an author who has simply not yet made up his mind whether he is or is not going to side with his fictional self.³⁹

There is no question of Forster's not siding with his character. The homosexual content of Rickie's rhapsody is never undermined; it is only his refusal or inability to recognize it, to realize it, for what it is that is subject to correction.

We have already seen how some of the conventions of comedy and tragedy have been explored by being placed within the context of Forster's domestic vision. The same thing happens with the scene in the garden; this time, however, comedy and tragedy are attributes not of fantasy or classical myth but of a mode indispensable to an understanding of Forster's language: the lyric.

It has been suggested previously that Rickie has an imaginative attraction towards ideal (and non-domestic) forms. Now the function of the narrative voice is to hint at ways in which ideal forms of language may be modified and reshaped into a new and real kind of lyricism whose dominant metaphors, appropriately enough, are musical.

Forster picks up the conductor's baton and ushers in one of his favorite figures of speech: "Their orchestra commenced in that suburban house where he had to stand aside for the maid to carry in the luncheon."

This quiet deflation of some of Rickie's imaginative excesses (and even the maid puts him in his place) is most Forsterian in its insistence that this modern and ironic version of "if music be the food of love, play on . . ." is inextricably attached to the domestic. Indeed, Forster's conception of the uses of music in his fiction revolves around an idea essential to his kind of domesticity: that of the "little phrase," itself a part of the larger rhythm which has "a life of its own."⁴⁰

Rickie, however, in the idealism of his youth and inexperience cannot yet intuit that domesticity has the potential to contain sexual energy. Consequently, he longs for the huge landscapes of some prehistoric mythology and the orchestras of emotion become submerged in "primeval" rivers. Forster, undaunted, emerges with "Then an obscure instrument gave out a little phrase," only to be drowned again with "The river continued unheeding."

Again Forster rises to the surface, along with his little phrase, and it is his voice one hears saying: "No! other instruments accepted it, the clarinet protected, the brass encouraged, and it rose to the surface to the whisper of violins." As the rest of the paragraph indicates, the emphasis is no longer upon the correction of Rickie's immature style but upon the fusion of his style with that of the narrative voice.

The intimacy of tone that is characteristic of the duet between author and character is probably a good indication of just how much Forster liked his own book.

The Longest Journey is the least popular of my five novels but the one I am most glad to have written. For in it I have managed to get nearer than elsewhere toward what was in my mind—or rather toward that junction of mind and

heart where the creative impulse speaks. Thoughts and emotions collided if they did not always co-operate. I can remember writing it and how excited I was and how absorbed, and how sometimes I went wrong deliberately, as if the spirit of anti-literature had jogged my elbow.⁴¹

There is another reason, too, why Forster was so fond of The Longest Journey, and it has something to do with the fact that the novel is the beginning of the development of his own personal and domestic mythology. Asked by Stone "what was meant by the 'spirit of anti-literature,'" Forster replied: "In those days I enjoyed the idea of doing flattering imitations of literature."⁴² There is more than a hint of the ironic note of self-deprecation that is characteristic of him. However, anti-literature is much larger than imitation, flattering or otherwise. In Forster's hands it becomes the domestication of traditional conventions, the reshaping of old modes into something newly significant. Domestic myth-making realizes the fictional world in a way which refutes the moral carelessness that idealistically denies the existence of others—and in Rickie's case denies the existence of the homosexual self. If fantasy realizes the present, and myth the past, Forster's treatment of the technique of voice points in one direction: towards a prophetic future. The negative isolation that is associated with the epistemological and ethical idealism of the "longest journey" must, in time, be replaced by the spirit of human community. In The Longest Journey that spirit incorporates the beneficent containment associated with a world both pastoral and domestic.

⁴¹ Forster's introduction to the O.U.P. edition of The Longest Journey (1960).

⁴² Stone, p. 185.

The Advance Beyond Daintiness:

Voice and Myth in Howards End

Behind the rather cozy domesticity of Howards End lies a full scale attempt on Forster's part to create an English myth. His preoccupation with this idea is evident when the narrative voice muses:

Why has not England a great mythology? Our folklore has never advanced beyond daintiness, and the greater melodies about our countryside have all issued through the pipes of Greece. Deep and true as the native imagination can be, it seems to have failed there. It has stopped with the witches and 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.¹

Forster, very likely, would classify himself among the "thousand little poets." Nevertheless, despite his characteristic concern with the significance of littleness, and its domestic manifestations, his attempts at myth-making are constructed around some centre as enormous in its archetypal implications as the fall from heaven to hell.

In Howards End, there are two distinct strands which together form the mythic fabric of the work. The first of these is concerned with the physical landscape, itself, and is usually conveyed by means of a narrative voice both overt and straightforward, in the "poetic tone"

¹ E.M. Forster, Howards End, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, ASinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), p. 264.

noted by a number of critics.² The characteristics of this landscape remain more or less fixed, but not static. As a backdrop to the narrowly focused-upon drama of Schlegels, Basts, and Wilcoxes, these physical features act as a constant, often ironic, reminder of what has been lost and what can be gained. Sealed inside this eden is an intense psychological topography, through which the characters must travel, where both heaven and hell are experienced with an acute perception of detail.

In his development of this psychic landscape, Forster, unlike his Victorian predecessors, most notably Arnold, rejects a purely classical vision of tragedy. By adjusting his perspective to "England," he manages to overcome the almost crippling limitations of a post Victorian age and to use the materials at hand as the foundations of a local myth with implications that are universal. Such universality gains its momentum from the little worlds of tea-parties and concerts, discussion-groups and family breakfasts; indeed, these events are never without significance. Each word, each action reverberates, each person connects with his neighbor, usually unwittingly, until what seem to be tiny gestures "performed in isolation" become revealed in their heroic proportions.

It is necessary, then, that the narrative voice appear as one that is both overtly, and sometimes intrusively, omniscient and omnipresent. A story as integrally concerned, as this one is, with the mythic dimensions of human behavior must be approached by means of a narrator

² Several critics have noted that the narrative voice has two distinct tones: the poetic and the humorously ironic in the manner of Jane Austen. Among them are Malcolm Bradbury, "E.M. Forster's Howards End," The Critical Quarterly, IV (1962), 229-41; Francis Gillen, "Howards End and the Neglected Narrator," Novel, 3 (1970), 139-52; J.L. VanDe Vyvere, "The Mediatorial Voice of the Narrator in E.M. Forster's Howards End," Journal of Narrative Technique, 6 (1976), 204-16.

who is able to convince one that he apprehends the whole. If one cannot believe in this narrator's omniscience, one is bound to see only the parts, to fail, in fact, to make the connections. And because the characters' visions are so frequently faulty, although at times they see things clearly, the reader who is not scrupulously careful may find himself, as it were, travelling in the wrong direction.

The primary function of the narrative voice is to act as a most Hermes-like "guide of souls"³ through the complexities of Forster's psychological landscape. It directs the characters, most importantly Margaret Schlegel, in the ways from innocence to experience. Consequently, Thomson's comments to the contrary,⁴ Forster's "good" characters must be morally responsible if their journey is to have any meaning. It is because of their capacity for vision, that it becomes imperative that this ability to see into the heart of things be exercised correctly.

Some characters, however, are more worthy of being tested than others. A case in point is provided by the narrator's comments on the behavior of Henry Wilcox. When told that Wilcox was "anxious to be terrible but had not got it in him" (p. 243), one finds it amusing because it diminishes his stature by deflating his sexual ego. One

³ Judith Scherer Herz, "The Narrator as Hermes: A Study of the Early Short Fiction," E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration, ed. John Bear and G.K. Das (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 17-28.

⁴ George H. Thomson, The Fiction of E.M. Forster (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967). Thomson states-correctly I think—"why [Forster] did not portray his bad people as morally responsible beings. To have done so would have given them too great a stature and spoiled the satire." However, when he discusses the moral dimensions of the "good" characters, it could be suggested that he makes an error. He says ". . . they resemble the bad people in this one respect only, that they are not morally responsible because their moments of vision are given. Though they are worthy of the revelation that comes to them, they cannot be said quite to have earned it" (p. 50).

proceeds, then, to the assumption that if he is not so terrible he might be rather nice--this is precisely what Margaret's view has been--and Henry is temporarily let off the adulterous hook. However, when seen from the perspective of Forster's own mythology, such a comment becomes a harsh, albeit humorous, indictment. Wilcox's lack of the "terrible" excludes him absolutely from any real knowledge or value. Consequently, since Henry and his family are incapable of sustaining any real exertion of a moral or spiritual nature, the onus of responsibility must fall on those such as Margaret. The greater shortcoming, then, from Forster's point of view, lies not in Henry's insignificance but in Margaret's failure to perceive it. Authorial values become most clear when the points of view of narrator and character are juxtaposed. Sometimes their voices merge; more often they do not.

In Howards End, it is the narrative voice which most consistently conveys the author's viewpoints and in order to do so it draws upon four distinct characteristics. First, it speaks overtly for itself. This is the voice most obviously concerned with the description of the physical landscape associated with this myth: a good example presents itself in the opening paragraphs of chapter eleven. Mrs. Wilcox has died and been buried and, because there is no one else to do it, the narrative voice delivers the elegy. As it speaks, it becomes apparent that there is joy in Ruth's death, the "exaltation" of the earth gathering its own.

The woodcutter knows this instinctively. Watching over the funeral, perched up in a tree, somehow an inseparable part of that tree, he both dignifies Mrs. Wilcox's death, in a way impossible for her family to comprehend, and insists through his presence alone on the joy of

continuity: "With a grunt, he descended, his thoughts dwelling no longer on death, but on love, for he was mating" (p. 87). What a furor that statement seems to have caused.⁵ However, Forster does not view this woodcutter with disdain; on the contrary, the presence of this, eminently natural man acts as something of a Greek chorus praising Ruth Wilcox and offering a commentary on the significance of her life.

In this particularly English atmosphere of romance, with its aura of an exhilarating and eternal battle between life and death, there is an ironic undercutting of the ways in which Wilcoxes express sorrow. Life and death are not the connected forces in Henry's mind; he only knows the world of marriages and funerals. The narrative voice, on the other hand, forges connections everywhere: between, for example, Margaret and the woodcutter. He takes her chrysanthemums to celebrate his "night of joy." She, then, by association must become admitted to the charmed circle of mythic figures and the ticket of admission has been her instinct.

Instinct is given but knowledge is earned. And since the search for experience is such an arduous one, both character and reader must have a reliable, although not always straightforward, guide. The technique used by Forster, in his development of the relation between voice and character, is a most effective one: he "throws" a voice--not necessarily his own--into his character's mouth, much in the manner of a ventriloquist speaking through his "dummy." This brings us to this narrative voice's second characteristic: the character--most often

⁵ For an example of an attack on Forster's "elitist" attitude, see Kinley Roby, "Irony and the Narrative Voice in Howards End," Journal of Narrative Technique, 2 (1972), p. 119.

Margaret--appears to speak for the author but in fact does not.⁶ A look at one of her well-known speeches will illustrate what I mean:

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

From Forster's point of view, there is no question that the separation of man from money is a peculiarly English version of the ancient estrangement between man and God. However, it is not his voice, although it sounds rather like it, who defines the abyss as the "absence of coin." For to define hell as the absence of coin is to say that heaven is found in the presence of money. Unlike Margaret, what he mourns most must be the "absence of love."

At this point, Margaret cannot understand that by defining the abyss as she does, by acting as a spokeswoman for some English reality, she is, in fact, only emphasizing the degree to which she is learning to see the world through Wilcox eyes. Her assertion, then, is intimately bound up in a pattern of cause and effect with her rather arbitrary insistence, only moments before, that the "Wilcox nerve" in Helen is dead. For all of her genuinely admirable qualities, Margaret has the kind of blindspot so characteristic of the "English" hero: she is a little too ready to dismiss the "doors of heaven." An ironic contrast

⁶ Many critics assume, along with Stone, that "Margaret can be said to speak for Forster." She can do so, of course, but frequently does not. See Bradbury; Frederick C. Crews, The Perils of Humanism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962); Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966; and VanDe Vyvere.

must be inferred between her statement regarding the absence of coin and her management--excellent manager she--of a situation in which Paul Wilcox, for one, finally and absolutely "counts no more."

The third characteristic of the narrative voice presents an instructive discrepancy between character and author that is even more subtle than the one just discussed: Margaret appears not to be speaking for Forster but if one carefully pays attention it is possible to hear his distinctly ironic tones. Furthermore, the intensity with which one must listen to hear his voice reinforces the importance of the moral choices confronting the heroine. Intense, however, need not mean solemn and the moment in question provides a very good example of the joke-playing aspect of the guide's personality.

Oniton Grange is the scene of a kind of dress rehearsal of Margaret's and Henry's marriage. And with their growing intimacy, if one can apply such a word to a Wilcox, comes a certain amount of moral smugness. Although Margaret appears rather ashamed of her evasive strategies for getting her husband-to-be to do what he ought, she is, in fact, quite proud of her ability to manage him. Patting herself on the back, so to speak, she concludes--fatal error: "In dealing with a Wilcox, how tempting it was to lapse from comradeship, and to give him the kind of woman that he desired!" (p. 226).

What Margaret considers to be the height of domestic diplomacy, becomes, when seen through the perspective provided by the narrative voice, something closer to outright dishonesty. And to underscore the degree to which she is moving, very rapidly indeed, towards the Wilcox world and away from Helen, Forster indulges in some ironic manipulation. As one hears Margaret's pretty self-satisfied "kind of woman that he

desired" as a comment belonging instead to the narrative voice, what follows next is painfully appropriate.

Musing on the discrepancy between "things as they are and as they ought to be," Margaret "descends a mound" (p. 228) and has a nasty little bump into reality: Jacky Bast. This, Forster seems to be saying, is what I mean by temptation and this is really the kind of woman Henry Wilcox desires. Here is authorial string-pulling at its most effective. It would seem that we readers are the witnesses to some unpleasant behavior all round and this joke-playing narrator is as guilty as anyone else. However, the point is made: the complete estrangement between Margaret and Forster is intended to parallel the degree of separation between the pair who most matter—the sisters.

Characteristically, Forster makes the descent a tiny one and the fall itself is into the most hellish of conditions: confusion, banality and most of all, squalor. As Margaret goes down from that mound a kind of incremental irony must accrue to her temptation, taking as it does the pathetic form of Jacky, "a piece of cake in one hand, an empty champagne glass in the other, doing no harm to anybody" (p. 228). Indeed, the harm which follows, and it is considerable, becomes part of Margaret's abdication of moral responsibility—most significantly in her writing of an acutely Wilcoxian letter to Helen, a letter which is both dishonest and, ultimately, deadly.

Look for a moment at its results. Helen is impelled to sleep with Leonard, an event which, as part of a complex chain of consequence, leads to his death. Of course, he is not actually murdered, which would be a burden of guilt too great for the sisters to sustain; were that the case, the work would be fatally weighted down. Rather, he only appears to be

violently slain because the narrative voice tells us that Leonard's remorse "cuts away," that he is "driven straight through," that it is a "knife that probes" (p. 313). Such comments do more than act as a symbolic preparation for the blow from Charles. One becomes very nearly convinced that Charles actually runs him through the heart. All of this focuses attention on Leonard: as his stature as tragic hero grows, Charles's dwindles away into the insignificance it deserves. Thus: Margaret writes a letter; Leonard dies. But he also gains a dignity, a dimension of greatness in death which is utterly denied him in life. And, from a structural point of view, he fathers the new life that will so appropriately come to be emblematic of the revived relationship between the sisters.

It must be emphasized that the continuous authorial correction of Margaret's perceptions of herself occurs precisely because of her virtues, because of her huge capacity for seeing the unseen. The considerable importance that a number of humanist critics⁷ has attached to her increasing attempts to connect the "prose and the passion," to integrate Wilcoxes and Schlegels, is based for the most part upon a reading of Margaret's character by the same light with which she sees herself. However, as Forster points out again and again, that light may be faulty. Connection, insofar as Margaret is concerned during the time of her visit to Oniton Grange, is purely a matter of bridging the gulf between Henry as he is and Henry as he ought to be. It does not take into account the subtle, and most significant, relationships that have

⁷ Bradbury; Crews; Frederick P.W. McDowell, "'The Mild Intellectual Light': Idea and Theme in Howards End," PMLA, LXXIV (1959), 453-63 and "E.M. Forster: Romancer or Realist?" English Literature in Transition, XI: 2 (1968), 103-22; VanDe Vyvere.

been implied by the authorial voice: those between Margaret and Jacky for example, or the similarity of Ruth Wilcox's position and that of Leonard Bast.

As one moves through the narrative, sharing the omniscient and omnipresent vantage point presented by this Forsterian voice, the real meaning of the relation between prose and passion becomes clearer. Indeed, the fusion of the two lies at the heart of Forster's myth-making. The testing of Margaret, or of any other character, is undertaken in order to facilitate connection. And, although Margaret's flaw, her weakness, lies in her undisputable prosiness, such prosiness is only "bad" insofar as it inhibits her ability to connect with passion.

One can hardly call the delightful opening to chapter five passionate, nor, with the possible exception of Helen who would do well with a little more prose, are the people who are attending this concert. But the passion is there. It is there, as Forster makes abundantly clear, in the music itself. It is somewhere else, too, and this is where the novelist's role comes in. For the basic premise upon which Howards End is constructed is this: "How interesting that row of people was!" (p.30). Here is the essential contradiction in Forster's mythology. The myth of England is, to him, a passionate one because he cares for it so deeply; it is animated by his interest. However, since this particular collection of people are English, for the most part they will be uncomfortable with grand gestures, violent landscapes, the overwhelming manifestations of emotion. Consequently, when Margaret has her moment of passionate apprehension, it will be no less intense for being small, intimate, quiet, and surrounded by an atmosphere of all-encompassing domesticity.

The most significant culmination of the connective pattern occurs in the coming together of the sisters and in their reunion, at Howards End, they unite many of those mythic elements Forster associates with England. The shared past, for example, to which the two women return, is a past deeply rooted in the life of common objects. As they move back, through remembrance, to their childhoods, there is a parallel motion towards the well-springs of vision. "The importance of youthful experience is one of Forster's main themes" says Thomson, and "the insights and revelations of youth will be associated with specific experiences, specific persons and places. But for a certain number of years . . . they may flow into and illuminate some new locality or situation."⁸ This is precisely what happens and the luminosity of place, so characteristic of the house, spills over and infuses its contents as well.

This brings us to the fourth characteristic of the narrative voice: Margaret really does speak for Forster and her voice and point of view merge completely with the narrator's. His presence is not at all intrusive; for the most part he leaves the sisters on their own and his voice is interjected only to confirm what has already been dramatized: the splendor of shared vision and its accompanying transfiguration of the inanimate. As he joins his words to theirs, his words express their thoughts:

And the triviality faded from their faces, though it left something behind—the knowledge that they never could be parted because their love was rooted in common things. Explanations and appeals had failed; they had tried for a common meeting ground, and had only made each other unhappy. And all the time their salvation was lying around them—the

⁸ Thomson, p. 53.

past sanctifying the present; the present, with wild heart-throb, declaring that there would, after all, be a future, with laughter and the voices of children. Helen, still smiling, came up to her sister. She said, "It is always Meg." They looked into each others' eyes. The inner life had paid. (p. 296)

Stylistically, this final sentence is characteristic of Forster, in its understatement, its matter of factness, and in its evocation of powerful affection. Indeed, it is a particularly effective example of how the contradictions inherent in an English mythology can be resolved; this, in effect, is what he believes. Prose and passion are connected, more than connected, as each takes on the other's attributes. The metaphor of England's commerce which has served as a structural principle of the work becomes transfigured by love. Those opposing forces--the inner life and the cash nexus--actually absorb each other's power.

Now that a common meeting ground has been earned, what Frye calls the "broken current of memory"⁹ is re-established. With this reconnection of the sources of power it becomes obvious that this meeting ground is not half way between anything; rather it is a wholly inclusive universe with extraordinarily life-giving qualities. Even something as apparently ordinary as a dining room chair, for example, can become transformed into something so alive as to seem to be almost breathing as when Helen says: "Their dear little backs are quite warm" (p. 277).

In Forster's mythology, such a common domestic object becomes a kind of sacred vessel and in doing so acts as the embodiment of the spiritual and psychological states of the person to whom it is attached. This atmosphere of domestic coziness, suggesting as it does a sense of

⁹ Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 145.

enclosure and womb-like security, contrasts sharply with its satanic opposite--the dark, stuffy, imprisoning London, where men like Leonard live not on the earth but under it.

However, in considering the polarities of heaven and hell, polarities approached through the guidance of the narrative voice, it would be a serious error not to take into account the highly comic attributes of these mythological conditions. A heavenly view of Forster's furniture sees it as an integral part of the home, important to the setting up of the domestic establishment, a significant player in the comedy of human continuity. The satanic perspective, on the other hand, is concerned with a comedy which is much more ironic.

Mr. Wilcox's furniture says as much about him as Helen's does about her. The significant difference between the two is that Helen, as it were, hears her own domestic paraphernalia talking. Since Henry Wilcox cannot hear what the contents of his house have to say, it is up to the narrative voice to ensure that we do.

The dining-room was big, but overfurnished. Chelsea would have moaned aloud. Mr. Wilcox had aschewed those decorative schemes that wince, and relent, and refrain, and achieve beauty by sacrificing comfort and pluck. After so much self-colour and self-denial, Margaret viewed with relief the sumptuous dado, the frieze, the gilded wallpaper, amid whose foliage parrots sang. It would never do with her own furniture, but those heavy chairs, that immense side-board loaded with presentation plate, stood up against its pressure like men. The room suggested men, and Margaret, keen to derive the modern capitalist from the warriors and hunters of the past, saw it as an ancient guest hall, where the lord sat at meat among his thanes. Even the Bible--the Dutch Bible that Charles had brought back from the Boer War--fell into position. Such a room admitted loot.

(p. 159)

The overpowering immensity of Mr. Wilcox's dining-room reinforces the fact that with homelessness imminent--as is the case with the

Schlegels--the "chairs, tables, pictures, books" (p. 146) that are part of daily living become oppressive rather than liberating.

Forster manipulates his narrative voice in such a way as to resolve comically this seeming antithesis regarding the real or potential forces residing in furniture. Margaret, unlike Henry, has the ability to hear what the contents of his house are saying but because her world view is getting more and more Wilcoxian what she understands is faulty. The increasing pomposity with which she views her husband-to-be is undermined by the narrative voice ironically deflating her association of modern capitalists with warriors and hunters. Such ancient analogues are forced and artificial, are essentially dishonest: "such a room admitted loot." Indeed, the understatement is characteristically Forsterian. It not only deflates the delusive pretensions in Margaret's approval of Henry Wilcox's decorative schemes, but even more significantly punctures any inflated sense of self-importance that might be attached to a narrative voice whose function is often corrective.

Forster deflates his characters when he thinks they need it, but it is important to realize that the voice which diminishes never mocks. And although the authorial presence in the scene quoted above is certainly disapproving of the impending marriage between Margaret and Henry, and conveys that disapproval by creating a highly comic setting for the proposal, it reveals as well an understanding of the vulnerability of loneliness. Thus when Henry asks Margaret to marry him, or more specifically, "to share my --" (p. 161), her reply is predictably both comic and moving.

His obliqueness--or evasiveness--is matched by her own. Rather than hear her say "yes," we find her instead "holding the piano" (p. 161)

as if by grasping some domestic object she can verify the nature of the experience into which she is entering. We know that it should be Henry whom she is holding, not the piano. We know as well that her capacity for hearing hidden harmonies will at some point separate her from the man whose closest approach to a musical apprehension of the world is to be found in a wallpaper covered with singing parrots. There is pathos behind the comic image of Margaret mutely embracing the piano and it is one that depends for its full effect upon the reader's awareness that the emotions of the characters in question are intensely compressed and circumscribed. A kind of displacement takes place as the piano takes on a significance that usurps the importance of the couple's engagement.

Whether one is talking of Helen's chairs or Henry's piano, Forster's myth-making creates a domestic universe that is both wholly inclusive and wholly English. However, the nature of this myth is one that intimates a human condition that has the possibility of being perpetually embryonic. Although the final picture is most definitely one of "opening out," one still must question the significance of the material from which it has been constructed. In other words: can the embryonic coziness, the intrinsic littleness of English myth—and remember it is the little poets who are to voice it—provide the same aesthetic and emotional satisfaction as its religious and classical counterparts?

The development of Howards End rests on a most paradoxical foundation. On the one hand one is presented with extremely sophisticated, and successful, rhetorical techniques such as the handling of a multifaceted narrative voice. On the other hand, however, Forster's mythical structure reveals what one might call something approaching timidity,

or perhaps reticence is the better word, particularly in comparison with the emotional confidence displayed by The Longest Journey and A Passage to India.

Since the importance of personal relationships is emphasized throughout Howards End, there is one final aspect of Forster's attempt at making an English myth that should be considered: the nature of these human connections. It is obvious that the novels are not particularly approving of marriage; it is even more apparent that many of the short stories, the Italian novels, The Longest Journey, Maurice and A Passage to India imply that some, if not all, of the major relationships are likely to be between members of the same sex. However, in Howards End there are none of the strong sexual overtones of the earlier works: the closest one comes to the erotic is in the brief encounter of Helen and Paul in the garden.

This turning away from sexual tension—even in its most subtle manifestations—might have something to do with that timidity just noted. Or, more possibly, it is not so much a timidity, a fear, as a faltering of spirit, a kind of emotional exhaustion. Forster's England had done much, as he knew, to facilitate the friendly growth of affection; what it evaded was knowledge of physical love, especially between those of the same sex. The closeness of the two siblings, then, might be seen as a mechanism of displacement. In any case, the sisters' relationship is the significant one in Howards End. If nothing else it provides the pair pattern that is archetypally romantic. All else is subsumed by their movements of separation and reunion.

What is not being suggested in this emphasis on the sisters' connection is the point that Stone makes: that together these women are

innately destructive and act out their roles as destroyers of men. His argument sees the ending in the hayfields as a travesty of harmony:

"The book ends with the two girls and their misbegotten heir in complete and undisputed possession of Howards End, in its real as well as its spiritual estate—and with all the human creatures they connected with either maimed, imprisoned, or dead. Once again things had gone on until there were no more men."¹⁰ This sounds rather like those earlier complaints that, in The Longest Journey, Forster killed off almost half of his fictional population.

Perhaps some of the reasons for this uneasy and most negative reading can be found in Stone's introductory comment. Accusing Forster of "hiding out" behind the guise of femininity, he goes on to argue that this "oblique and feminine way of meeting opposition would suggest that Forster may be facing the great world more out of duty than inclination. Such possibilities make one question whether Forster will be able to give the problem of connection, especially connection between men and women, a fair trial . . . Forster's fictional transvestism does not increase our confidence that he will be an impartial mediator."¹¹ Now, there may be something in this idea of Forster "facing the great world more out of duty than inclination." It would explain, in part, why there seems to be this desire to create a myth so embryonic in its coziness and sense of self-protection. However, there is still a serious problem with Stone's statement, for he starts like so many others from the premise that the only significant connection is that which occurs between women and men.

¹⁰ Stone, p. 263.

¹¹ Stone, p. 237.

When most of what Margaret Schlegel says is taken at face value, and when the unexamined assumption is made that her comments are almost always given authorial approval, it is no wonder that so much critical emphasis has been placed on her attempts to connect with Henry Wilcox. I am not for a moment suggesting that her love for him is not a real and valuable one. What I would argue is that her reconciliation with Helen correctly aligns her loyalties, insofar as Forster is concerned, and in doing so provides the enlarging faculties of compassion which can take in a broken old man. But to say, as does Stone, that she and Helen are responsible for the Wilcox collapse is to ignore the directions provided by the narrative voice.

The virtuosity with which Forster uses this voice endows it with a presence, a personality if you will, both unique and endearing. And if the England behind Forster's myth-making is not always the stuff of great heroes, any limitations encountered might lie not so much in the mythic structure apprehended by his own imagination as in the materials provided by the English themselves. However, although Forster seems to imply that it is hard, and gets harder, to be passionate in a country, even in a landscape, so distrustful of the grand gesture, a very considerable compensation comes about through the unflinching resources of affection and humour. It is so typical of him that, after both character and reader have been conducted through an often hazardous, and sometimes agonizingly painful journey through experience, the playful aspect of his Hermes-like guide should triumph.

There is one final display of the ventriloquist's art. Unhappiness is over, order is restored, and surely it is not only Helen one hears saying: "We've seen to the very end, and it'll be such a crop of hay as never!" Such a crop of hay, indeed.

Comedy, Courtesy, and A Passage to India

India is particularly well suited as the setting for E.M. Forster's final, and most comic, novel. Comedy and domesticity are a natural pair and the Indian locale of A Passage to India lends itself to the investigation of the relationship between that pair because, far more than England, it is a place where the domestic life is often public.

However, with the exception of Kenneth Burke's excellent discussion of Passage as "social comedy,"¹ none of the major critics has treated comedy in this novel as anything other than incidental. The presence of the comic spirit is duly noted and then the subject is dropped. Colmer says: "The ironic comedy that is sustained throughout the whole of the last part suggests that a complete version of life must admit the comic 'there is fun in Heaven'."² Bradbury makes the all-too-common critical assumption that poetry and comedy are somehow antithetical and that for Forster "there is this instinct towards 'poetry,' which goes with the view of art as a symbolist unity; and there is the comedy and irony, the belittling aspect of his tone, which brings in the problems and difficulties of the contingent world."³ If comedy is to be taken

1 Kenneth Burke, "Social and Cosmic Mystery: A Passage to India," Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 233-39.

2 John Colmer, E.M. Forster: The Personal Voice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 160.

3 Malcolm Bradbury, "Two Passages to India: Forster as Victorian and Modern," E.M. Forster: "A Passage to India" (London: Macmillan Casebook Series, 1970), p. 231.

at all seriously, then, as Bradbury says, it is on the level with which Colmer is concerned: "Temple" as evidence of the "comic sublime."⁴

Brower, on the other hand, sees the final section of Passage as an unsuccessful attempt to give "dramatic meaning to the Temple as a symbol of unity."⁵ And this reading follows his perception of the Temple as a "crudely ironic," "sometimes farcical"⁶ symbol. McConkey, in treating Passage as Forster's "prophetic novel" follows predictably the author's own dictum in Aspects of the Novel: "Prophetic fiction, then, seems to have definite characteristics. It demands humility and the absence of the sense of humour."⁷ And White, as Stone has pointed out, "finds a disparity between comic matter and cosmic meaning in the book."⁸ Indeed, it is Stone himself who comes closest to resolving the conflict between the comic and the cosmic. Talking of the "spiritual gusto and mud-splattered hilarity of the book's last section" he goes on to say: "It almost seems that prophecy and a sense

See Herz for a discussion of the connection of comedy and "beauty."
"Introduction: In Search of the Comic Muse." Forthcoming in a collection on EMF, edited by Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin, to be published by Macmillan, 1980.

⁴ Bradbury, p. 239.

⁵ Reuben A. Brower, "The Twilight of the Double Vision: Symbol and Irony in A Passage to India," E.M. Forster: "A Passage to India," p. 130.

⁶ Brower, p. 127.

⁷ E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), p. 94.

⁸ Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 338.

of humour may not, after all, be utterly incompatible."⁹ Consequently, Stone's conclusion about the meaning of Passage is one that grows naturally from his understanding that the guiding spirit of the work is comic in its ultimate inclusiveness: "we are in fact one."¹⁰

What all of these critics have in common is their treatment of the novel as one whose meaning is cosmic, whose mystery is visionary (or prophetic) and essentially unknowable. Indeed, it is not difficult to see (or hear might be the more accurate word if one keeps in mind Forster's comments about "song")¹¹ Passage in terms of prophecy for the resonance of its symbolic structure alone, a structure that has been competently discussed as "rhythm",¹² creates an undeniable impression of the unity that is crucial to Forster's concept of the prophetic novel. However, such an approach is only one "way-in" (to use Burke's terminology). Burke's own way-in is through the door marked "social comedy" and it is this particular approach that seems to me to offer the most illumination of Passage as the culmination of Forster's domestic, comic vision.

Before beginning, some speculation might be in order concerning the reasons for this overwhelming emphasis on entry through the door

⁹ Stone, p. 303.

¹⁰ Stone, p. 339.

¹¹ Aspects, ch. 7, especially p. 86 and p. 94.

¹² For a discussion on rhythm in A Passage to India, see E.K. Brown, Rhythm in the Novel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), pp. 3-30; James McConkey, The Novels of E.M. Forster (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), pp. 132-160; Stone, pp. 341-46.

marked "cosmic mystery." As Lodge has pointed out,¹³ the development and dare one say institutionalization of "new criticism" tended to give to poetry an artistic value not so easily awarded to the novel. Poetry was, of course, suited to such modes of analysis in a way that the cumbersome apparatus of the novel was not. Novels, therefore, especially modern ones, if they were to be read successfully had to be seen more in terms of "a bundle of various things not human beings"¹⁴ than as the comings and goings of everyday people, for that bundle was "art" and those people were not. Symbols became especially significant and if a concept like rhythm could be attached to any suitable novel--as it can to Forster's without any strain--it was in order to validate that novel's claim to speak for itself as a work of art. Moreover another distinction came into existence: one that tended to separate "human beings" in the novel from the language they spoke. Thus a novel could be successful although it was critically judged that its language was not.

Possibly the reason for Forster's own rather surprising disregard in Aspects of language as a category of novel-making is that insofar as Forster was concerned language and human beings are one and the same. Such a point of view is overlooked by critics as disparate in their approaches to fiction as Trilling¹⁵ and Stone. Both offer valuable criticism of Passage but it is criticism limited by the common suppositions

¹³ David Lodge, Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

¹⁴ Aspects, p. 73.

¹⁵ Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster (New York: New Directions, 1943).

of modern critical theories. Trilling belongs to the school which sees the novel as a bundle of human beings who engage primarily in political acts rather than in linguistic ones (not that the two can be separated). Stone occupies the furthest possible position at the other end of the critical spectrum and devotes all of his intellectual energies to the exposition of the symbol and that bundle of various things not human beings takes on the massive shape of nothing less than the "world mountain" itself.

While Burke fully recognizes that Passage can be investigated in terms of its cosmic mystery, he is a critic who is particularly well-equipped to deal with the political, social and linguistic strategies that are employed by comedy. Defining, in part, the comic mood as "ironically sympathetic contemplation," Burke goes on to discuss how the comic materials in Passage hint at contained mysteries:

The muddle of castes and classes in India itself, capped by the essential conflict between the natives, and the British officials . . . allows for a maximum number of interesting embarrassments in personal relations. Everybody is subtly at odds with everybody else; every situation treated by Forster acutely involves the "mysteries" that result from marked social differentiation—and these further accentuated by the fact that, since India is in a state of acute transition, along with the traditional formalities due to such a clutter of social ratings there is much improvising of protocol.¹⁶

Once you view the novel in terms of the embarrassments due to differences of social status (be they among different castes or classes of native, or between natives and colonialists, or between the sexes, or between members of the same sex as affected by all of these disparities) you confront a realm of compensatory possibilities. Such differences set the conditions that allow for new kinds of gallantry (modes of imagination neither necessary nor

possible to ways of life that are not encumbered by such intensifications of difference). There is a mystique of such gallantry. And it's the point at which (in terms of this particular novel) "mystery" and "muddle" overlap. For there is always the opportunity for some kind of gallantry, when persons confront one another with respect (or polite tentativeness) while they experience at the same time a compelling sense of disparateness.¹⁷

If the mystery in Passage is one that for the most part resides in "gallantry," then its essence is social. I will go one step further and say that this mystery is not only social, it is domestic.

One can get a clear idea of how crucial Burke's concept of gallantry is if one borrows another of his concepts: that of the "key term."¹⁸ His major example was Forster's use of "extraordinary"; mine will be the prevalence of "courtesy", its variations, and its corollary, "insult." It is, moreover, a concept intimately connected with the idea of the "invited guest."¹⁹ The act of invitation is, in Forster's view, fundamentally a domestic one for it revolves around the idea of inclusion and exclusion from the home. (Indeed, as Forster himself said: A Passage to India is about the "search of the human race for a more lasting home, about the universe as embodied in the Indian earth and the Indian sky.")²⁰

17 Burke, p. 227.

18 Burke, p. 230. See also his discussion of "attendant terms" on p. 232.

19 See the opening paragraph of E.M. Forster, A Passage to India, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1978): "The streets are mean, the temples ineffective, and though a few fine houses exist they are hidden away in gardens or down alleys whose filth deters all but the invited guest."

20 In the introduction to the Abinger Passage, p. xxv. Stallybrass quotes from the still unpublished essay, "Three Countries." The ms-cum-typescript of the 1950s is at Kings College, Cambridge.

And the courtesy implicit in that act suggests both a recognition of the possibilities of social embarrassments and a willingness to do something about them.

Burke put his finger on it exactly when he termed such gallantry a mode of imagination. It is precisely this imaginative territory which separates (and here for the purposes of argument I am being somewhat reductive) the chivalrous English from the courteous Indians. Indeed, chivalry is not so much an action of invitation as one that implies rejection. For example, Turton the Collector is undisputably chivalrous in his conduct towards Adela Quested before the trial for Aziz's assault. However, on the way to that trial—which will indeed "try" the "patience" (Mrs. Moore's game) of everyone involved—the narrative voice quietly points out the degree of concealed hostility in the Collector's actions.

[Turton] caught sight of some obscenities upon a long blank wall and beneath his chivalry to Miss Quested resentment lurked, waiting its day—and perhaps there is a grain of resentment in all chivalry. (p. 204)

How precisely Forster connects obscenity with chivalry and stresses their common foundation of hostility—sexual hostility—and how deftly he separates them again. Obscenity on the wall is hatred poured forth, not measured in grains of resentment. And the difference between the two is primarily imaginative. An abundant imagination, and a culture that encourages this sort of generosity, is not likely to run short of feeling. In "Notes on the English Character," Forster recalls being chided by an Indian friend: "Do you measure out your emotions as if they were potatoes?" In his own defense he replies:

. . . I valued emotion as much as he did, but used it differently; if I poured it out on small occasions I

was afraid of having none left for the great ones, and of being bankrupt at the crisis of life. Note the word "bankrupt". I spoke as a member of a prudent middle-class nation, always anxious to meet my liabilities. But my friend spoke as an Oriental, and the Oriental has behind him a tradition, not of middle-class prudence, but of kingly munificence and splendour. He feels his resources are endless, just as John Bull feels his are finite.²¹

One gets some idea of the comic possibilities in the natural conflict between the miserliness of chivalry and the generosity of courtesy in Mohammed Latif's treatment of Mrs. Moore as they return from the expedition to the Marabar Caves: "Mrs. Moore slept, swaying against the rods of the howdah, Mohammed Latif embraced her with efficiency and respect" (p. 150). The humour comes from the yoking together of what, for the purposes of this paper, is an Oriental act--the embrace--and the language of England and her empire which conceives of respect as a surrogate for affection and thus something emotionally efficient.

Domestic comedy in Passage has a number of components and in each case methods traditional to the English comic mode are illumined by their placement in an Indian setting. The most important of these has to do with the actions of invitation and withdrawal that accrue to the concept of the invited guest. Another significant aspect of Forster's comic strategy concerns itself with the exploration of a character, or set of characters, whose ambiguous social relationship to the rest of the cast does much to reveal the comedy of human differentiation: the buffoon. The buffoon provides the source of a good deal of the realization of yet another component of the comedy: the idea of surrogate action, of characters and situations taking on new and sometimes

surprising dimensions as they fill in for previously articulated people and events. Each category is an integral part of the others; these comic materials run into one another much in the way that do the colors in a piece of Madras cloth.

The scenario of the invited guest—a scenario which obviously has a religious counterpart in Godbole's spiritual hospitality: "come, come"—presents an extremely successful working out of a balance between Burke's "traditional formalities" and the "improvising of protocol." Forster's subtle manipulation of the social and linguistic strategies inherent in acts of hospitality is particularly evident in chapter nine where the "slightly ill" Aziz plays host to a number of friends and acquaintances. There is a somewhat improvisational quality underlying his alternate movements of invitation and withdrawal—movements accompanied by the physical motions of coming out of or going in to his quilt.

For example: hearing the sounds outside of "someone who had called to inquire," "with a sincere groan he wrapped himself in his quilt" (p. 94). This is a good illustration of the social correlative to the cosmic meanings that Stone attaches to Passage's frequent movements of expansion and contraction.²² As Aziz begins to respond to the affectionate presence of his friends, there is a corresponding gesture of expansiveness—a kind of psychological hospitality. Even the noun "quilt" expands in its attributes and as Aziz becomes more and more interested in social interaction, he peeps "out of the Bright crimson folds of the quilt" (p. 95, my emphasis).

22

Stone, p. 298.

This impression of life opening out establishes a mood conducive to comedy and as the atmosphere becomes more comic, the improvisation becomes more and more elaborate. Raff's comments regarding the nature of Professor Godbole's illness begin with the traditional formality which inquires after one's health but soon reveal in their wildly improvisational qualities a mode of imagination that is gallant in its desire to provide the company with entertainment. Initially he offers information only, but information calculated to arouse the curiosity that accompanies suspicion:

Professor Godbole, who also attended has sickened too, which seems rather a curious thing, does it not? (p. 95)

Raff then begins to improvise and when asked the nature of Godbole's illness

murmured the word "Diarrhoea", but took courage as soon as it had been uttered, for it improved his position.

One notices that his social "position" is directly proportional to the success of his function as entertainer and he senses something of this, too, for upon being asked if there is vomiting also (which in all likelihood would indicate the presence of cholera) he replies and qualifies that reply with an improvisational master-stroke:

Oh yes indeed, sir, and the serious pains.

Having aroused such a degree of interest in his elders and betters --an interest which is directly proportional to the specificity of Raff's imagination in its conjuration of the particular pains that accompany cholera--he intuitively understands that it would be impolite not to gratify it. And the value of Raff's improvised entertainment lies in the degree to which the spectators are moved to become participants. It is Aziz himself, who represents the epitome of participation, who as host directs

the festivities when he appropriates the product of Rafi's imagination and brings the matter to a resounding climax:

That settles it. In twenty-four hours he will be dead.
(p. 96)

Godbole's rapid fictional demise serves two functions in the comedy of entertainment. As the particularity of a "suffering individual" becomes dissolved into the generality of "All illness proceeds from Hindus," Forster's basic model of social differentiation is established: individuals acting as individuals can usually, despite their differences, effect some "secret understanding of the heart"; individuals assimilated into national, religious or linguistic groups usually prevent that kind of connection. But when the individual sensibility emerges, as does Aziz's, the response turns again towards gestures of hospitality. What motivates Aziz to issue "still further from his quilt" (p. 96) is that to which the poet in him responds: pathos. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that Aziz's role as poet is as the provider of a public entertainment. The improvisational quality of the social response which led to the invention of Godbole's death is now replaced by more traditional and formal modes of expression, those which "should touch the hearer with a sense of his own weakness, and should institute some comparison between mankind and flowers." The movement of expansion now becomes complete: "as a calm assurance came the feeling that India was one."

What one has seen thus far in chapter 9 is the development of various patterns of social response. However, social gestures are inextricably rooted in linguistic ones. Take, for example, Mr. Syed Mohammed's vigorous denunciation of Hindus: "His outburst took some time, and in his excitement he fell into Punjabi (he came from that

side) and was unintelligible" (p. 96). With the introduction of this linguistic confusion, one is presented with another, more ironic, dimension of the movements of expansion and contraction. The unintelligibility of Syed Mohammed's bigotry renders it comically deflated. As an integral part of the pattern of social differentiation, however, ("he came from that side") its meaning expands to encompass the symbolic heart of Passage's conflict: Adela Quested's echo—itsself summing up the muddle of language that is India—is the ultimate expression of the unintelligible and incomprehensible.

As Aziz entertains his friends and acquaintances, Forster effectively conveys the impression that the speakers communicate through a wholly improvised linguistic medium, one which in fact belongs to none.²³ Indeed, the strain of defining this common meeting-ground of language is evident in the sense of contraction that accompanies the entry of Panna Lal. Hearing Lal approach, Aziz has "retired under his quilt" and entertainment takes a new direction. Certainly, there is some withdrawal of hospitality, although not necessarily of entertainment. The imaginative (and affectionate) expansiveness that prophesized Godhole's imminent death shrinks when faced with the fact of "haemorrhoids."

23 This statement is in contradiction to a remark made by Santha Rama Rau and quoted in K. Natwar-Singh, ed. E.M. Forster: A Tribute (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 65. Rama Rau says: "Forster persuades you by characterization and without any word of exposition, that his Indians are speaking to each other in their own language, and yet catches the special lilt and idiom of Indian-English when they are talking to the colonial British . . ."

Rama Rau's comments are correct insofar as they apply to certain passages in the text—such as the conversation, in chapter 2, between Aziz, Hamidullah, and Mahmud Ali. Her error lies in the generalized nature of her remarks.

This disclosure leads to new forms of improvisation, ones that are based on the non-traditional use of the English language. And, as Forster makes clear, such linguistic improvisation is not only a vehicle for communication of the most basic kind between Urdu speakers and Hindi speakers, for example; it exists independently as a sophisticated, complex and highly imaginative language.

However, this non-traditional language incorporates clearly defined forms of politeness. Even the language of insult must be phrased in what to Western ears are exaggeratedly polite terms. Part of the innate courtesy of the Indian characters expresses itself in the avoidance of direct accusation in favor of more generalized forms of condemnation.

Thus:

"Dr. Lal!"

"Dr. Aziz?"

"You sit on my leg."

"I beg pardon, but some might say your leg kicks." (p. 103)

Panna Lal's response is linguistically complex. The intentionally vague "some might say" excuses Lal from the impoliteness of direct accusation while at the same time there is a subtle undercutting of that politeness in the generalized "I beg pardon"; it is not Aziz's pardon that is being asked but rather that of those with legs in general. This intentional vagueness, however, carries within its courtesy, the seeds of subversive insult. "How is stomach? . . . how head?" (p. 99) reveals that the traditional politeness of inquiring after one's health is only perfunctory. By leaving out the article, Lal fails to discriminate and ironically Aziz's illness is reduced to the insignificance of its general terms.

But this is the role Aziz expects of Panna Lal and indeed he finds Lal's lack of proficiency in English amusing. Each side, then, has

satisfactorily improvised his part in the entertainment, an entertainment which to a considerable degree develops from the conflict between Hindu generality and the particularity that is characteristic of Muslim verbal expression. (Remember Rafi's deliberate insertion of the article in his description of "the stomach pains" that accompany cholera). The nature of this conflict is well conveyed when tempers rise after the attempt to chastize Rafi for his inventions:

"It is only a boy," said Dr. Panna Lal, appeased.

"Even boys must learn," said Ram Chand.

"Your own son failing to pass the lowest standard, I think," said Syed Mohammed suddenly.

"Oh, indeed? Oh yes, perhaps. He has not the advantage of a relative in the Prosperity Printing Press."

(p. 100)

Although their rhetorical strategies are different, for both sides in the dispute the pattern is one of diminution and deflection. The indirectness of Panna Lal's neutral pronoun "it" establishes the insignificance of Rafi's status. Syed Mohammed deflects the thrust of his own insulting comments by using the imprecise "failing" (which suggests one's choice of past, present or future action); it also, however, with wicked irony suggests a continuous condition of failure. Ram Chand sarcastically parries the particularity of Syed Mohammed's blow by playing for time through the enactment of a kind of spurious agreement-- "Oh, indeed? Oh yes, perhaps" and then delivering what appears to be a triumphant non sequitur. The connection between success in school and a relative in the Prosperity Printing Press is not entirely clear, although his idiomatic error implies that the relative is not, as we would say, "in publishing" but actually inside the printing press itself like some all-controlling, Indian version of the deus ex machina. Certainly, within Ram Chand's mind there is a metaphoric logic which

equates printing presses, books, learning and classrooms. By making this direct accusation he has reached the limits of his capacity for expressing the particular.

Above all, what the comedy of chapter nine emphasizes is that the social and linguistic differences among these groups of men are subservient to the agreed-upon forms of entertainment that are fundamental to a society which stresses the importance of courtesy. Something much different occurs when Indians and English meet and that difference can be summed up in one word: embarrassment. The security of knowing the role (traditional or improvised) one is expected to play is absent. A case in point is provided when Ronny and Adela go for a drive with the Nawab Bahadur. A "spurious unity" (p. 86) descends upon the couple and it is one which suggests the fundamental dichotomy between Indian courtesy and English chivalry. Courtesy prompts the Nawab to offer his car; chivalry has Ronny offer the suggestion that Adela might enjoy the ride. Its corollary--sexual embarrassment--leads to their engagement. The chapter's comic strategy is interesting in its investigation of the meanings of various kinds of sexual embarrassments and their importance in the plot of the novel.

Chivalry is evident when Adela attempts to shake the Nawab's hand. Her act is discourteous in the extreme because it is sexually embarrassing, a fact of which she is utterly unaware. That act also, ironically, illustrates Burke's notion of the mystique of gallantry: the Nawab's reaction is to judge that "from so wanton a gesture . . . she was new to his country, but he paid little heed. Women who exposed their faces became by that one act so mysterious to him that he took them at the valuation of their menfolk . . ." (p. 78, my emphasis). This mysterious-

ness is something akin to the mystery of Syed Mohammed's unintelligible speech. Both are suggestive of the mystery, inherent in social relationships, that forms the larger design of the work. If Syed Mohammed's words suggested the echo of ceaseless linguistic confusion, the Nawab's thoughts upon meeting Adela foreshadow the sexual and social confusion that is directly responsible for that echo.

Further evidence of such social and sexual confusion occurs after the crash of the Nawab's car when the assembled party returns with Miss Derek—and her presence in this scene suggests a foreshadowing of that same perverse and subtle malignity that is conveyed as she carries Adela off after the incident in the Caves. The Nawab suspects, and connects, an act of discourtesy and one of sexual impropriety:

. . . he suspected that his audience felt no interest, and that the City Magistrate fondled either Maiden behind the cover of the harmonium, but good breeding compelled him to continue . . . (p. 85)

However, the imaginative generosity of the Nawab's suspicions reveal that even as a private act his mind naturally creates forms of entertainment for one cannot deny that both he and we are entertained by these extravagant suppositions. (It may also be significant that his conception of sexual insult is one that emphasizes that the people involved entertain each other). The absurdity of the charge is not so much a negative comment upon the Nawab's suspicions as it is upon the engagement of Ronny and Adela. This pervasive atmosphere of sexual cross-purposes, however, suggests a tragic corollary: the Nawab's mistake, Ronny and Adela's mistake, foreshadow the crucial mistake that surrounds the mystery of the events in the Caves.

When Adela returns to Chandrapore with the news that Aziz has assaulted her, that "assault" is translated by the local Anglo-Indian

community into "insult";²⁴ indeed, the linguistic similarity between these words reinforces their identification as part of the same process of colonial thought. An implicitly sexual act, then, becomes perceived as a social one and the Nawab's movement from discourtesy to intimations of sexual impropriety is reversed. As Burke says, "the embarrassments of empire invariably have counterparts in sexual embarrassments, be they between members of the same or opposite sexes."²⁵ All of the elaborate forms of comedy that infuse the first half of the novel (to the end of chapter 15)--acceptance, rejection, invitation, withdrawal, affection and insult--sound the preliminary notes of the crash that ultimately must result from much larger embarrassments.

Characteristically, Forster reduces the immense scale of empire into the more precise and manageable realm of domestic confusion. The fictional techniques he uses are particularly well suited to the conflicts of Passage because they pit forms of Indian entertainment against an English perception of that entertainment as something intrinsically embarrassing. The greatest potential for the investigation of modes of embarrassment lies in the character of the buffoon whose interest and effectiveness result from the juxtaposition of Indian character with a comic technique traditional to English literature. In Passage, the buffoon

24 Variations on the theme of insult occur in Passage: "Miss Quested has been insulted . . ." (p. 154); "that is a repetition of your insult in an aggravated form" (p. 155); "[Aziz] made insulting advances" (p. 158); "the insult that had befallen Ronny" (p. 178).

25 Burke, p. 226. He adds in a footnote: "All sociopolitical relationships are expressible in terms of intimate, personal relationships—and these in turn are reducible to analogous sexual relationships. For instance, a general condition of conflict between classes can be stated in terms of private conflicts between individuals. And these in turn might be 'dramatized' by expression in some sexual terms as seduction, rape, or sadism."

more than any other type of character paradoxically acts as a unifying force as he upholds the burdens of social and cultural differentiation. Like Rafi's speech about the nature of Godbole's illness, buffoonery in its Indian context is a highly appreciated form of entertainment. And a good part of its success as a comic strategy rests on its deceptively unsophisticated appeal.

There are three major sources of buffoonery in Passage: Mohammed Latif, Panna Lal and Professor Godbole (whose function as buffoon has already been hinted at, albeit in a highly displaced manner, in the conversation at Aziz's which kills him off rapidly from cholera and resurrects him through haemorrhoids). These characters function as fictional peace-keepers who take upon themselves their society's real or potential embarrassments. Although one might be tempted to include some of the less pleasant Anglo-Indians, the temptation must be resisted for the Anglo-Indians in their more ridiculous moments bred hostility not dissipate it.

Within the context of the English literary tradition, Mohammed Latif is the most typical buffoon. His purpose in any scene is to increase the "mood of festivity" and his role as a member of Hamidullah's household is very much that of what Frye calls the oldest example of the buffoon, the parasite.²⁶ This is how Forster introduces him:

Elaine Showalter, "A Passage to India as 'Marriage Fiction': Forster's Sexual Politics," Women and Literature, 5:11 (1977), p. 4, says that "Passage assumes in its narrative a correspondence between sexual and political relations." She also quotes George Steiner, "Under the Greenwood Tree," New Yorker October 9, 1971, p. 166 who sees Passage as a "reworking of the plot of Maurice, with the encounters between white and native, between emancipated rulers and 'advanced' Indians . . . a brilliant projection of the confrontation between society and the homosexual."

²⁶ Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (1957; rpt. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 175.

They [Aziz and Hamidullah] sat down to meat with a distant cousin of the house, Mohammed Latif, who lived on Hamidullah's bounty and who occupied the position neither of a servant nor of an equal. . . . A gentle, happy, and dishonest old man; all his life he had never done a stroke of work.

(p. 9, my emphasis)

His unique position in the complex scale of Indian social differentiation is clear when one contemplates his first act. Aziz has called for his bike and Mohammed Latif's response is ambiguous to say the least:

"Slightly immersed in the realms of matter, he laid his hand on the bicycle's saddle, while a servant did the actual wheeling. Between them they took it over a tin-tack" (p. 10). This implied image of a punctured tire indicates that the ambiguities of his social position are closely connected to the function of that position: comic deflation.²⁷

However, the buffoon is not nearly as peripheral as his relationships with the social and material world might seem to imply. What he gains from his condition of perpetual vagueness is flexibility—and we have seen that same kind of flexibility in adapting to a potentially hostile situation in the deliberate vagueness of Panna Lal when he visits the ailing Aziz. Such fictional suppleness allows for the transcendence of usually rigid social barriers (and in the more purely Indian context of metaphysical ones, if one considers, for example, to what extent Professor Godbole's vagueness with regard to the material world allows

27 One of the devices Forster uses to indicate the confusion or muddle inherent in ambiguous social relationships is to set up a sequence of actions that might be called the rhythm of puncture. One thinks of Adela and the cactus thorns, for example, or Ralph Moore being stung by a bee. The impression created is that of the material world being pierced in such a way as to allow the penetration of the metaphysical one. Another example that comes to mind is from The Longest Journey: Stephen Wonham's frightening encounter with sleep is followed by the image of Mr. Talling pulling out the thorns which have become embedded in his flesh.

him to leave it for a more spiritual one). In the terms of this comedy, the buffoon is the equivalent of the tragic scapegoat as he acts as a kind of safety valve, releasing dangerous tensions from an overburdened society.

Forster adapts another traditional form of buffoon--the cook or master of ceremonies²⁸--to the Indian experience and in doing so emphasizes not the cook as such but rather the complex rituals of social differentiation that accompany the consumption of food. As in the case of Mohammed Latif, one's first introduction to Professor Godbole occurs during the course of a meal: tea at Fielding's. Like Mohammed Latif's presence at Hamidullah's dinner, Godbole's taking of tea involves the ambiguity of simultaneous participation and withdrawal (from both the company and the food) and turns the whole into yet another form of entertainment:

Godbole took his tea at a little distance from the outcasts, from a low table placed slightly behind him, to which he stretched back, and as if he were encountered food by accident; all feigned indifference to Professor Godbole's tea. . . . The ladies were interested in him, and hoped that he would supplement Dr. Aziz by saying something about religion. But he only ate--ate and ate, smiling, never letting his eyes catch sight of his hand. (p. 65)

Everyone immediately rose, with the exception of Professor Godbole, who was finishing a banana. (p. 66)

These highly comic moments of courtesy and hospitality reveal again those characteristic patterns of expansion and contradiction that one expects from Passage. As Godbole's appetite expands ("ate--ate and ate"), he does in fact say "something about religion"; the ritualistic act of

²⁸ Frye, p. 175.

eating suggests its correspondence to a ritualistic participation in the universe.²⁹ Comic gluttony, then, however, delicately phrased, implies some connection with a largeness, an inclusiveness of spirit. Mysteriously, that same impression of largeness remains behind when the comedy itself sharply contracts its focus. From the generality associated with Godbole's continuous action of eating, the perspective narrows to a single object: the banana. Now why a banana is more comic than an orange, pear or blueberry, I am not certain. In any case, bananas do invoke a sense of the ridiculous. They are not serious, like the apple connected with the archetypal fall; nor, more significantly, are they symbolic like the mangoes that, for Aziz, represent India's sensuality.³⁰ They certainly are not sublime--possibly because they are so commonplace. Indeed, they are domestic.

This scene of comic ridiculousness, however, comments ironically on the comic sublimity of the conversation among the other guests at the tea. While Godbole steadily eats, the others for the most part only talk and appropriately their conversation is about food: more specifically about mangoes. Aziz gives mangoes the symbolic attributes of the "real" India. The comedy of juxtaposition contrasts the symbolic and mysterious (mango) and the real (banana) in a way that throws a good deal of light upon Adela's potentially embarrassing misconceptions, not only with regard to the nature of India but more importantly with regard

²⁹ Burke says of Godbole's contribution to the comedy: "One must always look upon Professor Godbole's social aloofness in terms of such contrasting ritual or formal oneness. . . ." (p. 231).

³⁰ An embarrassing scene takes place between Fielding and Aziz, during a moment of friendship and intimacy when they are talking of

to the nature of personal (and sexual) relations. Aziz's talk of mangoes reveals some subtle threat to Adela's equilibrium; indeed, it reveals possibilities of human behavior that frighten her and in consequence she seemingly spontaneously decides to leave both India and Ronny. Her instincts are, of course, right although shortly after she will rescind that decision. Even the language of her refusal indicates the anxiety and fear behind its politeness. Pressed by Aziz to "settle altogether in India," she responds "I'm afraid I can't do that" (p. 72, my emphasis).

Adela cannot come out and say: "I am afraid of India," "I am afraid of personal and sexual relations," "I am afraid of myself and that I have made the wrong decision." Rather, what she and the others do, as they watch Godbole eat, is subject personal differences to the polite rituals of "feigned indifference." There is, however, a crucial point at which that feigned indifference becomes real and as this shift takes place indifference becomes revealed as the fundamental antithesis to courtesy.

During the course of the expedition to the Marabar Caves, it becomes clear that the major difference between Adela and Aziz lies in the fact that she is "indifferent to what she [does] but desirous of being amiable" (p. 139). India, however, insists that these two actions be separated. Indifference and amiability provide the opposing poles of Passage's two major kinds of experience. Adela's feelings reveal an oxymoronic carelessness that resides in the heart of the novel's conflict. If, as Burke has suggested, mystery is located in acts of gallantry, then the genuinely indifferent mind, the mind incapable of apprehending detail, is the true repository of muddle.

The difference between Adela's indifference and that of Mrs. Moore lies paradoxically in the latter's obvious withdrawal from amiability. However, she never withdraws from courtesy, for courtesy in Passage is primarily an act of the imagination. As the novel makes quite clear, Mrs. Moore's spirit dispenses "kindness, kindness, and more kindness" regardless of whether she is physically and emotionally in contact with the other characters. This is evident at the time she leaves India when, in a moment both comic and moving, "thousands of coconut palms appeared all round the anchorage and climbed the hills to wave her farewell" (p. 200). Their courtesy is a part of her courtesy, but only a part. Here, as in so many other places, Forster ironically reinvents the meanings of pathetic fallacy; response exists in these Indian palm trees in a way that indicates that they have a life of their own. That life, however, is complementary to Mrs. Moore's and the mood established is crucial to the work as a whole: connection through separation.

Comic strategies are constantly at work trying to counteract the enervating effects of indifference. The expedition to the Marabar Caves, for example, an expedition which Herz calls the "familiar Box Hill picnic,"³¹ attempts to subject the vast, indifferent Indian landscape to the vigorous forces of Aziz's particular brand of domesticity. A great deal of the humour that resides in the scene results from his desire to take the accoutrements of home with him in order to demystify an encounter with the unknown—be it geographical or social. Another aspect of the amusement emphasizes that the presence of familiar and useful domestic objects turns the essence of domesticity inside out—

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Herz, "Introduction: In Search of the Comic Muse."

what is usually private now becomes public. And as is the case with any revelation, any moment of unexpectedness, one's initial response is comic surprise. Every object that Aziz loads onto the train that is to take them to the Caves suggests, to the English mind, something fundamentally displaced, as when Adela and Mrs. Moore witness "the sudden irruption of Mahmoud Ali's butler from the lavatory with tea and poached eggs upon a tray" (p. 126).

However, from the Indian perspective, the inclusion of tea and poached eggs with the other objects of the "comic 'purdah' carriage"—"piles of rugs and bolsters, the rolling melons, the scent of sweet oils, the ladder, the brass-bound box"—suggests not undifferentiated muddle but the mysteries of domesticity: each object is infused with its own kind of energy and with that energy struggles to counteract the great "ou-houm". Forster has made the point before in his essay "The Emperor Bahur":

His admirers—and he had many—have called him naïf, because they think it somewhat silly of an emperor to love poetry and swimming for their own sake, and to record many years afterwards that the first time a raft struck, a china cup, a spoon, and a cymbal fell into the water, whereas the second time the raft struck, a nobleman fell in, just as he was cutting up a melon.³²

Here two comic techniques are connected: the act of buffoonery (the nobleman falling in) and the exposition of the catalogue.³³ Much the same thing occurs in Passage when Mohammed Latif, in his role as "major-domo" oversees, in his own fashion, the loading of the purdah.

³² Abinger Harvest, p. 293.

³³ See Molly Tinsley's discussion of the catalogue in "Muddle Et Cetera: Syntax in A Passage to India," forthcoming in a collection of essays on EMF, edited by Judith Schärer Hers and Robert K. Martin, cited above.

carriage. As the carriage takes on its contents it suggests a variation of the act of domestic stock-taking, of inventory control.

Much had still to enter the purdah carriage--a box bound with brass, a melon wearing a fez, a towel containing guavas, a step-ladder and a gun. (p. 121)

The poor relative exchanged fezzes with the melon, and peeped out the window of the railway carriage, whose confusion he was superintending. (p. 122)

In the exchange of fezzes with the melon, Mohammed Latif rights some tiny wrong and acts out a ritual of object differentiation that is intended to relieve the general and considerable anxiety that accompanies Aziz's perceptions of social differentiation.

Like most buffoons, Mohammed Latif seems almost a natural feature of the human landscape—a somewhat more fictionally evolved version of the punkah-wallah in the courtroom. On a relatively simple level, his role as major-domo allows him to function, briefly, as a surrogate for Aziz. There comes a time, of course, when that function breaks down and faced with the immensity of the Caves whose attributes are unknowable, the forms of domesticity are momentarily ineffectual.

A much more significant development of the idea of surrogate action occurs after the trial, after Aziz's innocence has been made public. The revelrout (to use Burke's term) which follows, like all celebrations of that nature, suggests both tension and its release. Buffoonery becomes a conscious and deliberate strategy for dealing with a potentially dangerous situation. And who should emerge from this celebratory confusion but the figure of Panna Lal.

Initially, all one knows of him is that he goes "smash into our hollyhocks" (p. 35) during the Bridge Party. Indeed, at that time he is

so much a part of the undifferentiated human landscape (or more precisely one which is divided into two undifferentiated groups of guests: Anglo-Indian and Indian) that it is not until later that he is actually identified (pp. 52, 79). Quite a transformation has taken place by the time one encounters him at the hospital during the revelrout. In this case, the displacement of social tensions involves the buffoon's sophisticated manipulation of language:

. . . Here was a mob entirely desirous of [Panna Lal's] blood, and the orderlies were mutinous and would not help him over the back wall, or rather hoisted him and let him drop back, to the satisfaction of the patients. In agony he cried, "Man can but die the once," and waddled across the compound to meet the invasion salaaming with one hand and holding up a pale yellow umbrella in the other. "Oh, forgive me," he whined as he approached the victorious landau. "Oh, Dr. Aziz, forgive the wicked lies I told." Aziz was silent, the others thickened their throats and threw up their chips in token of scorn. "I was afraid, I was mislaid," the suppliant continued. "I was mislaid here, there, and everywhere as regards your character. Oh, forgive the poor old hakim who gave you milk when ill! Oh Nawab Bahadur, whoever merciful, is it my poor little dispensary you require? Take every cursed bottle." Agitated, but alert, he saw them smile at his indifferent English, and suddenly he started playing the buffoon, flung down his umbrella, trod through it, and struck himself upon the nose. He knew what he was doing, and so did they. There was nothing pathetic or eternal in the degradation of such a man. Of ignoble origin, Dr. Panna Lal possessed nothing that could be disgraced, and he wisely decided to make the other Indians feel like kings, because it would put them into better tempers. When he found they wanted Nureddin, he skipped like a goat, he scuttled like a hen to do their bidding, the hospital was saved, and to the end of his life he could not understand why he had not obtained promotion on the morning's work. "Promptness, sir, promptness similar to you," was the argument he employed to Major Callendar when claiming it. (p. 225)

Panna Lal's extremely peripheral status—he never seems to belong anywhere—is given new dimensions here and for the first time he is the host, shaping the entertainment for his guests. However, the Hindu doctor has a far more important function to fulfill than that of indicating

how absurdly self-conscious the English can be when required to be undignified. His self-sacrifice in fact makes him a participant in a comic, and Indian, version of the redemptive aspects of Christian mythology. Indeed his penitential act of begging for forgiveness reveals him, significantly, as a surrogate for Adela and thus he averts what proves to be a major source of embarrassment after the trial: the question of emotional recompense for Aziz.

The comedy in Lal's moment of glory comes from different kinds of displacement. The first has been mentioned: his substitution for Adela. Quested dramatizes the possibilities of compensation for Aziz's embarrassment (to say nothing of Panna Lal's embarrassment at having backed the wrong horse, as it were); he even takes upon himself some of Aziz's humiliation—or rather in playing the fool he lessens some of the world's supply of humiliation. The second kind of displacement is linguistic. The act of asking for forgiveness belongs to Adela; the way in which that plea is phrased—"I was afraid, I was mislaid"—suggests her earlier use of "afraid" when she has declined to stay in India ("I'm afraid I can't do that") and reinforces the cause of that anxiety: displacement or the condition of being "mislaid." However, the statement also reveals a linguistic strategy that is particularly Panna Lal's. In that rhyming refrain (which sounds something like the rhythms of some popular song) he reveals not the "indifferent English" of which he is accused but rather a grasp of that language that is both complex and precise.

"Mislaid" as Lal's word suggests not only the major source of displacement that is the novel's comedy and tragedy, it also implies wilful misrepresentation: misled. And in that confusion of vowel sounds, one is reminded again that the Indian-English language in

Passage exists as an independent structure of the imagination. Panna Lal's "error" in pronunciation comically articulates the seriousness of the colonial dilemma—both its causes and conditions. Moreover this is not the only occasion in which a mispronunciation has indicated an essentially political perception. Mohammed Latif's "You spick a lie" (p. 122) and Ram Chand's "You will make yourself chip" (p. 30) also rather unexpectedly bring into focus the falseness and debasement that characterizes the relationships of coloniser and colonised.

Within the comic context of Passage, Dr. Panna Lal gains in stature as he deliberately humiliates himself. In doing so, he foreshadows the most fully developed character of the buffoon: Professor Godbole. The whole of "Temple" belongs to him and as he presides over the birth of Krishna his presence infuses the scene with an atmosphere of comic celebration. He transcends the crude buffoonery of Mohammed Latif and Panna Lal and invests his own role as buffoon with something only occasionally hinted at in the English tradition: nobility. Like Mohammed Latif and Panna Lal he investigates the concept of the invited guest as he ponders the spiritual complexities of "come, come." He also serves as a source of pure entertainment but one that resolves not only social tensions but cosmic ones as well.: "There is fun in heaven. God can play practical jokes on Himself, draw chairs away from beneath His own posteriors, set His own turbans on fire, and steal His own petticoats when He bathes" (p. 279). And most fundamental to his role as buffoon is his function as the ultimate surrogate, a function he articulates in conversation with Fielding:

Nothing can be performed in isolation. All perform a good action, when one is performed, and when an evil action is performed, all perform it. (p. 168)

This idea is crucial to Forster's own fictional imagination and does something to explain how intensely domestic his novels are. That concept of shared action spills over into the life of objects, places. The comic spirit of Pan resides in the India of Forster's vision although his scale must surely be enlarged. And that is why one believes in the novel's consolations of comedy—in the waving palm trees, the mischievous spirit of place that capsizes the boat on the Tank, the "hundred voices" that cry "No, not yet," to be answered by a sky calling "No, not there" (p. 312).

The largeness of spirit that infuses Passage can seem, at times, to dwarf its inhabitants. When Frye says that in comedy " . . . the character of the successful hero is so often left undeveloped: his real life begins at the end of the play, and we have to believe him to be potentially a more interesting character than he appears to be,"³⁴ one has some intimation of the reasons behind Trilling's statement to the effect that Forster's characters in Passage "are not large enough for the story."³⁵

My point is that in a reading of Passage as a social comedy the secondary characters are "larger" than they initially might seem. A kind of adjustment of focus takes place every time one sees the linguistic and physical manipulation of whole groups of people which is demanded by the forms of invitation and entertainment. Surprise generally results from watching these scenes and realizing that they are conducted by buffoon-like characters whose insignificance is taken for granted. Their

34 Frye, p. 169.

35 Trilling, p. 147.

function is crucial in the construction of the texture of comedy. Forced by the sheer immensity of his Indian experience to reduce the scale of its human performers, Forster compensates for that loss by rendering every fictional action with exquisite detail. What is gained is a comedy whose domesticity is ultimately intended to soothe the insults of empire.