

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI[®]

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

How to Connect: Applying Martha Nussbaum's Literary Ethical Theory to
E.M. Forster's *Howards End*

Carol Weller

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

August 1998

© Carol Weller 1998



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-39426-3

Canada

ABSTRACT

How to Connect: Applying Martha Nussbaum's Literary Ethical Theory to E.M. Forster's *Howards End*

Carol Weller

Ethics in literature, that is, an ethical reading of works of fiction, is seen by some critics today as a valuable supplement to traditional philosophical, analytical discourse on ethics. In examining issues such as correct choice or action in the face of uncontrolled happenings ethical discourse inevitably uses example to illustrate theory. This strategy is especially fruitful when applied to novels. Literary language constructs the form to convey the content to the reader. Form illuminating content may make the fundamental issue of ethics accessible to a larger reading public. This thesis argues the congruence between the philosopher Martha Nussbaum's literary ethical theory and E.M. Forster's *Howards End*. The language of *Howards End* is tested against the four components of her theory. The final chapter argues a more generic ethical reading of *Howards End* in relation to two characters whose treatment within the novel appears to challenge such a reading. The thesis analyses the devices used by Forster in his text to set the writing/reading action in motion. It interrogates how Forster's text makes a case for literature as praxis, a first concern of the ethical literary enterprise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the help of a number of people. My greatest indebtedness is to my supervisor, Judith Herz, who ensured that Forster's text received the respect it deserves. I thank her for pointing me in the right direction, always with wisdom, finesse and humour. I am honoured to have worked with her. I thank André Furlani for lending me *Foe*, a text which clarified some perceptions of Nussbaum's theory. I am grateful for Eyvind Ronquist's enthusiastic discussion of literary ethical theory and its "fringes." Finally, I am deeply grateful to my husband, Jim Bunch, a research scientist, for his patience with me, his technical wizardry and meticulousness, and his commitment to this project. This thesis has been instrumental, for us, in strengthening the connection between science and the arts. For both of us, horizons have expanded. Forster would not be displeased.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction		1
Chapter		
One	Forster and his Greeks: “working at the same job”	12
Two	Discerning Perceptions: Priority of the Particular over the Universal	27
Three	Uncontrolled Happenings and Conflicting Commitments	44
Four	The Ethical Value and Rational Basis of Emotions in Correct Choice	73
Five	Ethical Theory and <i>Howards End</i>	95
Bibliography		110

Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
(Leonard Cohen, *Anthem*)

INTRODUCTION

Ethical theory as a critical approach in literature is a risky business. Waiting easily to be called into its service are amorphous feelings that defy inspection and definition, a lack of humour and imagination, a preference for the obvious reading, an assumption of authority and a discomfort with ambivalence. These are depressing and heavy-handed attendants. They might discourage any attempt to link ethical theory with literature were it not for other attendants just as eager to be enlisted: an opportunity for seduction, intellectual or political or moral, surprise and humour arising from active reading, an increased ability to discern the “other” in our lives and speak to it, a chance to delight in and examine characters whom we greet as kindred, a means of greater knowing and a possibility to “see . . . more intensely afterwards” (Woolf 119) as a result of this reading action. This thesis will make use of the latter attendants; I hope to steer clear of the former.

Once it was decided that ethical theory would form the investigative basis of *Howards End* (HE), a set of related directions forked off from the main road. They all proposed a movement from writer to reader about human concerns. They

necessitated a correlation between each of them and my own perception of what literature is and what its role might be.

Forster himself, of course, came to my rescue. As I read more of his writing (both fiction and non-fiction), I came across his deceptively matter-of-fact phrases about literature that distilled the vapours of my own notions. And I found reinforcements when I came across Czeslaw Milosz, speaking with a contemporary voice.

Like Milosz, I don't believe that literature is only paper; nobody who studies it from either side of the many fences does. The words "only paper" were part of a statement about literature that Milosz, at 81, wrote in 1992: "For no matter what our anger may be like and no matter how strong our sympathy for the fate of the oppressed, we will have a difficult time achieving that minimum of attention without which literature is only paper if we remain convinced that man, whom we are concerned about, is interchangeable, is but a bubble on the current of 'processes' " (Partisan Review 26). Literature tangles with social reality, itself "distinguished by the fact that it is opaque, treacherous, that with its myriad guises it deludes everyone who is entangled in it" (22). Literature concerns itself with many things, all variations on the fact that "the foundation of human society is still the death penalty" (although the definition of death and its forms may alter) and "what is most threatening to us [is still] another man" (21). When I read these statements, I thought that Milosz spoke remarkably as Forster had eighty years ago.

More important, Milosz condemns the writer (I include writer in his more specific “poet”) who fails to pay attention to the puzzles of social reality to live in a fool’s paradise, ultimately nullifying his writing (the last line of “Facing the River”, part of his latest collection of poems, is this unsettling and despairing comment: “If only my work were of use to people” [Chapman 295]). Milosz observes, “We have not made much progress in understanding how all of this [this puzzle we call social reality] dovetails, and the scientist who studies viruses or sends rockets to other planets may react to self-appointed specialists in the social sciences with a sense of well-founded superiority” (Partisan Review 22). True enough. Might ethical theory be an antidote to a fool’s paradise in writing, reading and teaching literature?

Milosz, along with contemporary writers like Dennis Potter¹ strengthened my view that texts do not exist to remain undecipherable and that many writers today write to involve themselves in setting the writing/reading action in motion. The investigation of this motion, with its ultimate impulse towards the reader, has not held much influence in recent studies of literature. Perhaps one reason for this is the idiosyncratic effect of such a motion on a reader (teacher?) of any text.

¹ Dennis Potter’s conclusion to his 1993 James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture, delivered at the Edinburgh Film Festival, underlined the urgency of television to *move* and *move to* the viewer. Potter was a British television dramatist: we can substitute “reader” for “viewer.” “ ‘Only connect,’ said E.M. Forster, that great novelist whom [Rupert] Murdoch’s nasty little rag would presumably dismiss as an artsy-fartsy old poofter. But, yes, what a good word; *connect*. The verb which far better than the merely technical *transmit* is, if not actually, certainly what should be the defining activity of all television . . . ” (51).

Such a motion may rely too heavily on the spontaneous and the subjective, something that we have come to mistrust today. We are afraid that the isolated subjective reaction leads to “fuzzy thinking,” which cannot be explained or defended in any manner deemed adequate.

But when Richard Rorty talks of literature producing “shudders of awe” (Raritan 8), he is not implying that critical skills must be left behind. Rather, he is calling for a reading disposition which, though it includes critical analysis, will allow a work, “at least at first, to recontextualize much of what you had known” (13). It is this first impulse in such a disposition that looks for and recognizes shudders of awe. It is reading “for excitement and hope” (15), for inspiration and surprise and not just “knowingness” (8). “Later on,” Rorty continues, “you may be able to be both at once” (13), meaning of course, to be feeling about the text and to be knowing about it. And the feeling/knowing sequence cannot be reversed if inspiration is to claim any part in active reading. As Rorty explains, “[j]ust as you cannot be swept off your feet by another human being at the same time that you recognize him or her as a good specimen of a certain type, so you cannot simultaneously be inspired by a work and be knowing about it” (13). The desire for literature to inspire (to infuse with spirit) is exactly what Milosz means when he differentiates between the writer as “pneumatologist” (concerned with the spirit) and the writer as “psychologist” (concerned with the mind). “The spirit,” he affirms, “is not the same as that instrument for inscribing impressions . . . and the struggle for the salvation of *homo pneumatikos*, despite the temptations of *homo*

psychikos, is worth the highest stakes. Dostoevsky was . . . a pneumatologist” (Partisan Review 26). I believe Forster was one, too.

Martha Nussbaum shares with Rorty and Milosz a belief that literature can, in fact, recontextualize what is familiar. Literary language can supplement traditional philosophical, analytical discourses on ethics and make this fundamental issue accessible to a larger reading public. With that assumption in mind, she has constructed a literary grid which draws on tenets of the Aristotelian ethical position. Against this grid she tests the language of novels. The Aristotelian position is grounded in “practical reasoning” (Love 54), something that we can use. Nussbaum identifies four major components of Aristotelian ethics: the assigning priority of discernment to particular circumstances over universal dicta; the danger in reducing the things we value to a common measure; the determining presence and value of contingency in our lives and its consequences; the rational basis for the emotional reaction to stories heard. Nussbaum argues that novels (certain ones at least) not only address the reader about our social reality, the spirit of it, the puzzle of it, but are of practical help in navigating it.

The components of this literary grid are useful indicators for iterating Forster’s main concerns in *Howards End*: opposing constructions of “I”, our personal and public relations, an ordering of the things we value, discernment of dislocation, the contingency of money, death as a penalty. Forster applies pressure to innocuous and accurate universal statements such as “[t]here always will be rich

and poor,” spoken by one character who is prosperous (HE 193) and another who is destitute (226). He addresses the oxymoronic “tragedy of preparedness” (115) and consistently insinuates it into his text humourously and ironically.

However, there are some problems with Nussbaum’s argument. The strongly Aristotelian nature of her grid and her choice of particular works of literature over which to lay it, mostly nineteenth century novels of representation (the novels she is most comfortable with appear to be Henry James’s), have generated some criticism. For example, in his review of Martha Nussbaum’s *Poetic Justice* (Nation 40-42), Lennard Davis criticizes her narrow choice of traditional novels of representation to make her arguments for the need for literary imagination in contemporary public life, specifically, the American judiciary. I agree that the inclusion of more contemporary works might deepen the exercise of cultivating a different imagination. But I also sense an edginess in Davis with realistic novels when put beside novels whose form is so new, so contemporary, “novels that critique their own ‘naturalness,’ novels that thwart identification with a character or that are deliberately surreal or irrational” (40). In the epigraph in *Resisting Novels*, Davis thanks his parents for “inadvertently through their deafness [creating] in me an interpreter of signs.” This interpreting is not an exercise limited to recent novels and a certain impatience rises in me with his sweeping designation of traditional novels as mirrors of “the classic Enlightenment notions of individuality, rationality and positivism” (40). In 1986, J.M. Coetzee speaks through his multi-layered and most non-traditional, even surreal *Foe* and

addresses the notion and source of writing and who shall be named writer: “[b]ut as there are many kinds of men, so there are many kinds of writing” (147). Just so, but isn’t the writing impulse always aimed at *homo pneumatikos*? The onus on the reader, says Forster in *Howards End*, is not to mistake the signpost for the destination. This is Forster’s writing/reading “law,” as I will explain more fully in Chapter Five. By momentarily foregrounding the strategy of “writer,” by stating the reasons to write and to read literature *within* the narrative of his literary text, Forster enriches, contemporizes, if you will, *Howards End*’s field of discussion.

There is also a problem with the highly constructed reading “we” that Nussbaum assumes: “we are social beings, puzzling out, in times of great moral difficulty, what might be, for us, the best way to live” (Love 171). Indeed her assumptions seem strangely at odds with her stated purpose to extend the ethical dialogue beyond what Rorty calls “isolated academic backwaters” (Raritan 9) that talk only to each other. But who exactly is “puzzling out”? Do “we” bring these self-conscious social and ethical considerations to every text we read? I don’t think so. I prefer Wayne Booth’s more intriguing idea of reading as seduction, that is, surrendering to a text, alert to the “paradoxical need to embrace in order to decide *whether* to embrace” (140). Seduction presupposes some level of assent, trust. Trust in Forster’s authorial voice is reinforced continually in *Howards End* by his intrusive narrator.

Another concern is that Martha Nussbaum’s ambitions for the ethical interpretation of novels are grand, grander at least than those of Forster, who stated

“may no achievement upon an imposing scale be mine,” and “reverence is fatal to literature. My plea is for something more vital: imagination” (Two Cheers 86) and, finally, “what is so wonderful about great literature is that it transforms the man who reads it *towards* the condition of the man who wrote” (Two Cheers 83, my emphasis). It is Richard Rorty’s defence of reading literature for hope and excitement that is more like Forster’s: direct, conversational, funny, understated and matter-of-fact in discussing our favourite stories and “their agents of love” (Objectivity 210). Rorty never aims for the universal voice of literature but asserts (of course and at last) that writers speak from communities. His resounding “So what?” (207) acknowledges and defends those communities speaking from different cultures, different times. Writing for “hope, a hope that I advance, that I defend, is not enclosed by any date,” says Milosz (Witness 116). “We are born only once on this earth, and only one and no other historical time is given to us” (Partisan Review 28).

In ascertaining the likelihood of a competent ethical reading of *Howards End*, it is also useful to refer to Geoffrey Harpham, whose voice is one of the most insistent today in arguing for the return from the wilderness of ethical study in literature. Harpham speaks generically of ethics, proposing no specific theory of his own. However, his view of narrative as ethical “example” deserves attention because of the particular structure of *Howards End*. Ethical discourse is preoccupied, says Harpham, with a “reciprocal probing between example and theory” and ethics in literature is the point “at which literature becomes

conceptually interesting and theory becomes humanized” (Ethics 402).

Howards End is especially suited to this view because of Forster’s use of the intrusive narrator, who functions in a typically understated manner but to an urgent purpose. Moreover, this narrator destabilizes the author’s own text. Although many critics have found this device jarring, I maintain that Forster’s stepping out of the text invites a reading which is thoroughly in keeping with the task of ethics. Forster’s narrator, taking his cue from the Greek chorus, goes one step further than strict commentary on the action. If, as Harpham says, the narrative is the necessary example of an ethical discourse, then the out-of-text narrator in *Howards End* is the theorist, nullifying or validating the example (sometimes ironically, in only a few words) as it is acted out by the characters the author has created. By performing in this way, Forster calls forth trust as he speaks beyond his own narrative.

For instance, our first introduction to young Charles Wilcox, exemplar of all that is progressive in England, allows us to observe his interactions with the lower merchant classes in the village. All self-important efficiency, there is not much generosity in Charles. After abusing several merchants for not matching their pace to his, Charles absolves himself by throwing a tip at them. As he drives away in a flurry of noise and exhaust fumes, his latest victim, a “bearded porter -- life is a mysterious business -- ” looks after him “with admiration” (HE 32). Forster’s narrator has quietly hurled his first understated challenge to the narrative example. In the most timely way, he has inserted his own comment on a puzzle of

social reality, “life is a mysterious business,” immediately *before* we realize the porter’s peculiar state of mind. The comment introduces the pull and push, the “reciprocal probing” between the *is* and the *ought* that preoccupies this story.

In describing Margaret’s childhood, Forster’s narrator inserts ironic asides (“a most offensive child,” “a hateful little girl” [HE 43-44]). On first glance, these asides ally him with Mrs. Failing, Mrs. Herriton and Miss Bartlett, all characters from previous novels, all prisoners of refinement who vigorously uphold the present conventions of society and determinedly, even brutally, thwart any deviation from them. But rather than censure Margaret, the narrator’s comments signal that Margaret might be Forster’s mouthpiece in *Howards End*. Having caught the narrator’s slow wink, we recognize Margaret’s value.

The most striking example of Forster’s desire to challenge his own narrative within the text comes with the death of Ruth Wilcox and the subsequent knowledge of her dying request that Margaret inherit Howards End. Having established the true and deep grief of her family at her death, Forster introduces this event which is so unexpected and of such consequence within the narrative that he halts and *asks* his narrator to intrude once again. The narrator performs his task and gives a balanced and reasonable account of the family’s decision to ignore Ruth’s bequest. It is only at the very end of this account, with the word “almost,” that our narrator reminds us of the fatal flaw in the family’s thinking: “They did neglect a personal appeal. The woman who had died did say to them ‘Do this,’ and they answered ‘We will not’ ” (HE 108). The theory has been set starkly

against the example.

There are other instances in *Howards End* of the teasing out of theory from example by an author/narrator collaboration and they satisfy Harpham's generic representation of ethics' possible contribution to a reading of literature. But in the end, it was Nussbaum's grid that I remained with. Its components amplified Forster's quiet voice in *Howards End* and did not distort it. I hope to demonstrate in this thesis that the grid can be effectively superimposed over a work " . . . whose post-realist method is in service of a pre-modern past" (Levenson 93). The essential activity of *Howards End*, Levenson later states, " . . . is the changing of aspects and the attempt to communicate such changes -- not, of course, for narrowly aesthetic reasons but as a part of the novel's most serious moral purpose. The demand which Wittgenstein records, 'You have to see it like *this*,' becomes an urgent ethical injunction" (Levenson 97)². Thus I begin in Chapter One by examining Forster's phrase, "right feeling," as the generic display of his "very Cambridge brand of Hellenism" (Furbank 1:59) and tracing his development of this notion in his writing, from the earliest stories to *Howards End*. Moreover, the Greeks provide a similar point of departure for both Nussbaum and Forster. Chapters Two and Four are direct applications of Nussbaum's literary grid, each chapter dealing with a different element. Chapter Three discusses two elements together, contingency and conflicting commitments. Finally, Chapter Five

² qt. in Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 208.

examines narrative strategies that fall outside Nussbaum's grid but nevertheless call for a response in an ethical reading of *Howards End*.

CHAPTER ONE

Forster and his Greeks: “working at the same job.”

In a letter to Forrest Reid in 1915 explaining, or more accurately, defending his reasons for writing *Maurice* (he had sent Reid the novel “with trepidation” [Furbank 2:14]), Forster stated what his defence would be “at any Last Judgment: ‘I was trying to connect up and use all the fragments I was born with’ -- well you had it exhaustingly in *Howards End*, and *Maurice*, though his fragments are more scanty and more bizarre than Margaret’s, is working at the same job” (14).

“Working at the same job”: it does not surprise that *Howards End* was exhausting. Forster’s job was no less than a re-ordering of England’s imagination. It was the toughest test of his own liberal humanism. The origin of this liberal humanism is the Hellenism of his Cambridge days and is the most compelling common ground between Nussbaum and Forster: the respect with which they speak of things Greek. Forster’s use of Greek mythology from his earliest writing has a particular affinity with a view of literature that calls upon a system of Aristotelian ethical thought. From his earliest stories to *Howards End*, Forster cannot abandon the Greeks, not entirely, and Nussbaum makes these inventors of the ethical reading serve such a reading of literature today.

This focus takes Forster further back than the eighteenth century and literary realism and it forms a backdrop against which his own values of humane individualism, his reiterated emphasis on the reality of the unseen (vs. positivism) and the danger of complacent certainty (vs. the supremacy of rationality) are to be offered for urgent consideration in his re-ordered England. It is useful to trace Forster's Greek affinity from its obvious presence in his earliest writing to its more subversive and disguised form in *Howards End*.

In January 1908, a few months before the idea for *Howards End* started to take shape, Forster took note of an unusual event in his diary -- "a man flew a 3/4 mile circuit in 1 1/2 minutes" -- and added his own reflections on it: "It really *is* a new civilization. I have been born at the end of the age of peace and can't expect to feel anything but despair. Science, instead of freeing man -- the Greeks nearly freed him by right feeling -- is enslaving him to machines. . . . God what a prospect!" (HE intro 10). He was twenty-nine.

This reference to the Greeks and freedom through right feeling is not an isolated one, nor is it the first. In Forster's writing before *Howards End*, there is a pitched battle between the "real" world and another one, usually mythic, usually Greek. The "real" world is inhabited by respectable, decent people who are "prone to think 'real life' [means] knowledge of finance" (Diary, 1909, HE 11) and who place the highest value on ". . . such virtues as neatness, decision and obedience, virtues of the second rank, no doubt, . . ." (This is not as unequivocal a statement as it sounds and the rest of the sentence, ". . . but they have formed

our civilization” (HE 112), lends the balance/ambivalence to Forster’s critique of society in *Howards End*). Forster’s other world offers a chance to step out from behind the veil of everyday life where “the heart of all things was hidden” (Journey 158). The battle is always over right feeling, which refers neither to obligation or habit as defined by society nor to a cynical detachment from it. Indeed, in many instances, right feeling would disavow both notions. Instead, it awakens greatness on an individual scale; it offers to makes life more human and fights against complacency and the respectable cruelty that can arise from it. And in its opposition to the “real” world, right feeling often poses a threat to those who act on its impulse.

Initially, Forster stages his battles between these worlds sharply and the “real” world loses. When it wins, it loses within the narrative. By invoking the Greeks, Forster demands acknowledgement of a character’s disconnectedness in the world of the everyday or a curiosity or desire that transcends it. This disconnectedness is often vague or muted. When right feeling is bestowed on a character, the result translates into leaving something of the “real” world behind and embracing something else. In his short stories published before *Howards End*, Forster rarely bothers to describe the new world that is opened to those so bestowed or how they will fare in it. It suffices that escape is accomplished and a new deeper level of life is attained, or could have been.

In the early stories, the notion of salvation through right feeling is woven throughout many of the fantasies, as Forster called them. And this salvation is

usually attended by the *genius loci*, itself an inspiration to Forster on three occasions, as he himself stated. “The Story of a Panic,” written in 1904 and the first story Forster ever wrote, presents a totally unlikable and unsuitable young man transformed by a strange unexplainable display of the forces of nature. Initially seen as mulish, lazy and surly, the boy finds *society* unattractive, indeed dangerous, to him after he is transformed. Forster’s narrator in the story is an unimaginative, parochial Englishman intent on setting straight these unseemly new developments in the boy’s nature, this longing which makes no practical sense. The boy’s desires now are simply to remain outside, close to trees and flowers (and for this he uncharacteristically begs fearfully), and to remain with his only friend. Neither desire is understood (the attempt to understand is never made) nor in any way deemed acceptable by family and acquaintances. Both desires are therefore denied him and the ensuing struggle to capture him, to return him to a “normal” life results in the young boy’s strangely effortless, indeed graceful, escape to the hills and in the death of his friend.

“The Road from Colonus,” also published in 1904, presents similar tensions between the world in which we live and another unrealized one. This time, a twenty-five-year old Forster deals with old age and the possibility of experiencing wonder when one’s life is so close to its finish. Such an opportunity finally presents itself to Mr. Lucas on vacation in Greece. (“Forty years ago he had caught the fever of Hellenism, and all his life he had felt that could he but visit that land, he would not have lived in vain” [Collected 95]). Once again, the deities of

the area make their presence felt but not through nature this time: they present themselves directly to him, in silence, in a village seen through a votive tree. Once again, the character of the person touched undergoes dramatic change. Mr. Lucas is a rather bitter and despairing old man, resentful of his physical vulnerability and dependence on others. The Greek vacation has thus far been disappointing. He is a cynical traveller, not easily impressed; it will take much to rekindle his fever. "Yet, Greece had done something for him." "It had made him discontented, and there are stirrings of life in discontent." "Something great was wrong" (Collected 95). This "something great" is nothing more than participating fully in life. "For the last month a strange desire had possessed him to die fighting: 'I do mind being old, and I will pretend no longer' " (95). The thought of spending time in the presence of these strange local gods (for a day, even) fills Mr. Lucas with forgotten feelings of sharing, listening, asking questions: living, essentially. He will be old but fully human in their presence, of this he is certain. For the first time in his recent memory, "his heart was leaping with joy" (95).

As Forster unfolds his fantasy, Mr. Lucas's last opportunity to discover "not only Greece, but England and all the world and life" (95) is taken away in the powerful name of rationality. Once again, the person attuned to this unworldly presence meets with concerned but intractable resistance from family and friends. Forster then proceeds to do one of the things he does so well and will do throughout *Howards End*: he subverts his own beliefs, ironically. Words are spoken, situations explained that appear irrefutable because they represent all that

is respectable and sound and known. Initially we say “yes” to this reason, and “yes” to that one but our “yes” comes more and more slowly and we come to see what is “no.” In its place is a resounding “yes” to Forster’s depiction of what might have been for Mr. Lucas. In “Colonus,” Forster leaves us with an old man who has not discovered life at all. Mr. Lucas will end his own life by writing self-indulgent angry letters to landlords and neighbours about trivia that concern no one but him. He has indeed been saved from physical death by his daughter; the other death he has been consigned to by that act is infinitely more tragic. The life-affirming and joyfully fierce desire that had possessed him in Greece, the desire “to die fighting,” no longer matters: he is dead already.

Other stories continue to invoke right feeling through the Greeks directly (“The Curate’s Friend,” for example), while others, like “The Eternal Moment” and “The Celestial Omnibus,” use particular sensibilities (the artistic, the innocent) which are predisposed to Forster’s small “something great.” The end is the same: those who yield to such a disposition and follow it are branded in some manner by those who remain behind; those who will not, or cannot, be similarly touched lose a Forsterian meaning of freedom. This consequence of “freedom” is one of what Milosz calls puzzles of social reality.

In *The Longest Journey*, written in 1907, a novel against the dreary half-life, Rickie exhibits the yearning for more and the weaknesses that prevent him from attaining it. The forces opposing right feeling in this novel are formidable. The proponents of the value of ordered daily experience, of competence and

“healthy contempt for all they cannot touch” (Journey 50) and self-invested kindness all gather to stifle his yearning. They come close to drowning out the voice of the philosopher Stewart Ansell, Rickie’s salvation speaking from the other world, ironically and honestly. Ansell, and the Greeks’ brilliant but naive envoy to Sawston, the classics professor, Mr. Jackson, are both steeped in Greek mythology. They incorporate this thinking into their lives because as Rickie tries to explain to his wife “[t]he Greeks looked very straight at things” (189). Ansell finally intervenes, as gods must sometimes do, and his intervention, surreal as it is, *should* pull Rickie into that other world of the heart of all things, of recognition of “other,” in other words, right feeling. But no -- or is it yes?

Rickie’s half-brother Stephen is an other-worldly creature both above and below social conventions, unrefined, a wise fool. In describing Stephen as a bully, of sorts, Forster invests him with a peculiar tension, at once menacing and innocent. This creates and ensures a deep ambivalence toward him that is resolved only at the end. Rickie dies saving a drunken Stephen, and Mrs. Failing later writes that the dead man is “ ‘one who has failed in all he undertook; one of the thousands whose dust returns to the dust, accomplishing nothing in the interval’ ” (303). Rickie himself, on his deathbed, whispers to her “You have been right” (303). Rickie is wrong.

No wonder Trilling says this novel flies apart (76). The climax of *The Longest Journey* is tragically absurd: a small man with a lame leg is trying to drag his much bigger drunken half-brother away from the tracks he’s sprawled over in

view of an oncoming train. Even for the anti-heroic Forster, this image numbs and confounds. Minutes before he saves Stephen, Rickie has yielded not to right feeling but to the disavowal that any such feeling exists at all. He “. . . knew that the conventions would claim him soon” (302), and in saving Stephen, “Wearily he did a man’s duty” (303). His deathbed “You have been right” whispered to Mrs. Failing embraces convention over true existence, as she has counselled him to do. But the link between Rickie and Stephen is not one of personal love but of blood. Stephen has part of Rickie in him. They are the sons of the same mother whose brief appearance in the novel nevertheless marks her as a Forsterian right feeling goddess. Rickie’s father taints his blood (he is weak, sarcastic, urbane, cruel); Stephen’s father contributes to Stephen’s “cloudless spirit” (260). The gift of right feeling has been handed down in a direct line, intact, to Stephen; to Rickie, it has come incomplete and too late. Freedom for each must be different.

It is the last chapter in *The Longest Journey* that salutes Rickie’s life in a manner that was impossible while he lived. Stephen, still a bully when necessary, triumphs heartily over Herbert’s “refined disapproval” (304) and gets his fair share of money for the publication of Rickie’s stories. More important, Stephen’s life, “his happy tangible life” (310), now includes a little girl and a wife reminiscent of their mother. Out on the downs with his daughter at twilight, he honours Rickie in a deeper way: “. . . he [Stephen] marvelled why he, the accident, was here” (310). “ ‘What am I to do?’ he thought. ‘Can he notice the things he gave me?’ ” (311). In an exquisite demonstration of right feeling Stephen “bent down

reverently and saluted the child; to whom he had given the name of their mother” (311). This chapter offers one of the most challenging examples of Forster’s early stated reason to write: the idea of two people pulling each other into salvation. Stephen, alive because of Rickie, has been pulled into salvation by him; Rickie is more alive, more present in death, than ever in life. Stephen “had always been grateful” (311) and the last pages are an expression of gratitude that best describes the meaning Forster ascribes to existence, Ansell’s essential Spirit of Life.

In *The Longest Journey*, Forster pushes back the Greeks and uses mortals to speak for them. But here one of the mortals, Rickie’s would-be saviour Ansell, has his own views to profess and this is the beginning of a focus on the particular that is so evident in *Howards End*. It is the scene where Forster brings Ansell and Stephen together, this philosopher and this bully. In discussing a book Ansell was reading (the physical appearance of it only) and discussing its original title “What We Want,” signifying global love, Ansell states: “I don’t intend to spoil myself on the chance of mending the world” (229). (This will be re-stated in *Howards End* as: “Doing good to humanity was useless. . . . To do good to one . . . was the utmost she dare hope for” [134]). After speaking with Stephen, Ansell recognizes him as “really wonderful,” and “the conviction grew that he had been back somewhere -- back to some table of the gods” (231). In his battle to help this one man attain confirmation as the other son of Rickie’s mother and as someone who *exists* (Rickie’s wife Agnes does not), Ansell will begin the process of salvation that Rickie so desperately needs.

With his two Italian novels, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, written in 1905 and 1908 respectively, Forster demonstrates right feeling through a country's different cultural signposts (he called Italy "the beautiful country where they say 'yes' " [Furbank 1:96]); Greek mythology does not act as his agent of love. Caroline Abbott, a disaffected but respectable product of the English suburbs, undergoes a transformation that initiates her into the world of right feeling, and it is a tragic one. The transformation occurs as she witnesses the holy bond between Gino and his infant son that she and the other suburbanites have come to sever in the name of English respectability. When the baby dies, it is Caroline who intervenes between Philip, who heads the English party, and the baby's father and ensures that the tragedy will not become anything *less* than it is. During that scene, she seems to Philip like a goddess and Forster notes, "[m]any people look younger and more intimate during great emotion. But some there are who look older, and remote. . . . Her eyes were open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned the boundaries of sorrow. . . . Such eyes he had seen in great pictures but never in a mortal" (*Angels* 138). Caroline prevents Gino from killing Philip in this scene. We contrast this with an earlier scene of "great" emotion: a telegram arriving from Italy and announcing her widowed daughter-in-law's engagement to Gino has interrupted Mrs. Herriton's planting of peas in her garden. Disruption of the domestic is the ultimate transgression for this suburban matron. Forster's brilliant description of her reaction to the engagement and efficient plans to thwart it, her cool handling of a concurrent and unforeseen

domestic dispute (she triumphs, of course), and her realization that her own important work of planting has gone unfinished ends in a violent portrait of conventional-turned-twisted feeling and a petty but unrelenting desire for absolute control.

Forster's *A Room with a View* presents the Emersons as the signposts for right feeling. Their main sin, for some other English men and women travelling with them in Italy, is disregard for social conventions if they interfere with kindness. This sin is expressed honestly by one of their party: "It is difficult to understand people who speak the truth" (Room 21). The Emersons have a talent for doing things "which are most indelicate, yet at the same time beautiful" (25). The Emersons, a man and his son, see Lucy, the main character, as a young woman "who shall want to live, I say" (76). Lucy's discontent, and her consciousness of it ("Nothing ever happens to me" [69]) are reminiscent of other stories of Forster's (his themes vary little) whose characters are similarly poised for something greater than what is offered. Forster deals ingeniously here with the ways right feeling might be subverted, tamed. The "room" from which each person "views" Lucy reflects less of *her* than the wishes of the viewer: Lucy as work of art, as a winged but celibate free creature, as a young would-be escapee. It is the Emersons who see her and see her straight.

It is not surprising that the other character who would work against Lucy's freedom is Lucy herself. At the height of her own crisis, still poised for greatness but not free, not yet "right," she falls back on a kind of thinking that may cause her

destruction or her salvation, depending on definitions: “That is to say, she was now better able to stifle the emotions of which the conventions and the world disapprove” (246). It is Forster’s way that the beginning of freedom will come with a small thing, something that, as he says, causes the scales to fall from the eyes. The “precautions and barriers which may avert evil, but which do not seem to bring good, if we may judge from those who have used them most,” those fortresses of “a shamefaced world” (125) which war against right feeling all crumble, for Lucy at least. But the price that must be paid for this freedom is exile, temporary perhaps, and the novel ends where it began, in the land of “yes.”

Howards End, with its larger scope, would oblige Forster to enter into the role of deliberative rhetorician, to play to his reading audience, to construct characters and story firmly rooted in England, a land he himself was discovering anew. Of that novel, Forster wrote to Edward Garnett shortly after its release, “It is devilish difficult to criticise society & also create human beings. Unless one has a big mind, one aim or the other fails before the book is finished. I must pray for a big mind, but it is uphill work -- !” (Furbank, Selected Letters 117). One of Forster’s uphill struggles in shaping his novel was the realization that the Greeks and their stories would no longer resonate and he says so in the novel: “to speak against London is no longer fashionable. Of Pan and the elemental forces the public has heard a little too much -- they seem Victorian, while London is Georgian. . . . Certainly London fascinates. One visualizes it as a tract of quivering gray, intelligent without purpose and excitable without love . . .” (116).

The task of criticising society and also creating human beings would indeed send Forster searching to use all the fragments he was born with and then some. His personal line of action, expressed in 1917 to Lowes Goldworthy Dickinson, “I have never had the energy or intelligence to understand contemporary civilization, have never done more than loaf through it and jump out of its way when it seemed likely to hurt me” (Furbank 2:46), would be wholly inadequate. In spite of the times, Forster would fall back on his beloved Greeks, this time obliquely and subversively.

Claude Summers asserts that Forster’s “The Road from Colonus” is “an ironic, modern reversal of Sophocles’s *Oedipus at Colonus*” (252), with direct references to that play within Forster’s text. I say that *Howards End* reworks another of Sophocles’s plays, *Antigone*, but brings that story in through Georgian London’s back door, incognito.

Antigone is Sophocles’s direct representation of right feeling and the brutal strength of opposition to it. The unwavering certainty and unyielding authority in the refusal to allow an act of family love and the view that such an act is treacherous to the welfare of the city, the obtuseness, in crucial non-civic areas, of a person invested with responsibility and the inevitability of his collapse when facing what cannot be planned for, the fatal blindness to conflicting obligations and the emptiness that exists when there is no “other,” all form the foundation of *Antigone*. In *Howards End* Forster inverts these same values and channels their opposites, Anglicized, Georgianized into his credo of personal relations. Indeed,

it can easily strike one as more than coincidence that the famous and often quoted remark of Forster's used to exemplify this credo, "I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (*Two Cheers* 66), is in direct opposition to Creon's "[o]ne who considers a friend more important than his country I regard as worthless" (*Sophocles* 35).

Forster's reworking of the ancient play to relieve its starkness and allow the ambiguity of England in 1910 to surface does not diminish the Henry/Creon Margaret/Antigone/Haemon conflict. Also in *Howards End* there is more than one kind of death and the battle for the safety of England's soul will be won or lost in tiny increments, not in grand gestures.

Still, there are similarities between the two. Both Creon and Henry are Great Men, and Great Men produce, says Forster, "a desert of uniformity around them and often a pool of blood too. . . . [They have] . . . an iron will, personal magnetism, dash, flair, sexlessness. . . . No, I distrust Great Men" (*Two Cheers* 70). Both are proud nationals, heavily invested in civic matters and they centre their values around such matters; both are challenged by women at the most essential level of their belief system; both fear ideas but have tradition and convention on their side; both are certain of their views and have their personal history of success to reinforce them; both are nearly destroyed by their certainty and come to self-scrutiny, as Forster calls it, and right feeling on their knees.

This mode of existence, as acted out in 1910 by Henry Wilcox throughout

Forster's narrative, both designates him as a Great Man and assures his inevitable collapse. The underpinnings of this mode collide with other characters' ways of "seeing," alternately and subversively strengthening and weakening them. These collisions present us with knots that are confounding and often dangerous; they are Forster's "muddles"³. I will show that Martha Nussbaum's ethical theory helps to untangle the knots, and more important, helps to understand how the collisions themselves are as crucial as their untangling.

³ "Muddle" seemed to be a favourite word of Forster's. In *Howards End* Margaret uses it to signify a minor misunderstanding with Ruth Wilcox. But Furbank cites Forster's early use of it to mean something more disturbing. In 1893 Forster wrote a desperate letter to his mother: " 'Do, do come at 3:30. I must talk to you. I am in a dreadful muddle, yet I can't explain by letter.' " The letter concerned Forster's harrassment by some bullies at boarding school. By the time the letter was written, Furbank assesses that Forster "had reached the point of hysteria" (1:39). I place "muddle" somewhere between Margaret's minor misunderstanding and Forster's schoolboy panic.

CHAPTER TWO

Discerning Perceptions: Priority of the Particular over the Universal

Margaret to Henry: “ ‘It’s impossible, because . . . [i]t’s not the particular language that Helen and I talk, if you *see* my meaning’ ” (277-78 [my emphasis]).

The components of Martha Nussbaum’s theory, which incorporate the elements of the Aristotelian ethical position, are closely aligned. Indeed, it is often difficult to speak of them separately. The aim of correct ethical judgment in any concrete situation calls forth all the coordinates of her grid: identification of the salient particular features of the situation; acknowledgment of conflicting values and obligations; flexibility in the face of contingency; and recognition of emotion as a valuable, trustworthy and rational tool in deciding correctly. There are, however, fine distinctions among these components. The first locates the *focus* of perception; the second, the ability to resist a simplified hierarchy of valuable things; the third, the *consequences* of the focus of perception; the fourth, the validity of ethical judgments made without educated emotions arising from rational beliefs. This section describes various patterns of perception (ways of discerning, of “seeing”) and their congruence with the characters who practise

them.

In the quotation at the head of this chapter, Margaret resists Henry's suggestion that she use an alien language with Helen: she is resisting the language of the lie. A brief discussion of scruples signals what can be called Margaret's "moral awkwardness" (Levenson's apt phrase pertains to Forster's vision of a community whose "incommensurable values collide" [81]). The same discussion signals Henry's ultimately steady, unequivocal choice: "I am as scrupulous as any man alive, I hope; but when it is a case like this, when there is a question of madness --" (278). (The unfinished sentence could be Margaret's interrupting Henry; could it also be Forster's bestowing on him just *enough* finesse not to finish it so complacently?) For Henry, the "question of madness," far from being proven as Margaret "illogically" attempts to point out, is ruled by social convention. It contains within itself privileged liberties that override and render inconsequential *whose* madness is at issue.

Margaret is, in fact, resistant to more than Henry's language. In desperation and on Tibby's urging, Margaret has sought advice from Henry on the problem of Helen's prolonged absence from England and her unexplained but absolute refusal to meet her family. They meet Henry at his office, that imperial hub of planning and efficiency. Initially, Margaret speaks of Helen's particular nature and how her behaviour is so out of character. In this, Henry is at a loss. "Unsatisfactory at first," he advises them not to worry, that it is "just like Helen to lead her relatives a dance" (276). Urged on by Margaret, Tibby makes the first

statement that nudges us toward the workings of Henry's pattern of perceiving Helen: "All the same, you have not quite *seen* our point" (276, my emphasis), "or our sister," we might add. Henry's response is to laugh at "the gifted but ridiculous family" and answer "I suppose I never shall" (276). However, with the introduction of the fact that Helen may be mad, an abrupt change occurs in Henry that is distressing to Margaret. Asking questions that will ferret out the facts of this situation, he signals how his limited perceptions of Helen's particular nature will direct where he invests his energy. When Margaret explains that Helen never "sins against affection" (276) (the pain she is inflicting on her family is incongruous; resolution is therefore critical) and asks of him "You must have noticed that much in her, surely", his peculiar answer is "Oh yes; she and I have always hit it off together" (276), betraying an astounding inability to perceive and an ability to forget Helen's hostility to him. Margaret's "No, Henry -- *can't you see?* -- I don't mean that" (276, my emphasis) foreshadows the whole sordid escapade to capture Helen that will call for Margaret's almost complete betrayal of her sister.

The absence of acute perception of particulars in Henry's pattern of judging the *ought* and choosing correct action allows for Helen's disappearance in his mind. She is subsumed in the universal, general category of "the sick." Having obliterated the rich particular "who," (Helen's "fair flying hair and eager eyes counted for nothing" [279]), the coarse generalities (the "what," the "where," the "how") remain. Helen has joined the vast, vague, faceless multitudes of the

sick, who have no rights, who are not entitled to the truth and who can be dealt with in a manner that “drew its ethics from the wolf-pack” (277). It is Henry’s plan, “clever and well-meaning as it was” (277), based on deceit and the disavowal of the personal (Helen, in this case, although he had treated an ill Ruth in a similar manner) that forces Margaret to return to the particular, that is, to her sister and how to help *her*. She has perceived that the fading away of Helen is of no consequence in this plan. Her own knowledge of her sister and respect for her wishes are relegated to the fringes by Henry’s usual competence in taking up any piece of business. Something must be done, some end accomplished (for Margaret, in the name of love for Helen; for Henry, in the name of efficient resolution). Henry is a man of action (as Forster deftly reminds us with “the fire flickered over the map of Africa” [277]) and his motto is Concentrate not Reflect. Once again his motto has served him well. Isolating the key to the dilemma (“You want to get hold of her? . . . That’s the problem, isn’t it?”), Henry judges that the solution is “perfectly easy” (277).

In yielding to Henry’s plan, Margaret “lowers her colours” (277). She forfeits her responsiveness to her sister’s fine inconsistencies for a plan that works only if Helen, now made invisible, is seen as “the sick.” Nussbaum would explain this act of negation as a contravention of “correct choice [which] is, first and foremost, a matter of keenness and flexibility of perception, rather than conformity to a set of simplifying principles” (Fragility 69). Margaret, only slightly less than Henry, has distorted, perverted even, one of the novel’s “recurrent thematic

preoccupations,” “the logical categories of experience: types and individuals” (Levenson 89).

The full impact of her complicity and her self-willed universalizing of the dilemma hits Margaret as Henry tries to leave without her. Having decided that Margaret is not up to the task at hand (Henry equates worry with incompetence), he temporarily consigns *her* to “the sick”; this gives him the right to divert her with a lie. At the last moment, Margaret jumps into the car as it is leaving and “[s]he said not a single word; he was only treating her as she was treating Helen, and her rage at his dishonesty only helped to indicate what Helen would feel against them. She thought: ‘I deserve it; I am punished for lowering my colours.’ And she accepted his apologies with a calmness that astonished him” (281).

This episode takes place toward the end of the novel. But Forster has been contrasting different patterns of perception from its outset. In this ethical reading of *Howards End* it is important to remember what, according to Nussbaum and Forster, the particulars are and why they take priority over the universals. For Nussbaum, the particulars are those of individual people, their complex claims on us and their strengths and weaknesses that both impede our own good lives and cause them to flourish. Our ability to discern the best way to be with people (in friendship, love, hardship etc.) is based on knowing them as individuals, not as types. For Forster, Levenson says, the particular (the personal) is an unhesitant choice based on a vote of non-confidence in L.T. Hobhouse’s *Liberalism*, written in 1911, which enthusiastically affirmed belief in *both* social reform (the public,

the universal) *and* an “unremitting respect for personal liberty” (Levenson 88).

During the Great War, which casts a shadow over *Howards End*, Forster wrote to G. L. Dickinson, continuing a war-time discussion of “nation” and “person”:

“Privately most men attain to love and unselfishness and insight and a priori one would expect them to display these qualities in their social life. . . . But some psychological hitch takes place: could it be removed we should be free from all evils except disease and death. An observer from another planet who watched not only the earth’s wars but its public institutions would never infer what sweetness and nobility there can be in intercourse between individuals” (Lago: 251).

Forster went on to admit to his own “hard little theory”: all rational and philosophic effort towards a good society was futile (Furbank 1:46).

In building a case against the Platonic ethical view “that the good person cannot be harmed” Nussbaum states that “Plato’s Diotima argues that making the general prior . . . to the particular brings a ‘relaxing’ and ‘easing’ of the strains involved in planning a life” (Love 67). This is certainly the case with Henry Wilcox up to the final crisis with Leonard Bast’s death. Henry’s talent lies not in discerning the multifacetedness of people; his talent identifies a task and isolates and dissects its immutable components “item by item,” as Forster says (107). “Item by item” describes a static, mechanical process and yields a certain kind of success well described by the phrase “hands on all the ropes” (112). This phrase, a physical, athletic-sounding one, is used by Helen, by Leonard Bast, by Henry Wilcox and means the same: such a condition is a strong, clear, healthy, competent one, one that inspires trust and, if it is yours, self-congratulations.

Henry “felt that his hands were on all the ropes of life, and that what he did not know could not be worth knowing” (138). It is only in Henry’s office, with the fire flickering over the map of Africa in Forsterian symbolic terms, that the question of Helen and her future could so efficiently be determined.

It is perhaps too easy to denigrate Henry’s plan: there is, after all, no other. We *are* fearful of it and Henry’s description of it as “perfectly easy.” By adhering to universal perceptions about the sick, Henry demonstrates the certainty, the “easing of the strains” (these have visibly been tormenting Margaret) that Nussbaum calls “ethical crudeness” (Love 37). Margaret looks across the chasm from her perceptions to Henry’s and wishes she had never involved him. She swallows her rage at Henry’s deceiving her. However, it is not this division that will bring about the conflict that destroys their marriage. “Whether Henry was right or wrong, he was most kind, and she knew of no other standard by which to judge him” (279). As Margaret will later say to Henry about Helen’s pregnancy, “It all turns on affection now” (285), so it all turns on Henry’s kindness now. Like Rorty’s liberal, Margaret believes that cruelty is the worst thing one can do (Contingency xv) and as long as there is evidence of Henry’s kindness, “unweeded” (300) though it is, the marriage will endure.

On the way to Howards End to surprise Helen, in the company of Henry and a doctor, Margaret’s “anger and terror increased every moment” (282) as she listens in shock to questions of Helen’s normalcy (“Were *they* normal?”) and “heredity”, descriptions of her as “highly strung” and “a tendency to spiritualism

and those things, though nothing serious” (282). Finally, Margaret raises her colours and they place her unequivocally on her sister’s side. Jumping from the car before it stops, Margaret rushes up to Helen and discovers her pregnancy. She faces down the doctor, bitterly. And yet she has no bitterness for Henry: “ ‘Now, Henry, you’, she said gently. ‘Go away now, dear. I shall want your advice later, no doubt. Forgive me if I have been cross. But, seriously, you must go’ ” (HE 285).

In this crisis, Margaret behaves quite similarly to Ruth Wilcox over the misunderstanding of the Helen/Paul affair at the beginning of the novel. Faced with champions of impersonal, universal propriety who would obliterate the particular people concerned, both women reach back to “the instinctive wisdom the past can alone bestow” (36); Ruth to her ancestors, Margaret to her father. Margaret’s father, who “fought like blazes” as a soldier and “abstained from the fruits of victory” (42) rightfully his, who preferred the risk of the confidence trick (the work of man) to the want-of-confidence trick (the work of the devil). He abhorred equally Pan-Germanism and English Imperialism and searched for the rekindled “light within” (43). It is he who is probably responsible for Margaret’s hatred of war and love of soldiers (a distinction that causes Forster no conflict) and who, “. . . with all his defects and wrong-headedness . . . had he lived . . . would have persuaded his daughter rightly” (74). Both women dismiss the “facts” of each crisis as irrelevant (“Dear Charles” says Ruth, “one doesn’t ask plain questions. There aren’t such things” [36]). Both women echo Caroline Abbott in

Angels, “. . . eyes open, full of infinite pity and full of majesty, as if they discerned the boundaries of sorrow” (*Angels* 138). Finally, both women do the wisest thing and, strangely, meet with no resistance: “Separate those human beings who will hurt each other most” (36). For both Margaret and Ruth, the “who” assumes prime importance, unlike the focus of Henry’s “what” and “where.” Forster blesses this perception which makes “everything less terrible” (41). Of the consequences of Ruth’s action he says, “the rest can wait” (36); of Margaret’s, “there was no hurry” (285).

That Margaret’s anger in this crisis, indeed her recent rage, should dissipate before Henry is not so strange. His kindness has not yet shown itself to be “unweeded” and it is Margaret, after all, who has put Forster’s ethical system under pressure from the outset of the novel: “Do personal relations lead to sloppiness in the end?” (41). For Helen, the answer is clear now, but was not in the presence of the Wilcoxes at Howards End. Margaret sees difficulty in answering “no” unequivocally. “. . . there is a great outer life that you and I have never touched. . . . Personal relations . . . are not supreme there. But here’s my difficulty. This outer life [of marriage settlements and death duties], though obviously horrid, often seems the real one -- there’s grit in it. It does breed character” (41). Henry Wilcox will be its most forceful emissary. In her belief in bridging the prose and the passion, the inner and outer life, and her fear of living in fragments, Margaret has discovered, Malcolm Bradbury believes, a “kinship between the Wilcoxes and herself, founded on the fact that cultivation is not an act

of separation but an imaginative activation of society, and that England belongs both to those who can see her *sub specie aeternitatis* and those who have made her powerful" (Possibilities 106). Bradbury's naming of this kinship "essential" strikes me as too wholehearted. "Tentative," or even the Rortian "contingent" (Contingency xv), which avoids anything final, seems more accurate.

In a brilliantly ironic opening to his novel on competing values for England's reordered imaginative life, Forster introduces extreme proponents of one value system through the enthusiastic letters of an extreme proponent of the opposed value system. Far from being horrid, this "jolliest and happiest" of families, the Wilcoxes, offers Helen a bracing antidote to doubt and she revels in Henry's kind but certain dismissal of new ideas (women's suffrage, equality become "Meg's clever nonsense" [HE 20]) and the family's practical busyness ("they put everything to use" [20]). She cheerfully contrasts Tibby's hay fever morbidity with Wilcox manliness in dealing with the same allergy. Ruth Wilcox lends the right touch of humanity and mystery for a Schlegel. At this stage in the novel, Helen is a universalist, an idealist on the prowl and as Forster indicates, "the truth was that she had fallen in love, not with an individual, but with a family" (37). So firmly and securely ensconced are the Wilcoxes in this outer life that Helen's " 'notion[s] . . . picked up from some book' " (21) and more of Meg's clever nonsense on distinguishing between "life as life" and "life as drama" dissolves, unsubstantial, not real (21).

What does this outer life signify? It signifies scale in the world and scale in

perception processes. It reflects an unequivocal response to the “pressures and oppressions of history” (Levenson 80) whose memories are those of a battle, not a romance. For Henry, “the man who had carved money out of Greece and Africa” (HE 227), it is *not* “the vice of a vulgar mind to be thrilled by bigness” (43). On the contrary, bigness calls forth health, energy and concentration (Henry’s motto) and the exhilaration of getting things done. This outer life is unyielding in its demands but lavish in its rewards. Its rules are unchanging, determinate, fixed. Henry Wilcox has been a loyal subscriber and practitioner (a major player, as we say today) and his success is unquestioned and there for all to see. He has embraced the rules and has devoted all of his considerable energy to their perpetuation. How likely is he to notice small things? or need to? “I am not a fellow who bothers about my own inside” (187) is a statement made by a man who has never had to venture there. Forster is priming us and we wonder what it is that will, or could, bring Henry to his knees.

This outer life has implications for Leonard Bast as well. Bast has been witness to the brutality of this life’s demands but not its rewards. Not a robust willing member of this life but at its mercy, he too thinks in terms of bigness: Ruskin is big, Culture is big, his wife Jacky is big, a walk in the woods is big. This is a bigness that is Sisyphean; it does not exhilarate and challenge but exhausts and defeats eternally, every day. “Oh, to acquire culture!” (52) thinks Leonard, as he listens to Margaret’s speeches on Wagner “flutter away . . . like birds” (52). But as Forster explains in the chapter about the “very poor” (58),

which has led some critics⁴ to call him unkind in this instance, Leonard's "mind and his body had been alike underfed, because he was poor, and because he was modern they were always craving better food" (58).

At the Beethoven concert in Chapter Five of *Howards End*, Bast is preoccupied with a series of worries that appear at first glance particular. But these particulars (his umbrella, the price of his seat, whether to buy a programme) all signal the universal bigness, Sisyphus's rock that, it will soon be apparent, impedes his own life. The corroding suspicion that skews his perception and laughably casts the Schlegels as umbrella thieves is similar to Henry's genial obtuseness: neither trait allows for accurate discernment of people and their consequent choices are therefore suspect.

Forster skilfully *opposes* Leonard Bast and Henry Wilcox by having them utter the *same* phrase about a given "universal" condition of the world: "There always will be rich and poor" (193). A safe speculation for Henry, a desperate observation for Leonard. What is intriguing is the thinking of each that leads to its utterance. The first time the statement is made is when Henry has been attacked by Helen for his role in giving her and Margaret what turns out to be incorrect information about Leonard's place of employment. On the sisters' advice,

⁴ About Forster's treatment of the Basts, Peter Widdowson, for example, asserts, "It is again the detachment, and the condescension, which constitutes the dismissal: the lack of understanding implies the absence of anything worthwhile to understand" (92). Wilfred Stone believes that Forster treats Jacky, Leonard's wife, "with unqualified -- and even cruel -- contempt." He calls the introduction to Chapter Six which begins with "We are not concerned with the very poor," a "rather shocking statement" (248-249). It is indeed shocking, but deliberately so, as I argue in Chapter Five.

Leonard has left and taken lesser paying work. But the insurance company that was going to crash is now “safe as houses” (191), says Henry distractedly, intent on other business. Reacting with surprise to Helen’s assigning responsibility and blame (“we, the upper classes, thought we would help him from the height of our superior knowledge and here’s the result!” [192]), Henry immediately and “pleasantly” offers “a word of advice” to the “neurotic modern” Helen (193). It is an assured defence of the world of insurance and it is, in reality, unassailable. The institution has triumphed over the individual but in her defence of the particular Leonard Bast, Forster gives us one of Helen’s shining moments. Henry speaks in vague generalities about “the battle of life” and “the shoe pinching -- no one can help it” (192) and Helen scores a hit with “Is that your point? A man who had little money has less -- that’s mine” (192). To Henry’s “No one’s to blame” comes Helen’s “Is no one to blame for anything?” (192). Called upon to answer, Henry states, “ ‘Our civilization is moulded by great impersonal forces’ (his voice grew complacent; it always did when he eliminated the personal), ‘and there always will be rich and poor’ ” (193). Henry has explained “the rich” and his kindness, perhaps, obliges him to speak on behalf of “the poor”: “By all means subscribe to charities . . . but don’t get carried away” (192). He leaves the discussion with the thought “[s]he rather reminds me of Dolly” (193). But he remains “fraternal to the last” (193): his value system has been strengthened, not seriously challenged. Henry’s comparison between Helen and his inane daughter-in-law consigns these two essentially opposed women to the same type: emotional, illogical. Margaret

has been strangely quiet, smiling “bravely,” “hovering as usual between the two” (228).

Leonard Bast’s use of the same phrase about rich and poor comes later in the novel, not as a shining moment, but as one of stark clarity, with his seeing “the abyss where nothing counts, and the statements of Democracy are inaudible” (58). Leonard now has no work, having been released from his new employment. Helen has brought him and his wife to Evie’s wedding in the name of justice to “show up the wretchedness that lies under this luxury” (223). Decrying “such theatrical nonsense” (223), Margaret turns to Leonard and says “ ‘We would like to find you work. . . . You’re only down in your luck’ ” (225). To these two upper class women Leonard responds, “ ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about. . . . It’s no good. It’s the whole world pulling. There always will be rich and poor’ ” (225-6).

Helen’s perceptions have gone no further than injustice and revenge, Leonard’s no further than “the whole world pulling” and it is up to Margaret to speak to *Henry* about *Leonard*. As she declares, “ ‘I have no use for justice. . . . Nor am I concerned with duty. I’m concerned with the characters of various people whom we know, and how, things being as they are, things may be made a little better’ ” (226). Her success is blemished: she avoids any mention of who Leonard Bast is and chooses, intuitively, the “methods of the harem” (228) to secure Henry’s agreement to see him. Margaret has negotiated, not navigated, between men of action (“Henry would save the Basts as he had saved Howards

End” [229]) and theorists (“while Helen and her friends were discussing the ethics of salvation” [229]).

Margaret Schlegel has been the mediator throughout, recognizing the danger of speaking a final vocabulary and “accepting an occasional failure as part of the game” (44). Rooted in a core of commitment to a general conception, “the good agent,” Nussbaum affirms, “may need not only to locate the virtuous action among strange new events, but also to deal with an evolving and situation-relative list of virtues” (Love 71). Margaret looks to the particular for correct judgment and choice. Or, in Forsterian terms, she attempts what neither the businessman (who “assumes that his life is everything” [195]) nor the mystic (who “asserts that is nothing” [195]) does: she embarks upon “continuous excursions into either realm” (196), straining for right feeling and correct choice.

It falls on Margaret, whose bonds with people are never severed but sometimes frayed, to foster the bond with her sister and forge a new one with her husband. Her excursions will continue to be fruitful so long as Henry does not cease to be kind and does not “sin against affection” (276).

It is Margaret who rejects Henry’s labelling of Leonard as a “type” (150), after the misunderstanding with Leonard in the Schlegel home, by picking up a clue from the memory of “his nice eyes getting so miserable” (54). She challenges Henry’s later assertion that Mrs. Avery, as an unfortunate member of “the uneducated classes,” can be dismissed as “stupid” (203). It is she who urges Aunt Juley to speak only to Helen (whom they know) about her engagement and not to

the collective Wilcoxes. Margaret fails to convince her discussion club to see the case study named “Leonard Bast” as an individual able to pick up his own ideals without enlightened intervention from leisured class “Twin Star[s]” (133) hovering over him with food or clothes or books and presumably plenty of advice. Her argument to simply give him money unites the splintered factions within the group against her radical views. Her (and Forster’s) use of “warp” and “woof” is a vivid description of a decent life. The two kinds of threads add up to a woven fabric, a particular texture, a particular life. Money, says Margaret, is the “warp of civilization, whatever the woof may be” (134). But she stands alone, losing to others who “had attacked the fabric of society -- property, interest, etc.; she only fixed her eyes on a few human beings” (134).

Margaret’s fine perception allows her to recognize “the deftness that was almost beautiful” (209) in Henry’s managing of the guests at Evie’s wedding. She also recognizes that he cares less for them than the generosity performed on behalf of a task called “wedding.” About his friends, she realizes that Henry is “. . . content to settle one of the greatest things in life haphazard, and so, while his investments went right, his friends generally went wrong. But he seemed without sentiment,” and his friends, “. . . ‘thundering good sorts’, [might] at any moment . . . be shaken off cheerily into oblivion” (207).

Such are the perceptions, acutely particular or simplifyingly universal, that illustrate the is/ought tension in *Howards End* and colour the process resulting in choice. Forster takes pains to trace the origin of perceptions and how they are

focused. Perhaps it is this care that leaves him open to criticism from some. Barbara Rosecrance, for example, says that “[c]oncerned though he is with social equity and social cost, Forster shrinks from humanity in the aggregate” (127). But I see that as precisely the point, although “shrinks” conjures up a distaste, an elite fastidiousness that ignores Forster’s personal history (teaching at the Working Men’s College, for example) and distorts the tenor of his authorial voice. When Margaret says “Doing good to humanity was useless,” we are not meant to think misanthropically. Completing that thought, she says, “to do good to one . . . was the most she dare hope for” (134) and speaks prototypically for Forster who wrote: “I have no mystic faith in the people. I have in the individual. He seems to me a divine achievement and I mistrust any view which belittles him” (Two Cheers 55). It will be when we discuss the consequences of different ways of seeing that Forster’s ethical system crystallizes but never calcifies. It emphasizes the notion of “‘I am I’ ” (236) that Charles Wilcox suddenly yearns for after Bast’s death (“a wish that something had been different somewhere” [319]). It concerns itself with discerning the particularity of “other,” leading to the redemption/renewal of Henry Wilcox, in one memorable case. In this way does this system demonstrate its power to endure (imperfectly, as Margaret herself endures) not in blazing triumph but “quizzically,” as Malcolm Bradbury maintains in his essay (130). The stamina of such a system is sustained by the activated display of the small-scale particular greatness of its thinking, right feeling advocates.

CHAPTER THREE

Uncontrolled Happenings and Conflicting Commitments

Henry: “ ‘To my mind this question is connected with something far greater, the rights of property itself’ ” (317).

Margaret: “ ‘To be humble and kind, to go straight ahead, to love people rather than pity them, to remember the submerged -- well, one can't do all these things at once, worse luck, because they're so contradictory. It's then that proportion comes in as a last resort, when the better things have failed and a deadlock -- ’ ” (83).

Narrator: “It is necessary to prepare for an examination, or a dinner-party, or a possible fall in the price of stock: those who attempt human relations must adopt another method, or fail” (71).

“The choice between \$50 and \$200, when one cannot have both,” says Martha Nussbaum, “is not terribly wrenching. The choice between two qualitatively different actions or commitments, when on account of circumstances one cannot pursue both, is or can be tragic -- in part because the item foregone is not the same as the item attained” (Love 37). The possibility of conflict arises from acknowledging the claims of the “goods” we value as competing. Correct resolution requires acute discernment of these competing values and acceptance of the choice as neither uncontroversial nor unproblematic. Further, Geoffrey Harpham explains, “All forms of the ethical imperative gather around the

structurally *obscure* but commanding figure that contemporary thought has called ‘the other’ ”⁵ (Getting 2, my emphasis). Starting from Nussbaum’s and Harpham’s observations, this chapter explores a question that underlies a central preoccupation in Forster’s novel: how scrupulous must the analysis be of any affirmed value system in order to aid correct choice and ensure appropriate action?

It is necessary to situate, in *Howards End* as a whole, Henry’s comments about property rights that begin this chapter. It is made hours after Margaret’s electrifying speech to him that is the climax of the novel and, gauging his response as we read, signals the end of their marriage. Henry’s kindness, “unweeded” though it has always been and which has fuelled Margaret’s love and patience, has not withstood the pressure of her request, a grievous assault on a cherished belief: “Tomorrow she [a pregnant Helen] goes; tonight, with your permission, she would like to sleep at Howards End” (298). To continue Forster’s “unweeded” analogy, not only does Henry’s kindness wither and die, it exudes a toxic residue. Margaret’s request lands her in the tangled centre of Henry’s garden: “It was the crisis of his life” (298). Cautiously phrasing and re-phrasing her request, making her arguments “logically” and deliberately, she nevertheless witnesses the

⁵ When Harpham explores this “otherness” more fully, he finds that it “touches all aspects of ethics, beginning with the most important ethical terms, such as ‘freedom,’ ‘obligation,’ ‘subject,’ and ‘ought’ itself.” He sees complications here. The “clarity” and “precision” that ethical discourse seeks, as other professional discourses do, is “both necessitated and frustrated,” he claims, “by a radical and ineradicable unclarity built into the discourse itself.” To overcome “the depressing reduction to strictly logical rules,” on the one hand, and a “more or less covert utopianism,” on the other, Harpham hopes for an acceptance of ethics’ innate unclarity as “constitutive” (Getting 2-3).

fragility of his kindness, the fear that supplants it and the visceral reaction that enables Henry to resolve the problem. Henry's inflexible hierarchy of values demands "clever redefinitions" and "aggressively revisionary strategies" (Fragility vii), as Nussbaum calls them, of unexpected and threatening situations in order to eliminate conflict, to "secure singleness and the absence of tension" (Fragility 55) and thus to facilitate action. This close causal relationship between contingency and conflict makes it necessary to discuss these second and third elements of Nussbaum's ethical theory in tandem.

Forster ironically allows Henry to use the presiding symbol of Margaret's sermon. But Henry's "connect[ing]" takes on, once again, "the manner of the committee-room" (106). Obligated to explain to his son the circumstances that lead to his decision to refuse Margaret and Helen overnight access to Howards End, he dissects "this question," as he says to Charles, and concludes that familial love (the love of Helen and Margaret) is and should always be ranked less than the rights of property and conventional morality. Some critics have argued that Henry's main objection to Margaret's request is Helen's pregnancy: certainly that is part of it. But if we examine the novel's treatment of the events as related to Charles by Henry, we can reasonably infer that Helen's pregnancy is disclosed in the non-specific sentence "the story unrolled . . . of course nothing about Mrs. Bast" (316). This is the general recapping that leads up to the present midnight conversation with Charles. It is here that Forster gives Henry his voice again to speak in his own language of the more crucial matter: "I am *morally* certain that

she is with her sister at Howards End” (317, my emphasis). “Morally” is deliberately ill-used here and it exemplifies Henry’s overriding perception of his rights as owner of Howards End, linking [im]morality more to Margaret’s act of disobedience than to Helen’s act of promiscuity. Indeed, the dialogue between Margaret and Henry is subject to greater and greater stress so that Margaret’s violation of Henry’s fixed order of value and her subsequent transgression is the sure thing that any reasonable bookmaker, moral or not, would lay money on. “Her sister,” not Helen and “my wife” (317), not Margaret convey their lack of particularity for Henry, their depersonalization, their lesser importance in Henry’s present ordering of things. Henry goes on to say “ ‘The house is mine -- and, Charles, it will be yours -- and when I say that no one is to live there I mean that no one is to live there. I won’t have it.’ He looked angrily at the moon” (317) and ends his discussion with his son, wrapping it up with a certainty unvexed by conflict and with the comment that introduces this chapter.

Henry Wilcox has built himself a self-sufficient world in which insoluble conflicts cannot arise. He has done this by ranking all possible “goods” in a fixed, purely quantitative order and, when pressed, redefining situations to accord with it. “At best,” says Nussbaum, “this is ethical immaturity -- at worst, callousness and blindness” (Love 37). Before examining more fully the nature and occasions of Henry’s redefinitions in this and other crucial requests made of him, it is useful to revisit Forster’s essay on property, detailing the not-so-surprising effects it can produce on its owner.

In 1926, with the royalties earned from *A Passage to India*, Forster purchased “a wood . . . the first property that I have owned,” he says in “My Wood.” “It is not a large wood -- it contains scarcely any trees, and it is intersected, blast it, by a public footpath” (Abinger 22). “Blast it” here denotes a telling anti-public sentiment. So begins Forster’s discerning, ironic, humourous account of “effects of property upon the character” (23). His account is meant to yield a reading less of “My Wood” than “*My Wood*,” or “*My Soon-to-be-Bigger Wood*,” or “*My Wood-and-everything-in-it Wood*,” or still, “*My Reflection-of-me-only Wood*.” Citing a certain heaviness and slowness, a need for expansion, a creative urge that is “pretentious and empty” (24) and an inability to share (“perhaps . . . I shall wall in and fence out” [26]) as insidious and real effects upon the character of a property owner, Forster half-jokingly projects himself backwards as Wilcoxian but with ironic humour. The last sentence, the funniest, reads as follows: “Enormously stout, endlessly avaricious, pseudo-creative, intensely selfish, I shall weave upon my forehead the quadruple crown of possession until those nasty Bolshies come and take it off again and thrust me aside into the outer darkness” (26). *Howards End* has clearly situated Henry’s tendency to dwell in universal, vague perceptions of people, as we saw in Chapter Two. He is also slow to identify irony (“If Oniton is really damp, it is impossible, and must be inhabited by little boys” [HE 257], Margaret says to him of his stated reason why the house has been let without her knowledge). Forster’s last sentence, if contextualized universally, might draw from Henry his “Olympian laugh” (140); if

perceived as a particular threat, we would follow him in the process of redefinition that neutralizes any stress on the hierarchy of his values, of which the most important appears to be the ownership of property. Further, and more seriously, Forster himself was involved in several disputes over property with his various landlords (some of which he won, most lost) and in a memoir, “written in bitterness after his expulsion from West Hackhurst,” notes Furbank, Forster recorded a memory of his feelings as property owner:

“ ‘Once I attended . . . a meeting of landowners who were trying to obstruct rural development. . . . Our aim was to make the country inaccessible to common people. Elbow to elbow, acre to acre, we were to stand firm. That was my nearest approach to feudalism. My next nearest had been at the age of fourteen, in the Howards End house in Hertfordshire. We were turned out of it. If the land had welcomed me then, if it had welcomed me more effectively at West Hackhurst, the Tory side of my character would have developed, and my liberalism been atrophied’ ” (Furbank 2:204).

It has often been stated that the house in *Howards End* is not merely a house. Through Ruth Wilcox we see it as a spiritual home to her and to her ancestors wherein dwells “the inward light” (99), but through Henry and his children we see a physical structure, a questionable drain on capital that is too small to pay, “spend what you will on [it]” (141). It is an unsatisfactory hybrid, neither country nor city, “picturesque enough, but not a place to live in” (141). For Margaret and Helen, on the night of their visit, it becomes their home by the simple fact that it presents sheltering memories of their life, and they the home owners without deed or keys. The house, as does the novel itself, explores and demarcates “life by time” from “life by value,” a crucial dilemma for Forster,

Bradbury affirms in *Possibilities* (93), requiring an on-going balancing within the novel between the “unyielding forces in history” (93) confronting, “against all the logic of the times” (92), “the will to vision . . . and the urgent claims of the holiness of the heart’s affection” (95). Forster cannot follow Tolstoy or the Gospels, he says in “My Wood,” when they call property sinful (Abinger 23). As we shall see later on in this chapter, the characters are presented with increasingly stressed variations, through no consent of their own, of this same time/value dilemma, a very modern one. The variations of this dilemma will be occasions for [re]ordering the things they value: the rights of property, social convention, family love, human tragedy (Helen’s, the Basts’), human love (Margaret’s) and a human appeal (Ruth’s). A close look at the first crisis to threaten Margaret’s and Helen’s relationship, unexpected for both, will explore the process that may lead to such a reordering.

In discussing reactions to uncontrolled happenings, Nussbaum explains:

“If human beings cannot make themselves entirely safe against such rare bad luck, at least they can structure their lives and commitments so that in the ordinary course of events they will be able to stay clear of serious conflict. One obvious way to do this is to simplify the structure of one’s value-commitments, refusing to attach oneself to concerns that frequently, or even infrequently, generate conflicting demands” (Fragility 51).

The inability to confront conflicting values and obligations, to resist a calcified hierarchy of things we deem valuable and good, leads inevitably then, according to Nussbaum, “to [a] clos[ing] off, [a] simplifying of the agent’s commitments and loves” (Fragility 51). For Forster, a dangerous complacency arises resulting from

a loss of proportion which often defined for him the problem of modernity (Levenson 89). “Man lives,” Forster states, “and ought to live, in a complex world, full of conflicting claims” (Two Cheers 87). As the novel’s principal practitioner of proportion, Margaret bears the brunt of the fallout in crises with Helen and with Henry; for both the concept of proportion is foreign. During the sisters’ first serious crisis, Margaret’s announcement of her proposal of marriage from Henry, Helen’s reaction is one of incoherence and dismay. Indeed, Margaret’s decision, seen by Helen as threatening to both of them and by many critics as novelistically untenable, carries within it the seeds of a rupture between the sisters that could prove unfixable. Margaret redeems her own decision masterfully, if not completely. She allows for Helen’s initial reaction: the strong emotions are a gauge by which to perceive Helen’s fear (“Don’t, don’t, Meg, don’t! Don’t, don’t do such a thing! I tell you not to -- don’t! I know -- don’t!” [175]); she responds emotionally herself (“‘But it’s stupid!’ and suddenly . . . the immense landscape was blurred” [175]). Helen’s intent is not to cause Margaret pain and she turns to her, seeing an “other.” Beginning from divergent positions, Margaret begins to ask and Helen begins to explain, neither intent on winning. As Leonard Bast has discovered earlier, “The Miss Schlegels did not mind being wrong. To them nothing was fatal but evil” (145). Margaret’s aim is to understand the opposition that is so fierce: “‘What *is* it against him, Helen? You must try and say’ ” (176). Such an invitation *must* lead to Helen’s “saying,” breathlessly conflating Paul Wilcox, and by extension the entire family, with panic

and emptiness, telegrams and anger. Margaret understands “because it touched on thoughts that were familiar between them” (177). Accepting these values, Margaret nevertheless goes on to speak of Henry and history: his “public qualities which you so despise and enable all this” (177), the past role of men like the Wilcoxes in assuring the existence of “us literary people” (177). She ends with the famous “[m]ore and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it” (178).

The conversation may end with Margaret’s “Rubbish!” (178) but she *has*, in fact, made things a little less terrible. She has held up to the light of her own scrupulous eye the competing values of personal relations (life by value) and public qualities (life by time), affirmed and endorsed their existence and declared to Helen her esteem for both (not equally or ideally and not without conflict). Helen’s final comment, “One would lose something” (178), murmured to herself, speaks to the difficulty in securing singleness in this dilemma. Margaret herself has attempted proportion with her sister, understanding more the nature of their deadlock, not expecting to break it. And she has helped Helen grapple with an event that has unexpectedly altered both their lives. As Nussbaum points out, “Happenings beyond the agent’s control are of real importance not only for his or her feelings of happiness or contentment, but also for whether he or she manages to live a fully good life, a life inclusive of various forms of laudable action” (Love 17). Margaret, indeed, “had expected the disturbance, and was not irritated by it. For a sensitive woman, she had steady nerves . . .” (HE 179). Her reward is to

hear Helen say a few days later, “I definitely dislike him, but I’ll do what I can” (196). This is the novel’s first grappling with a situation that tests their relationship. The illustration of its resolution, of sorts, through the Schlegel sisters underscores not the resolution itself but the ability of their bond to sustain pressure, to adapt and endure. Its tone is deeply Forsterian, with its “insistence on *transaction*,” as Judith Herz has recognized (125, my emphasis). Consequently, their bond remains intact and they are “assured against estrangement” (196). Their priorities are long lasting and can outlive an attack from “externals.” (There are echoes of Erasmus, one of Forster’s “law-givers” [Two Cheers 65], in this habit of scrutinizing matters central to a good life and matters peripheral). The common ground they share has already been reiterated and the disruption between the sisters comes to little for the moment.

This extended description of Margaret’s and Helen’s crisis serves to contrast the workings of Henry and his family when faced with the similar dilemma of a wholly unexpected and severe blow to their own value system. The consequences of any focus of perception as an aid to correct choice will most clearly be revealed under the pressure applied to that focus, that way of seeing. It is in examining those consequences in the Wilcoxes’ focus that we now turn to an example of Nussbaum’s “clever redefinitions” (absent in the Schlegel sisters, but necessary for others), and Forster’s famous phrase, “The tragedy of preparedness” (115).

We meet the Wilcox family alone hours after the funeral of Ruth Wilcox.

“Up at Howards End they were attempting breakfast” (98), Forster discloses, readying us for a portrait of a family in mourning. And so it is: Henry’s manner of grieving requires the protective sanctuary of solitude; Charles and Evie find distraction and solace in a brusque display of life-as-usual. Their grief is real, as Forster emphasizes, but directed away from the personal. Henry “suffered acutely” (98), and we believe Forster when he says so, but as Henry remembers his wife, we have the vague notion that he did not know *her*. When Henry holds up his memories of a thirty-year partner to the light of *his* eye, he sees “[n]ot anything in detail -- not courtship or early raptures -- but just the unvarying virtue, that seemed to him a woman’s noblest quality,” her “wonderful innocence” and lack of “capriciousness . . . and odd flaws of passion or frivolity” (99). The one “cloud” that he remembers is Ruth’s dissatisfaction with the sermons of the Church of England (“she came of Quaker stock” [99]) and her “desire for a more inward light” (99). “Inward light must have been granted,” says the novel, speaking for Henry, “for he heard no complaints in later years” (99). What we see is an idealization of Ruth which belies the affirmation of her real existence together with a deeply flawed reading of her *mode* of existence. And we discover that she had kept the knowledge of her illness to herself (“Was this altogether just?” Henry asks himself, using the wrong adjective. “It was a fault on her part -- what a little fault!” [99]).

The portrait that Henry’s memories paint of Ruth is composed of such broad strokes, ending with a misty image of “steadiness” (100), that we suspect

she may never have *really* existed at all for Henry, was never “there,” as Ansell says of the cow in *The Longest Journey*. We have met Ruth earlier and we cannot ignore the nature and depth of her attachment to Howards End, her own home after all: “To be parted from your house, your father’s house -- it oughtn’t to be allowed. It is worse than dying. I would rather die than -- “ (93). The narrator’s view of her and her husband’s collide, are strangely incongruent. At Margaret’s unsuccessful luncheon party, Forster’s narrator sums up Ruth’s quiet failure to shine: “. . . she and daily life were out of focus: one or the other must show blurred. And at lunch she seemed more out of focus than usual, and nearer the line that divides daily life from a life that may be of greater importance” (86). This, then, will be the test of Ruth’s last request: the perception of *her* mode of existence, an existence beyond the daily gray. Wilcoxes are rarely out of focus with daily life. It is the only life they embrace. Along with suspicion of Henry’s idealized recollections, therefore, comes the fear that Ruth may become someone else in his mind or disappear from it as she has disappeared in body.

Ruth also becomes quickly repositioned in the memories of her son. Charles is “too miserable hanging about” (103) after the funeral and decides to return to London to work. This requires a conversation with Crane, the chauffeur, to ready the car. Charles’s casual, habitual contempt for the lower classes and his near obsession with possession leads him into an inane, futile discussion of whether his car has been driven in his absence. Aware of being treated as a fool by the calmly obsequious chauffeur, Charles’s heavy heart interferes with his

normal impulse to report the man to his father. Earlier we have seen Charles demand quick service and receive it: he is the exemplar of the present and future historical moment. In his memories of discussions with his mother about modernizing Howards End we see the same traits tempered with loving impatience, always triumphant over her. Charles's intent in personal relations is to win through persuasion or brutishness, hence "When people wrote a letter Charles always asked what they wanted" (104). Charles has not won with Crane and his anger has partly usurped the grief for his mother. Before the fateful note arrives, Ruth has already been displaced, and relegated to a different time than the five minutes that are "now."

Having established the tenuousness of her claim on the minds and hearts of those closest to her, the novel follows how Ruth's identity, her essence, will be redefined when startling evidence of her real, individual self posthumously collides with values whose order will not be questioned or rearranged. Ruth's "desire for a more inward light had found expression at last" (108), says Forster. Whether this desire is sensed and how scrupulous is the analysis of values under stress are my next concerns.

Henry has received the handwritten request, "no date, no signature" (106), whereby Ruth gives Howards End to Margaret. "No longer inert," "transformed" (105), the narrator informs us, by a turn of events which has occurred without his knowledge and without his consent, Henry quickly sheds sorrowful recollections of his wife (abandons *her*) and concentrates on the business at hand. Controlled

anger replaces grief: “Heavy breathings were heard. They were calming themselves” (105). The atmosphere has changed concerning the death of this woman who “wanted not to vex people” (102). Indicating the particular direction that this urgent discussion will take (disposing “of . . . [human affairs] item by item, sharply. It is the best -- perhaps the only -- way of dodging emotion. All went forward smoothly” [107]), the novel shifts rather abruptly from the world of social reality to the continuing, pastoral world of the winter morning outside. It tells us that the white-now-gray terrier of Evie’s has been “discredited” (its colour pales when compared to the snow’s purity) “but the blackbirds that he was chasing glowed with Arabian darkness, for all the conventional colouring of life had been altered” (107). The novel presents a riddle in such a shift: if “all the conventional colouring of life had been altered,” then who is the blackbird, who is the terrier? or, who/what will inform correct choice and action?

Inside the Wilcoxes attempt to neutralize the blow by scrupulously examining the physical evidence before them, but nothing more: is the note in Ruth’s handwriting? Are there conditions for this bequest? Is there to be compensation for repairs? As this process unfolds, the nature of Ruth’s request, “treacherous,” “absurd” (108), is conflated with, not informed by knowledge of, the woman who made it. The family slides into the fusing of author and note. Ruth Wilcox, redefined solely through the unsettling piece of paper that travels from hand to hand, *becomes* the note. *She* vanishes along with her desires and literally joins the unseen. Always obscure in the Wilcox imagination (but not in

Margaret's), Ruth commands no attention in death. Although this decreasing of her value, from the ideal to disgrace, is painful to her family, the entire matter now becomes manageable, able to be concluded.

The question of correct choice in this instance must be debated within the novel's structure. The author calls forth the commentator and demands more than asides, he demands a polemic on the *ought* that reconfigures Ruth's desire and retrieves the novel's symbolic mode. On the grounds of practical morality, the coordinates of convention in the present historical moment, the commentator finds that theory and example are not discordant. On other more ambivalent, "deeper" (108) grounds (the interrogated but sustained ethical system of *Howards End*), the decision of the family is quietly condemned as they are acquitted -- "almost." "For one hard fact remains. They did neglect a personal appeal. The woman who had died did say to them: 'Do this,' and they answered, 'We will not' " (108). This is a solid example of Nussbaum's "closing off" of commitments and loves.

In death, Ruth Wilcox can no longer be persuaded to alter her real desire. To protect themselves from this "tragedy," the Wilcoxes "prepare": they redefine what they cannot grasp, simplify and calcify the structure of their commitments and obliterate all but the most practical items. Their method is to nail each item down, hammering the entire dilemma into its proper pieces, familiar and resolvable. Margaret risks allowing "the bulk of human affairs" (107) to surface, looks to the personal for understanding and resolves whatever can be fixed within these norms. A redefinition of her sister or the stark reversal of perceptions from

one day to the next are impossible for Margaret. The Wilcoxes appear to encounter less difficulty in that regard: “[y]esterday they had lamented: ‘She was a dear mother, a true wife; in our absence she neglected her health and died’ ” (108), a statement not wrong, but not right. “Today they thought: ‘She was not as true, as dear, as we supposed.’ ” “Tracherous and absurd!” says Forster, “treacherous to the family, to the laws of property. . . .” “When we think the dead both treacherous and absurd, we have gone far towards reconciling ourselves to their departure” (108). Henry’s reconciliation is complete when Ruth becomes “the -- the invalid” (106).

Nussbaum’s notion of redefinition, then, occurs in the face of unexpected stress to an inflexible ranking of things we value. The structure of *Howards End* appears to concur and each of Henry’s radical redefinitions is prefaced with signposts such as “Heavy breathings were heard” (105), “He saw his whole life crumbling” (230), “It was the crisis of his life” (298). Most will agree that Henry’s (and subsequently the family’s) redefinition of Ruth is possible because she was always perceived vaguely, nebulously. By subsuming Ruth to the physical evidence of her request, it is no longer marked as a personal plea. It is something else, an attack on property rightfully theirs, not legal, not binding, words scrawled on paper, an “unbusinesslike” note (108). Henry has great affinities here with Creon’s myopic reduction of all values under one, Greek civic duty, in *Antigone*. In a desperate effort to persuade Creon to acknowledge Antigone’s ordering of values (her love for her dead brother supersedes civic duty)

or, at least, not to kill her for them, Creon's son Haemon says to him, "You would do well as monarch of a desert" (Sophocles 83). This aridity presides over the end of this chapter. Earlier in the chapter some semblance of proportion and respect for his mother had urged Charles to leniency and not report Crane the chauffeur to his father. In the newly established atmosphere of treachery and absurdity, the grudge against Crane lies harmoniously within a larger one and Charles now feels comfortable saying to Henry as he leaves, "And by the way, I wish you'd speak to Crane some time. I'm certain he's had my new car out" (110). This small but most telling development returns us to the simplifying focus of the entire chapter and the kind of singleness that is secured. It dismisses forever the reality of Ruth Wilcox in the mind of her family. Henry's character is nobler than his son's, as we have seen in his defence of Margaret in this whole affair, and after ascertaining that no harm has been done to the car, Henry lets it pass. Father and son may disagree, but "each desired no doughtier comrade when it was necessary to voyage a little past the emotions. So the sailors of Ulysses voyaged past the Sirens, having first stopped one another's ears with wool" (HE 110). The novel is priming us once again: if we know how the sailors fared, we fear in some way for the dead woman's family. They who have prepared so well have denied her real existence and not heard her words. "The tragedy of preparedness," says Forster, "has scarcely been handled, save by the Greeks. Our national morality assumes that preparation against danger is in itself a good, and that men, like nations, are the better for staggering through life fully armed" (115).

The novel's first example of tragic preparedness, cited above, is less connected with fear than Henry's two other crises which we will examine shortly. Ruth is dead, her voice mute. Her bequest is a wish which will lead to correct action only if her rich particulars can be teased out from bland generalities, when the belief ". . . that nothing will ever come to the same thing as anything else" (Love 37) is not perceived as anarchy, and contingency is not neutralized or distorted when it collides with a pre-established value hierarchy. The choice to keep a house nobody wants over the wishes of a beloved wife and mother summarizes the Wilcoxes's first brush with the unseen. The consequences of that choice do not disrupt much.

Chapter Eighteen in *Howards End* ushers in a quickening in the pace of the novel. It is the chapter where Henry asks Margaret to marry him. Up to this point, Schlegels and Wilcoxes have had irregular contact. We have been familiarized with the different values that order their lives. Following behind Henry and Margaret, the two families are brought closer and the differing values are observed meshing and clashing. It is their impending marriage that triggers the crisis between Margaret and Helen that was discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Even a moderately discerning reader will be expecting more clash than mesh: the sisters' voices are not mute ("Meg," writes Helen on the third page of the novel, "shall we ever learn to talk less?" [21]), Margaret's perceptions of Henry from the outset are keen, the chasm between Helen and Henry appears vast.

One mark that differentiates Henry is the image of fortress employed in the

novel and it appears only once, in connection with Ruth's will, without Margaret's presence. "Fortress" represents the common dual notion of strength and safety from siege. The episodes when Henry speaks "from out of it" (106), "out" here nicely conveying distance and detachment, are ones which necessitate a show of authority of some sort. With Dolly during the episode of Ruth's will, Henry's fortress bestows on his authority a congeniality that rightfully deflects her inanities ("Of course, my dear, we consider you as one of the family, but it will be better if you do not interfere with what you do not understand" [106]). But Dolly is easily trumped. In Henry's two other crises, he scrambles to his fortress under siege, a military tactician turned benighted foot soldier.

Margaret, who will be intimately involved in these crises, knows of Henry's fortress but is not fully aware of its essential bearing on Henry's usual, exuberant, Olympian laugh, his ceaseless fraternity with a hostile Helen, his deft and generous managing of Evie's wedding. The episode involving his meeting Jacky at the wedding, while more straightforward than the dilemma of Ruth's will, is orchestrated, implausibly perhaps, to affect a greater threat. It challenges publicly not only Henry's ordering of major and lesser "goods," but exposes as fraudulent his own projected, protected identity as "English gentleman." This crisis is structured differently than the first to accord with the more damaging assault. For one thing, it cannot be so easily contained in a piece of paper, and for another, convention rules against Henry this time. Most important, Margaret, very much alive and present as Henry's future wife, still more Schlegel than Wilcox, speaks

words that call for response, and unwittingly causes him more alarm than Jacky herself. It falls on Margaret, in her natural enough desire to understand what is happening here, to strain Henry's resources so greatly that she becomes redefined by him as master of a plan to destroy him. "I don't know what it is all about," she says. Henry's response is "Don't you indeed? I do" (230). Her efforts to reconcile, which structure the entire novel on deeper grounds, must and will be, at this point, perceived by Henry as disingenuous ("He thought she was acting," "He thought he was trapped" [230]). The maintaining of his publicly impeccable persona, the supreme and only "good" here for him, dictates that the "others" around him will be obliterated (no recognition of Jacky) or ludicrously transformed ("Very well thought out. I am amused at your caution, Margaret" [230]). Within the newly constructed context, the operating principle becomes self-defence. Inevitably, Henry's inept and myopic perceptions of these now "manageable" circumstances lead, once again, to efficient resolution: "I have the honour to release you from your engagement" (230).

This second crisis, specifically the scene during Evie's wedding, serves as the source of dramatic action for the remainder of the novel. It raises the ante for Henry as he continues to redefine and neutralize, it temporarily deprives Margaret of her voice and distorts her deepest instincts, it reconfigures Helen's future and robs the Bastis of theirs. This event forms an integral part of the novel's plan to mount assaults of increasing force on differing value systems and to evaluate the scrupulousness of their examination. Nussbaum's emphasis on flexible priorities

over codifying structures, and the ethical relevancy of contingency in choosing, harmonizes with the novel's running commentary on preparedness: "The most unsuccessful [career] is not that of a man who is taken unprepared, but of him who has prepared and is never taken" (115).

The aftermath of the crisis with Jacky involves Henry and Margaret only. To their conversation the next morning, Margaret brings a reconfigured sense of proportion that will salvage her engagement ("Henry must have it as he liked. . . . Henry must be forgiven and made better by love" [240]) but which is fuelled by pity (this "man who was blundering up and down their lives" [240]), a contravention of her own description to Ruth of a good life: to love people rather than to pity them.

Henry brings a mindset that is less blatant and more wily than the previous night. When Margaret greets him with "Henry dear --" (241), implying forgiveness which in turn brings his focus back to his sin, the occasion for another redefinition presses, this time of himself, and the fortress image once again comes into play. "Expelled from his old fortress [authority, respectability] Mr. Wilcox was building a new one [a lurid past]" (241). The "manliness" of such a past, the nature of his confession, the treatment of "other" all surface in Henry's account of his affair with Jacky to do service to his new ultimate good, his identity as "a man who has lived a man's past" (230).

Margaret's pity restricts her speech, but not her insights. Clear-eyed and alert to Henry's confession and its telling subtext, she accepts her assignments as

confessor and mother, she who doesn't like children (she calls Henry "boy" [241]), even as she decodes his wiliness. "You, with your sheltered life, and refined pursuits . . . how can you guess the temptations . . .?" she acutely decodes to mean "[h]e was not so much confessing his soul as pointing out the gulf between the male soul and the female" (242). "Oh, Margaret, we fellows all come to grief once in our time" is really "improvised emotion" and "she could not bear to listen to him" (243). Henry ends his confession with the self-centred " 'I have . . . I have been through hell' " and Margaret's reading of him as "anxious to be terrible but had not got it in him" (243) neatly encapsules a significant aspect of her future husband. (The novel will construct another of its intriguing ironies when Margaret and Henry finally do marry, shortly after this event: "She, a monogamist, regretted the cessation of some of life's innocent odours; he, whose instincts were polygamous, felt morally braced by the change, and less liable to the temptations that had assailed him in the past" [254]).

Margaret's pity, transfigured into calm and few words, is a source of annoyed surprise for Henry; he would prefer her to rage or be felled by this blow. She appears to him as "not altogether womanly" (241); is she in his mind as Miss Schlegel, the "toothy one"? (153). However, it is this conscious stance of Margaret's that allows confession.

Henry's behaviour during this scene is consistent with what the novel has already established as his complexities: his genial unassailability in one mode of existence, his covert vulnerability in another. However, Margaret's unusual and

complete demarcation between her words and her thoughts, the dichotomizing of soothing words and tough observations consigns her more definitely than before to the harem. The novel encounters difficulty here with its symbolic imperatives and its historical ones: Margaret simultaneously impedes and pushes forward her project of connecting. We are told that “she longed to mention Mrs. Wilcox” (243), but her silence complies with the rules of the house in Henry’s new fortress. This place of safety, surely seen by now as false, rises once again with Margaret’s help as she assumes an additional role in this imperfect scene of many roles: “she played the girl, until he could rebuild his fortress and hide his soul from the world” (243). Nowhere else in the novel is its own ethical example under greater stress. The novel has painstakingly developed a self-scrutinizing methodology for correct choice and has had Margaret as its exemplar. Margaret’s new sense of proportion, foremost of which is Henry’s salvation through love, has a whiff of unearned tranquillity. She seems, to use Nussbaum’s reference to the Jamesian phrase, not “finely aware and richly responsible” (Love 148), which includes in correct choice acknowledgement of the value of what is foregone. She enters into the multiple roles assigned to her and passes through them, much as Henry passes through his emotional states. Her only true roles here are simultaneously complicit and subversive. Having confessed to his mother, having explained and been forgiven by his girl, Henry passes through the crisis unchanged but more manly: a few hours ago it threatened his life.

The text, then, becomes troublesome in this scene as it underscores the

challenge, both thematic and dramatic, to preserve and further this relationship in its historical mode. Novelistically, the exposure of deeper yet consistent complexities in Henry favours him in this scene; Margaret is thwarted and betrayed by her own reordered priorities. It is not strange that she seems to escape from the novel, to be supplanted by an impostor. Forster's intrusive narrator, so apt at fine tuning, has not been present and returns in the final two paragraphs only to summarize the standing of a rather complacent Margaret after this episode, Henry's second crisis.

The third crisis which climaxes the novel and began this chapter relieves Henry of the necessity of dealing with emotions or improvising them. The text elaborating the aftermath of the Jacky episode has strained Margaret's dual role in the novel as both symbol of the bridge between inner and outer life and a part of the social, historical reality we call a wife. This third crisis finally redresses the queer imbalance of thought and words, unsatisfying but perhaps necessary, that allowed her relationship with Henry to continue. Henry himself unconsciously presses for such a redress by employing his lifelong strategy of isolating the practical matters in human affairs and itemizing them in strict order. He ignores all "others": his fatal misreading of Margaret and of the new, deeper bond between her and Helen (of it she has said to him, "It all turns on affection now" [285]) blandly presumes her acceptance of this strategy. He fails, many times, and each failure indicates to him how quickly his fortress is receding. Forster stages this encounter with economy. It is precisely, almost militarily, controlled. It is

impossible not to see Margaret as a reluctant but brilliant warrior forced, finally, to give no quarter nor ask for any. Quickly losing ground in this, “the crisis of his life” (298), Henry builds a makeshift fortress from “out” of which he speaks the words that twice deny Margaret’s request and so much more. In delivering her climactic speech she redeems the novel’s symbol for a reordered “good” life. Henry’s failure is complete when his reaction becomes one of self-defence: he issues such a perverted redefinition of Margaret’s request that Nussbaum’s statement “[n]othing will ever come to the same thing as anything else” (Love 37) might very well signal insanity. We must look at this chapter more closely as it declaims Forsterian right feeling and interrogates its fate as victory or defeat; it is the ethical microcosm on which the entire novel rests.

The request to spend the night at Howards End, which originates in love and ends in all that love is not, comes from Helen. It falls on Margaret, once again, to travel from one mode of existence to another and return to her sister with proportion maintained and love respected. Very soon in her conversation with Henry, however, she knows how vulnerable her order of values is to his. Were she mute, as Ruth was, the matter would be settled differently. But Margaret brings both voice and thoughts to Henry on this occasion. With his opening mollifying remark “I am a man of the world and you are a most exceptional woman” (296), Margaret knows he has ensconced himself in the fortress they constructed dishonestly. We are surely meant to see her “blush” (296) at this remark as an unwilling and deeply disheartened reaction; more important, we should recognize

Henry's misstep in *not* seeing it in that way. Sympathetic to this womanly display, Henry proceeds to item one, whether Helen was wearing a wedding ring and item two, the name of her seducer. The last question clearly demonstrates what it is that Henry is trying to secure. In her increasing understanding of the danger (the "precipice" [299]), Margaret's voice does not betray her but her body does; she goes gray. "It [her reaction] did not displease him" (296) says the novel; we remember that Henry's eyes held an "agreeable menace" (165) and we know that Margaret knows that he lies when he says "this is far worse for me than for you" (296). This conversation is assuming a different and threatening nature for Margaret.

Still, Margaret speaks only to answer Henry's questions. When resistance comes, it is to reject his suggestion that she sit down ("I knew you weren't fit for it; I wish I hadn't taken you" [297]). Item three is a demand for any other information about Helen's lover and an attempt at flattery. It discloses that Charles has been enlisted. Margaret resists more strongly and hears Henry speak from out of his other fortress, respectability ("You don't think that I and my son are other than gentlemen?" [H97]), once vacated but now conveniently reclaimed under the banner of saving Helen's name.

This last question rules on Margaret's control and in her loaded question to Henry ("Suppose he [Helen's lover] turned out to be married already? One has heard of such cases" [297]), she greatly heightens the risk of this exchange. Henry's inability to grasp the question's real intent and identify its real subject

immediately relieves Margaret and points to her strong regard for her marriage although she is exhausted and disoriented in her search for her place in it.

With this knowledge and her husband's permission, Margaret now makes her request and again regrets the words as soon as they are spoken. She is no longer disoriented or numbed by Henry's methods; it is her turn for the lead and she is as alert to the consequences as she is to Henry's blindness to them.

Thus begins the novel's ostensible depiction of a struggle over a house, tacitly accepted by us as a tangle of value systems and push for correct choice. Henry will speak, naturally, about the better alternative of a hotel; Margaret will speak, naturally, about the condition and wishes of her sister: to this, Henry will move irritably. Margaret will speak about furniture and books as signifiers of life's memories; Henry will speak about pieces of wood and sheets of paper that can always be reclaimed. Each will attempt, honestly or not, to speak the other's language. Henry will think of a "telling point" in this battle, the "sacred, I don't know why" (298) concept of house and home but he will confuse the two; Margaret will appeal to the technical ("Realize that fancy is a scientific fact" [298]) but will fail. Henry's increased wiliness (if one night in *Howards End*, why not two?) sends Margaret back to her own language, a mistake that causes "again the irritated gesture" (299); she retreats, panting.

The mention of Charles induces heightened sensitivity in both. To Margaret, he is not significant in this. To Henry, he represents a clear figure around which his argument can gather authority and to which he can speak in his

own language: “ ‘As the future owner of Howards End,’ said Mr. Wilcox, arching his fingers, ‘I should say that it did concern Charles’ ” (299). A rapid exchange follows with Margaret behaving more like Helen but Henry not at all genial:

Margaret: “Will Helen’s condition depreciate the property?” Henry: “My dear, you are forgetting yourself.” Margaret: “I think you yourself recommended plain speaking.” Henry: “Helen commands my sympathy. But I cannot treat her as if nothing has happened. I should be false to my position in society if I did” (299). Margaret’s last efforts to be heard must be spoken in the only language she knows, the language of proportion, for this deadlock has frightening dimensions. She speaks personally to Henry, about the empty house he does not care for, about forgiveness for Helen for one night only, and his own.

The inclusion of the personal, fatally desperate and desperately misguided, leads not to a reordering but ironically to Henry’s first refusal and brings into play the criteria we have previously witnessed that decide choice for him: universal, meaningless statements (“ ‘I have some experience of life, and know how one thing leads to another’ ” [300]), his rigidity (“Perhaps some hint of her meaning did dawn on him. If so, he blotted it out” [300]), his intellectual dishonesty (“ ‘I have . . . the memory of my dear wife to consider’ ” [300]), his authority (“ ‘see that she leaves my house at once’ ” [300]).

With his mention of Ruth, Margaret both breaks a promise to Henry and earns her spiritual legacy from the last Howard by mentioning Mrs. Bast. Henry stops her, unmoved, and rises to leave. Margaret seizes the hands that are on all

the ropes and begins the famous speech. At its conclusion, it is Henry's turn to be disoriented and he stammers a response while searching for a retort that "was not quite ready" (301). When it comes, it signifies defeat, but whose? Margaret's speech is dazzling, an angry and loving prayer for his salvation. His response is to redefine her prayer into its grotesque opposite: "I perceive you are attempting blackmail. It is scarcely a pretty weapon for a wife to use against her husband" (301). Existing now in the self-justifying mode of self-defence, Henry issues his last refusal as Margaret releases his hands. The chapter ends with Henry entering the house, physically eliminating all traces of this encounter by "wiping first one [hand] then the other on his handkerchief" and Margaret "looking at the Six Hills, tombs of warriors, breasts of the spring" (301).

Henry's value system has dictated action that has assured him of desired results but has pushed him further along a particular path. Margaret's has tried to maintain proportion in the constant presence of the "other"; both are congruent examples of their own theory. The next chapter will discuss correct choice in a good life through a focus on the rational basis of the emotions and, says Nussbaum, their "ascription of significant worth" (Therapy 91). I will show how the value judgments at the core of emotions transcend victory and defeat.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Ethical Value and Rational Basis of Emotions in Correct Choice

Henry, "Again the Olympian laugh," (to Helen): " 'Human nature, I'm afraid . . . ' " (140). " 'I'm afraid public companies don't save one another for love' " (141).

Henry (to Margaret): " 'Charles may go to prison. I dare not tell him. I don't know what to do -- what to do' " (324).

I

Is Henry Wilcox a god? His comment to Helen, cited above, occurs when we meet him for the second time in the novel. Two years have passed since Ruth's death and the issue of her gift of Howards End to Margaret has been resolved efficiently and with a lazy, conventional generosity: Charles writes to Margaret asking if Ruth "had wanted to give her anything" (114); Henry sends Margaret a meaningless trinket which she delightedly calls "extraordinarily generous" (114). This ironic play on generosity should not go unnoticed by the reader: it reflects the ease with which the Wilcox value system operates thus far.

When Henry unexpectedly meets Margaret and Helen on the Chelsea Embankment, the conversation we witness is structured precisely to accord with

one of the novel's main preoccupations, the Forsterian modern dilemma of lack of proportion. But the way the novel underlines this preoccupation, in this instance, is to disallow its presence in the conversation, to insist that proportion visibly *not be there*. To accomplish this, Forster aligns himself, once again subversively, with the Greeks. He enlists them in the way that Nussbaum does. For, against all sense, Henry Wilcox *is* a god in this episode. And he is an Old Stoic, attaining the transcendence that demands the complete absence of passions; "not," cautions Nussbaum, "that [to the Stoics] the emotions are unintelligent or unclear or merely animal. They are 'irrational' not in the sense that they are without reasoning -- but rather, in the sense that they involve what is, from the point of view of the aspiration to transcendence, a false and pernicious reasoning" (Love 388).

Henry comes to us on this occasion successful, respectable, genial and genially self-assured, alive to the external world but transcending it somehow (that Olympian laugh). He is self-sufficient not needy, certain not doubtful, a wise man able to recognize, identify and assent to all that this external world presents. He has knowledge, he has truth. Henry's life has "no hostages to fortune" (Love 387) and his condition in this encounter can, indeed, be called cataleptic, "a condition," Nussbaum tells us, "of certainty and confidence [in knowledge of the external world] from which nothing can dislodge us" (265). Nowhere else in the novel is Henry presented so strongly, so unconflicted, so representative of the impressiveness of life by time. To use the famous example of the cataleptic process from the Stoic Zeno, Henry has opened his hand and outstretched his

fingers to the world's sensations; he has contracted his fingers a little in assent; he has closed his hand, making a fist, recognizing and grasping these sensations; he has brought up his other hand and grasped his fist with it tight and hard (Long 9-11). (There are entrenched debates attached to this model of Stoicism; these are not my concern.) Such a depiction of Henry here consciously probes the nature and extent of his value to the Schlegels in the present historical moment.

In fact, Henry uses the entire conversation to make straight situations that were crooked. He transcends confusion, his knowledge is invaluable, he observes humanity but is untainted by its humanness. And he laughs his Olympian, exuberant laugh. It is worthwhile to look more closely at their conversation and see how the novel's concern with proportion emerges through the constructed, staged absence of that very concern.

Before Henry appears, Margaret expresses sadness that places should ever replace people and calls it "one of the curses of London" (137). Henry's unexpected physical materialization before Margaret's and Helen's eyes has something of the god about it responding to a human appeal for aid. This will be the crux of the encounter. Their small talk displays his "protective tones" (137), his acceptance of civic duty ("Someone's got to go" [137] he says of his son Paul's work in Nigeria), his drawing out of the sisters as a tutor would ("Now tell me all your news" [137]). As Helen explains the struggle and failure of the discussion group to arrive at consensus and action on the issue of money and the poor, the novel opposes Henry's general ease, his security in a world which seems "in his

grasp" (137), recognized, defined, assented to. Nothing confounds him ("the river Thames . . . held no mysteries for him" [137]). When he praises the discussion group ("a most original entertainment!" [138]) he is patronizing but charming. Margaret's thought that Henry [like all Stoics] is inadequate "in times of sorrow or emotion" (138) (and this had pained her) appears curiously insignificant and her next thought accords with the *present* context: "it was pleasant to listen to him now, and to watch his thick brown moustache and high forehead confronting the stars" (138).

With the focus of the conversation shifting to Leonard Bast (the sisters appeal their "special case" [138]), Henry comes into his own. He transcends their dilemma about Bast by dismissing the need for any personal observations of Leonard's character. His interest is in indisputables and his confident knowledge of special externals brings order to confusion. Helen's fear ("One is so afraid that circumstances will be too strong for him and that he will sink" [139]) is assuaged by Henry's valuable advice (" 'Let your young friend clear out of the Porphyron Fire Insurance Company. . . . It'll smash. . . . ' " [139-140]) and grasp of truth (" 'the man who's in a situation when he applies . . . is in a stronger position than the man who isn't. I know by myself . . . it affects an employer greatly. Human nature I'm afraid' " [140]). We know that he is right.

The rest of the conversation shows Henry correcting Margaret's misconceptions about the letting of Howards End, his purchase of houses in Ducie Street and Shropshire and the new living quarters of Charles. Margaret's

breathless "What a change!" (142) is countered by Henry's easy "Everybody moving! Good-bye" (143).

After Henry leaves, Margaret watches the tide "sadly" (143), reflecting on the very modern notion of forgetting. "Is it worthwhile," the novel asks, "attempting the past when there is this continual flux even in the hearts of men?" (143). The question is similar to the fleeting thought about Henry's emotional inadequacy and falls, is dropped by Margaret, into a context that maintains no place for it; it is almost futile.

Margaret and her concerns have been discomfited by the modern Stoic. Her reflections on emotions and the hearts of men seem of no consequence here. Her own and Helen's emotions themselves are of limited use in resolving the Bast dilemma. It is Henry's detachment from emotions and the novel's tacit semi-ironic championing, in this episode, of the Stoic position that "repudiates the emotions as an acknowledgement of incompleteness" (Love 387) that allows him to be of such value. From the beginning of the conversation, Forster has orchestrated the emergence of the life by time and configured a context that assures its supremacy. There is no proportion to their dialogue. The Schlegels are hopelessly out of their depth and *their* inadequacy (life by value), their inability to be of actual help to Leonard (for whom they care) is made straight by Henry (to whom he is 'a clerk'). The disproportion in the conversation, more like a tutorial, is of course, deliberate: Margaret and Helen all confused questions, misconceptions; Henry at his (Olympian) peak, his fortune increasing visibly, his knowledge deep and

sound, his thinking healthy (not “neurotic” or “modern”), his world self-sufficient. The absolutist Helen dismisses him as “a prosperous vulgarian” but even *she* admits his value: “he did tell us about the Porphyryion” (143). We nod to the imbalance: we are primed for redress.

Much has happened in the novel when we read Henry’s second statement to Margaret about Charles cited at the beginning of this chapter. That the words seem to be spoken by a different character, another Henry, is the ineluctable end of Henry’s flawed view of correct choice in a good life. Henry’s redefinitions, explored in the previous chapter, have created ease in any struggle concerned with correct action; they have allowed him to overcome vulnerability at crucial points in his life; they have dispensed with the ethical imperative of recognizing the “other.” The nature of his crises has been suited narratively to this redefinition strategy. For these redefinitions to work, they needed a vacuum or an accomplice. The first crisis, Ruth’s will, involved a voice that was mute and the dilemma was, therefore, easily resolved. The second, the encounter with Jacky, more difficult and immediately threatening, had Margaret as Henry’s accomplice. The third, the conflict with Margaret about staying at Howards End, had Charles for support in the greatest stress thus far to Henry’s values. Each conflict was presented in the novel as an obstacle that could be made governable, honestly or not, leading to action, correct or not. In each case, the valuable good most prized was attained, not forfeited.

Even before the death of Leonard Bast occurs, an event that will directly

cause Henry such pain, we are alerted to a promise of trouble. Even as father and son discuss and agree on the correct action regarding the sisters' overnight stay at Howards End, "Mr. Wilcox linked his arm in his son's, but *somehow* liked him less as he told him more" (317, my emphasis). This "somehow" is an obscure emotional state for Henry and vaguely disquieting, in addition, to the reader. We question why Henry should feel this way. The rupture between Henry and Margaret has obliged Henry to inform Charles of it ("I had better have a talk with you and get it over" [316]); most important, it has challenged this ability of Charles and his father together to "voyage a little past the emotions," a mutually beneficial talent that has been the basis for their comradeship thus far, especially in the resolution of Ruth's will. The result here is an artificial and awkward intimacy, an unpleasant one for Henry. He quickly downplays the shattering conflict with Margaret: "I don't want you to conclude that my wife and I had anything of the nature of a quarrel" (317). Why is the reader disquieted? We surely sense the novel is priming us once more, obliquely predicting a test of this tenuous father/son bond, never before examined, which has to do with love. Henry Wilcox has never suffered but it is in suffering, as Nussbaum points out, that we are given "the subtlest, most powerful, most appropriate [instrument] for grasping the truth of our inner world" (Love 264). What could be the instrument of Henry's suffering? It is Charles.

When he mentions the Schlegels' sword in his description of Leonard's death, Charles becomes the agent, albeit unwittingly, of Henry's decline. As we

trace this decline through the signposts indicated, we see another cataleptic condition that is as real as the one related to the first quotation in this chapter. It is a cataleptic condition of the emotions, the inner life. His initial condoning of Charles's handling of the affair, before the sword is mentioned, is the novel's last call for redress ("You would have been no son of mine if you hadn't" [318]). With knowledge of the sword and its role in Leonard's death, all of Henry's reactions arise, increasingly, from impressions and sensations rooted in reality. His "anxiety" (318) on first hearing of a sword, his "fretfulness" (319) about walking to the police-station, his "shuffling up the road" (319) and his return "looking very tired" (320) are all un-Wilcoxian and non-Stoic.

In the Stoic model of the cataleptic condition, as I stated earlier, sensations from the external world are grasped with such certainty that the agent cannot be dislodged from belief about them. I believe, as Martha Nussbaum does, that we can fruitfully apply this same model to the emotions and their response to external reality. We can track a similar process in Henry again, this time with positive implications for Nussbaum's support of the Aristotelian value of emotions in choices determining a good life. (Nussbaum clarifies: "The true Stoic could never countenance an emotional cataleptic impression. This would come close to being a contradiction in terms, since the Stoics argued that emotions are forms of false judgment" [Love 266 n12]. Henry Wilcox would surely concur).

Henry's impressions of and emotional responses to the forthcoming tragedy, Charles's imprisonment, are real; he cannot but assent to them. But rather

than give confidence, these impressions situate themselves “within” Henry where, as the novel has previously indicated, “all had reverted to chaos” (188). The nature of these impressions should be clarified: they are integral to the dichotomy, tested and strained within the novel, of the life by time and the life by value.

With the impending verdict of manslaughter, it is clear to Henry that his son will be taken from him. Charles is the “valuable” that will be forfeited and no redefinition of the obstacle is possible. The obstacle is the law, an institution neither neurotic nor modern, a gentleman’s institution which has codified the laws of property, established norms concerning the legality of documents, abetted Henry’s success in the colonies and concerned itself, by and large, with the wellbeing of those who are of Henry’s sort. Charles himself has been an extension of Henry, if a less noble one, grasping the same beliefs with the same certainty if not ability. He is the intended heir and has been blessed by nature [who] “is turning out Wilcoxes . . . so that they may inherit the earth” (187). When we read “[i]t was against all reason that he [Charles] should be punished,” we might detect a slight note of ironic mimicry in Forster’s authorial voice; when we read on, “but the law, being made in his image, sentenced him to three years’ imprisonment” (324-25) we surely recognize that there are few bleaker acknowledgements in the novel. Neither choice nor action is possible in this ungovernable situation; Henry is a man reduced to passivity. However, in his forfeit of Charles, Henry recognizes “the ascription of significant worth” to his son which leads, finally, to ethical identification of Charles as “other.” (We recall Charles’s discomfort with

the changing paternal bond a few pages before, as he listens to his father's fretfulness and watches him shuffling up the road: ". . . he [Charles] had a vague regret -- a wish that *something* had been different *somewhere* -- a wish (though he did not express it thus) that he had been taught to say 'I' in his youth" [319, my emphasis]). If the Wilcoxes identify emotions at all, it is in vague usually uncomfortable terms. Up to the final crisis in the novel, there has been no practical reason to behave otherwise.

The novel has been scrupulous in its testimony of the Wilcox system of values, and its own ethical theory. Henry's handling of his three crises has been commented on from outside the text or under it but Henry himself has escaped suffering. (His grief over his wife's death is quickly put to one side with the arrival of the note.) This last crisis redresses the imbalance by sending Henry to his most unfamiliar place, his "undeveloped heart -- not a cold one" (Abinger 8), and confining him there. This is not an emotional state that will become obscure once he has passed through it: the emotions are too powerful and self-certifying; they are cataleptic, enclosed with certainty in Henry's unwilling fist of a heart.

This crisis, then, the most formidable one mounted against Henry's value system, leaves him completely defenceless explicitly because of that system's mechanism and life-long success in guaranteeing attainment, not forfeiture, of valuables. In an assault of this kind, not only is Henry's value system of no help, it works against him, confusing him, inducing the "panic and emptiness" (40) which has been prophesied so resonantly since the outset of the novel and which

now surfaces so implacably. Alone, Henry will not survive this assault, he and we are certain. With the sentencing of Charles, Henry's fortress, wherein all correct action is strategized, falls to ruin. Who else to turn to but Margaret, the wife who has just now announced decisively that she is leaving him but whose life-long habit of recognizing the "other" (of connecting, even in bitterness) cannot be broken? Henry's need for Margaret here is emotional in a most rational sense: it has at its core the belief that she can be trusted. Neither comforting saint nor dispassionate avenger, she follows what this habit suggests: "She did what seemed easiest -- she took him down to recruit at Howards End" (325).

We are not privy to Henry's rehabilitation: the last chapter opens fourteen months later. There are, however, unquestionable changes and these, it is not improbable to believe, have resulted partly from conversations between Henry, the Old Stoic, and Margaret, his ethical opponent and Aristotelian therapist.

"Oh, we merely settled down" (328), says Margaret, underplaying in a most Forsterian way Helen's view of her elder sister's life as heroic. It is Margaret's voice, a new, less talkative voice, which directs this last chapter. This is the first most noticeable change we are alerted to: Margaret's main preoccupation is no longer conversation (we remember her comment to Ruth: "'discussion keeps a house alive' " [87]) but work, her own ("She put down her work" [325], "took up her work again" [325], "Margaret never stopped working" [327], "Averse to wasting her time, she went on sewing" [330]), and the work going on in the meadow. It makes her a different partner in Helen's talk about heroism and love

than we have seen in the past. Often Margaret does not comment and responds only when asked a direct question by Helen. Then her answers are short and clear. When Helen expresses delight in the friendship between young Tom, the son of one of the workers, and her baby and declares “It will be a great thing for Tom” (325), Margaret’s comment is “[i]t may be a greater thing for baby” (325). She is aligning herself more closely than we have seen with a new community, Ruth Howard’s and Mrs. Avery’s. Where is Culture? as Aunt Juley has always called her favourite place of worship. Where is the usual Schlegel “zig-zagging over Thought and Art” (86)? And how is it that her belief that the destruction of the wych-elm tree would “bring the end of all things” is so strong that she cannot “read or talk during a westerly gale” (326), she whose heritage is monied intellectualism?

Margaret has, indeed, settled down and its implications will be examined more fully later in this section. In her statement “Things that I can’t phrase have helped me” (332) we recognize two operatives: the guiding Schlegel value system, modified and sustained, and an awakening activation in a new physical community, operating both historically and symbolically. It is to these operatives which we now turn to speculate on the process of Henry’s rehabilitation.

How might Margaret have begun the practical task of helping this “other” person become whole? Howards End is not the only place available to recruit but in choosing it, Margaret “sees” what is beyond London’s curses, if only temporarily. We might call Howards End the house beyond the curse, beyond

Henry's world view, above his self-sufficiency (it triggers his hay-fever), mindful of his vulnerability and his tiredness as it is vulnerable and tired itself. Margaret's choice is the act, therefore, of a person with "practical wisdom," Aristotle's rubric, his designation of what constitutes a good life.

In speaking with Henry in the time immediately after Charles's arrest, Margaret must have ensured that she remembered to "remember the submerged" (83), a most apposite situating of Henry now, if an ironic inversion of its initial context. In these conversations, would they have discussed Henry's cataleptic emotional response to this tragedy and the reasonableness of such a response? Would they have discussed pity? Would Margaret have affirmed, as Nussbaum affirms, that the person pitied has been ascribed worth and is "thought to be undeserving of the misfortune" (Therapy 87)? that the person who pities "must believe that he or she is vulnerable in similar ways" (Therapy 87) as Henry believed himself vulnerable to blackmail? that the sufferings of the pitied must be seen as "significant, have size" (Therapy 87)? and that the emotion of pity takes us out of *our* selves and brings us to the "other"? Finally, would this catharsis of Henry's have redefined, correctly this time, his relations with those now closest to him? The text supports such speculation. "One usen't always to see clearly before that time [the black abyss of the past]. It was different now" (HE 326) certainly implies a change of thinking in Margaret, Helen *and* Henry, who now are living together in Howards End. The cathartic ripples have extended to Helen as well. "I like Henry," she says to Margaret, ostensibly for the first time. In her

new matter-of-fact way, Margaret answers, “You’d be odd if you didn’t” (326). Things have been resolved in the manner of practical wisdom: the telling sign is tranquillity.

This tranquillity is the defining element of the new, “obscure” (326) life the three are building up. It is an earned, educated tranquillity, as all emotions must be, says Nussbaum, closely approaching Aristotle’s view of virtue as a “disposition to pursue the appropriate,” “a mean disposition with regard to both passions and actions” (Therapy 96), the Forsterian sense of proportion. But as the novel reaches its end we see that tranquillity does not extend to the Wilcox children, who have been called from the city for a family meeting. There is overt hostility to Margaret from Paul and hushed restraint from the others. At Henry’s redistribution of his wealth to them (a change in plan, a gesture beyond “just”) and his desire for *consensus* about the inheritor of Howards End (an un-Wilcoxian gesture), the children express neither surprise nor simple gratitude. The scene is one of many isolated, Wilcoxian separatenesses, the children’s from their father’s, Paul’s from the idea of England (his racist use of “piccaninnies” [331] and that strange, almost habitual scratching of his arm link him to the colonies and signify displacement), Dolly’s from society (Charles must serve two more years in prison), Evie’s in her embracing of the role of “woman of the world” (331). *This* context, their father’s new focus of perception, is not theirs: they belong to London and its curses (they live the life by time) and the novel marks their exit from this context with an immensely quiet, final “so be it.” (“And again and

again fell the word [good-bye], like the ebb of a dying sea” [332] has a biblical resonance). Separated ideologically from their father, they retreat from him but our anticipations of activation and participation are realized a mere two paragraphs later. With the children’s departure, the darkened and airless room where the discussions were held (all Wilcoxes suffer from hay-fever, are historically and symbolically allergic to *Howards End*) is invaded by Helen, Tom and baby, laughing excitedly. Their *emotion* is catching and catch it Henry does: “Pitiably tired” (332) the novel has told us two paragraphs earlier, perhaps, but also happier and strangely boyish, he “exclaimed, ‘here they are at last!’ disengaging himself [from Margaret] with a smile” (332).

II

Narrator: “Margaret’s cheeks burned. She could not finish her breakfast. She was on fire with shame.” “She flung on a hat and shawl, just like a poor woman, and plunged into the fog . . .” (78).

Narrator: “Clumsy of movement . . . Paul drove his foot against the paint of the front door. Mrs. Wilcox [Margaret] gave a little cry of annoyance. She did not like anything scratched” (330).

What is Margaret’s role in *Howards End*? She is the check, at times both baffled and baffling, on any value system that appears to suffer from lack of proportion. Her own system of values includes assent to emotions as a gauge in right feeling. They are educated, interrogated reflections of beliefs that identify

and prompt correct action. This acceptance of emotion's methodology in her ethical system often leads to action which accentuates vulnerability and underlines possible humiliation. The first quotation is an example of this.

Margaret has written Ruth Wilcox a note discouraging what she falsely perceives is Ruth's desire for friendship (" 'Bother the whole family!' snapped Margaret. 'Why can't the woman leave us alone?' " [75]). The note expresses the appropriateness of ending their acquaintance in deference to Helen's recent unfortunate episode with Paul. But Margaret is mistaken: as her written reply makes clear, Ruth had called to inform her of Paul's departure for Nigeria, identifying a perception common to both women of the unsuitability of the lovers. Ruth has taken offence at Margaret's note ("You should not have written me such a letter" [77]) and Margaret is left to reflect on her error and its consequences.

As she reflects, she remembers uncomfortable realities (Helen *had* told her Paul was leaving, Margaret had forgotten; the entire Helen/Paul episode had caused significant pain) and evaluates anew her obligations to Helen and Aunt Juley and concerns about friendship with Ruth Wilcox. "All her [Margaret's] absurd anxieties fell to the ground, and in their place arose the *certainty* that she had been rude to Mrs. Wilcox. Rudeness affected Margaret like a bitter taste in the mouth" (78, my emphasis). In these statements, Forster puts Margaret through a lightning-quick Nussbaumian ethical exercise: Margaret's error, an unforeseen lapse in memory, has called for a reordered hierarchy of value (Helen is no longer in danger); her new hierarchy gives predominance to the wrong to Ruth's

“otherness,” a particularity that overshadows all her other general anxieties; Margaret’s emotion of shame obliges her, if she will trust it, to see the situation as it is, not redefined conveniently to avoid the reality; correct action is clear, if unpleasant and risky. “She flung on a hat and shawl, just like a poor woman” indicates the initial position from which Margaret is working, “and plunged into the fog” signifies the energized action which will carry her past vulnerability and humiliation in the attempt to correct a wrong.

“I hope to risk things all my life” (71), declares Margaret in the midst of a discussion with Mrs. Munt which began with the physical proximity of the Wilcoxes and has worked its way round to money. Establishing that money reduces the risks in life, the novel will show, a few pages later, how incorporating emotion into a value system increases those risks. A few pages later, Margaret will write the note to Ruth Wilcox that causes her such shame, dictates risk and begins their friendship. Margaret’s reaction and subsequent action are, of course, clearly pivotal to the novel: her friendship with Ruth, “which was to develop so quickly and with such strange results” (75), has begun in shame and will end with Margaret’s inheriting, in all ways, and furthering, the legacy of *Howards End*. And it is only through Margaret’s assent to emotion and her decision to risk it that Forster can continue his story.

In discussing the value of emotion in the Schlegel system of values, it might appear incongruous to focus on Margaret more than Helen. The choice of Margaret revolves around Nussbaum’s description of educated emotions, to which

I have alluded earlier, and which I now will explain more fully. It is a significant difference between the sisters and one which is lessened only at the novel's conclusion.

Forty pages into *Howards End*, the narrator interrupts his own narrative to mention "a word on their [Miss Schlegels'] origin" (42). For three pages we are present during the Schlegels' childhood, learning of their remarkable father, the "countryman of Hegel and Kant . . . inclined to be dreamy. . . ." and his unorthodox perhaps unpatriotic ideas on "re-kindling the [German] light within" (42). Only young Margaret is present as the novel re-creates her history and that of her siblings. The narrator quotes her directly and we observe this "most offensive child" (43) urging her father and his "haughty and magnificent nephew" (43) to continue their debate, settling it for herself when resolution is not forthcoming. "Her brain darted up and down; it grew pliant and strong" and at thirteen "she had grasped a dilemma that most people travel through life without perceiving. Her conclusion was that any human being lies nearer to the unseen than any organization, and from this she never varied" (44).

Helen is absent from this tableau. We are simply informed that she was similar in character to her older sister but pretty, more amusing, apt "to enjoy a little homage very much" (44). Further descriptions of Helen arise by contrasting them with Margaret: "Alike as little girls, at the time of the Wilcox episode their methods were beginning to diverge: the younger was rather apt to entice people, and, in enticing them, to be herself enticed; the elder went straight ahead, and

accepted an occasional failure as part of the game” (44). The brother, Tibby, is described and dismissed in two sentences.

The novel privileges Margaret in this novelistic re-creation for a solid reason: it is through her that Forster will speak to and test a particular system of values and it is crucial that we know the depths of its roots. Interestingly, for this thesis, this is an added advantage. Aristotle believes, says Nussbaum, “that emotions, unlike many other beliefs, are formed above all in the family, in the child’s earliest interactions with parents and other loved ones” (Therapy 98). Margaret Schlegel is the only character known to us from a past reconstructed by and in the novel. This knowledge confirms that her ethical system has developed along with her and its roots are deep. It also gives credence to this Aristotelian view about the value of emotions: from the outset emotions must be refined, educated, scrutinized as part of a moral development that is a life-long process begun in the family.

“Emotions, in Aristotle’s view, are not always correct, any more than beliefs or actions are always correct” (Therapy 96), explains Nussbaum. They need to be “brought into harmony with a correct view of a good human life” (96). But so harmonized and educated, Nussbaum continues, “they are not just essential as forces motivating to virtuous action . . . they are recognitions of truth and value and as such they are not just instruments of virtue, they are constituent parts of virtuous agency” (96). Educated emotions, intimately linked to beliefs, distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate attachments and are not

deterred from doing “what is required” (Therapy 94). Surely this is how Margaret has chosen her action in the example with Ruth. We have been given special information about the origins of Margaret’s bravery in this instance and because of this we can trust her as Forster says we can trust Beethoven “when he says other things” (HE 47).

Does our trust in Margaret ever appear to be misplaced? In Chapter Three I discussed her dilemma with Henry in the aftermath of the episode with Jacky and the text remains troublesome. Is the second quotation about Margaret (conspicuously named as “Mrs. Wilcox”), on first impression admittedly odd, *more* troublesome, particularly in a chapter on the ethical value of emotions?

At first glance, “Mrs. Wilcox’s” little cry of annoyance at Paul’s clumsiness typifies what Daniel Born has called the “frequent chill” which he asserts is consciously infused into her voice by Forster not only at the novel’s conclusion but throughout ⁶. There *is* a change in Margaret, as I stated earlier, and her reaction to Paul’s scratching the paint is one manifestation of it.

Margaret’s responses, including the emotional ones, have “continual[ly] and sincere[ly]” (25) been subject to the aim of harmonization in her life. What the

⁶ A central point of Born’s is that the connection which Margaret is most intent on making is the “fiscally opportunistic” one of marrying Wilcox money. His development of this “harsh” position, as he himself calls it, is seriously flawed in my view. In his energetic mission to track down the sources of “liberal guilt,” themselves subtly woven throughout Forster’s text, Born might be accused of Henry Wilcox’s committee room manner, isolating “item by item” and not seeing the bulk of the novel. The frequent “chills” certainly have more nuanced dimensions. Born’s question “How, we ask, can her rhetoric of connection be reconciled with such coldness?” unfortunately presupposes that such coldness has been established (153, 157).

crisis with Henry about staying the night at Howards End has shown is the lopsidedness of confrontation with someone whose emotions are not harmonized or non-existent. We are heartened to discover, after Leonard's death, that Margaret has reflected on and is unrepentant about ". . . her own tragedy. . . . She neither forgave him for his behaviour nor wished to forgive him. Her speech to him seemed perfect. She would not have altered a word. It had to be uttered . . ." (322). On the strength of these scrutinized and educated emotions, including "agony and contempt of Henry" (303), she intends to end her marriage.

This, I contend, is the beginning of the change in Margaret. Accepting "to do what she could with him [Henry]" (325), she experiences "no sudden warmth," nor any desire "to break him" (324). What she accurately perceives is present *now* ("a new life began to move" [324]) but was never present before is Herz's apt phrase, used earlier in the description of Margaret and Helen's first crisis, the most Forsterian "insistence on transaction" (125). Margaret has brought to all ethical choice, all dilemmas, her educated emotions, her focus on the particular and her proportion and with these she has been ready and willing to transact. We may surely imply that she has done so with Henry after his breakdown.

This business of transaction with its accompanying tone of quiet accommodation and sobriety is the predominant one in the concluding chapter. It is translated more than once through Margaret's voice. It recognizes truth ("Leonard was dead; Charles had two more years in prison and Henry 'worries dreadfully about his part in the tangle' " [326]) and value ("One usen't always to

see clearly before that time. It was different now" [326]). This clearness has been earned. It is not concerned with theories but with practical wisdom, practical living. "We [no longer] lead the lives of gibbering monkeys" (88), Margaret might say now. The wych-elm subsumes Culture, not culture.

But what of those with whom transaction is not a possibility? Of all the Wilcoxes, Paul is the farthest from "others." He is a lone creature, permanently displaced from his community, the colonies, and ill-tempered about it. He is a racist and a source of embarrassment to his sister; his own family is unknown to him. "Cynical and manly," the novel tells us, and, "a very little shook him out of the Englishman" (331), he does violence both to the essence of his father's new life and its physical centre. Paul's presence at Howards End is an invasion, a transgression of all that has been so arduously earned. As this new life's initiator, Margaret's reaction dismisses Paul as unfit to participate in it; as protector of its physical centre (she is truly Mrs. Wilcox now) her annoyance protests against his hardness and, as Forster says of hardness, "I know it does not even pay" (*Two Cheers* 54). It is an emotional reaction, educated and restrained, underscoring a toughness evolved from a new game with new rules. It is intimately linked to the belief in Howards End as "home," the notion once confused by Henry with "house" and worried over and yearned for by Margaret throughout the novel.

Henry Wilcox has come to emotion late in his life and on his knees; Margaret Schlegel has accepted to rehabilitate Henry and, in doing so, has educated his emotions, re-examined her own and affected those of Helen. For the

ensuing tranquillity, imperfect and temporary but before which even the Wilcox children are powerless, she deserves to endure, she deserves our trust.

CHAPTER FIVE

Ethical theory and *Howards End*

In the preceding chapters, I have argued the congruence between Nussbaum's grid and Forster's novel. Her grid, I admit, has been superimposed primarily on the main relationship in the novel, that of Margaret and Henry. This focus is teleologically sound but cannot as fully explore other relationships as they are constructed within the novel's fiction. Other characters and other relationships have performed at varying distances from the main ring, high above it, in the ring right next to it and at times spilling over into it, or in the shadows. And if the novelistic treatment of some characters appears to trouble an ethical reading of *Howards End*, such treatments should be addressed.

Such an acknowledgement raises questions about what J. Hillis Miller calls the "necessary ethical moment" (1) in the writing of a text, the narrating of its fiction, the performing within it and the reading/teaching/critiquing of it. They are intrinsic vantage points in the discussion of his "ethics of reading" (1). Miller names this "necessary ethical moment" in the four modes just mentioned the "I must" (4) moment. It is around this name that other performing strategies, outside

Nussbaum's grid but within *Howards End*, will be probed.

I identify in *Howards End* Forster's authorial "necessary ethical moment," his "I must" moment, to be this excerpt: "They [great names in literature] mean us to use them as signposts, and are not to blame if, in our weakness, we mistake the signpost for the destination" (HE 127). It is quietly slipped, extratextually, into Leonard Bast's description to Helen and Margaret of his all-night walk in the woods after reading a book about "back to the earth" (124). As we have seen, this is not the only time Forster intrudes on his own narrative, but it is the only occasion that speaks to the "law as such" (Miller 16) of Forster's writing and reading. It follows that Forster wants his text to exemplify this law but its workings-out for characters and readers must be "self-wrought" (Miller 19). It must not be a response to something external arising from fear or desire or as an act "based on prudent calculation of results" (Miller 31). Forster's "I must" moment, encoded in this law, does not mean "the thematic statement or dramatization of some ethical law ('Thou shalt not commit adultery,' for example, surely a staple ethical theme of novels) but the effective and functional embodiment of some ethical law *in action*" (Miller 18, my emphasis).

Forster's "embodiment of some ethical law in action," his paradigmatic reader at the point in the novel mentioned in the preceding paragraph is, perhaps surprisingly, not Margaret Schlegel but Leonard Bast. Never mind that Leonard misconstrues the ethics of *his* reading (" 'Curious,' " says Leonard, " 'it should all come about from reading something of Richard Jefferies.' " Helen's response:

“ ‘Excuse me, Mr. Bast, but you’re wrong there. It didn’t. It came from something far greater’ ” [127]). Forster makes the crucial point that in Leonard’s “cramped little mind dwelt something that was far greater than Jefferies’s books -- the spirit that led Jefferies to write them” (127). Respect for the law (the “spirit” behind the writing) which the text exemplifies has presented Leonard with his own “necessary ethical moment” to which the only response possible is ‘I must; I cannot do otherwise and I *ought* not do otherwise.’ And never mind that his overnight walk was unpleasant and has inconvenienced a number of people. Leonard’s act is an “inaugural act” (29), Miller’s term for a private act which, if legislated “for all mankind” (29) generates a universal necessary ethical moment and thus respects the law; Forster urges an ethical act of activated reading to respect *his* law. The signpost must lead to the destination. Leonard is Forster’s first activated model of that “act of reading [which] would lead the reader voluntarily to impose the necessary ethical law embodied in that text on himself.” (19). These are Miller’s words, not Forster’s.

Forster has not deprived Leonard of his “I must” moment. Moreover, he has chosen *Leonard’s* moment, his only triumphant moment in the novel, to equate a proper ethics of reading with a kind of redemption, in this case. We might ask, why Leonard? Our answer might include words like naiveté, stubbornness, a disposition disinclined to be “stoneyhearted to the word” (Miller, *Is There an Ethics of Reading?* 91). About the *event* of his reading and not merely the act, “he [Leonard] spoke,” we read, “with a flow, an exultation, that he had seldom

known” (HE 126). Margaret speaks for both sisters when she says, “ ‘You’ve not been content to dream as we have -- ’ ” (126). Before examining characters in the novel who appear not to have had a similar opportunity for praxis, I must discuss in slightly greater detail Miller’s context of “respect for the law” (18) as he modifies it and applies it to narratives. It is a context drawn from Kant.

Miller takes the Kantian correspondence between the unnamable moral law and respect for persons who exemplify it and constructs a parallel analogy between this same law and respect for a *text* which is its example. I have taken unwarranted liberty, perhaps, in identifying (naming) an excerpt from Forster’s text as the unnamable law. But both Kant’s “law as such” (Miller 16) and Forster’s signpost/destination dictum are similar in that they situate respect for the law *beyond* what is at hand. For Kant, respect for the law is located beyond any particular manmade law and for Forster, respect for *his* law calls on a reading beyond the signpost of literature. The response demanded by both originates in this “beyond.” Operating with respect to this uncertain place, which is able to be defined only negatively or indirectly, which is “voluntarist” (Miller 13) but recognizes necessity, even duty, presents the reader of Kant with “an apparently insoluble knot in thinking” (28), says Miller. Kant’s solution, he adds, “is just the place where the necessity of narrative enters into his theory of ethics” (28). Kant’s “in such a way” (28), the giving of examples, puts him in the same camp as Forster. Forster’s narrative is one ongoing working-out through his characters of the law of writing/reading, with Forster weaving adhering or contravening

performances into his story as the woof is woven into the warp. All performances originate in the *narrative at hand*, but some go beyond, still within the *text*. (A pivotal example of a reading act which fails to go beyond is, of course, the “reading” of Ruth Wilcox’s will, which has already been explored. Margaret’s “I must” moment surely comes with Henry’s plea for help after Charles’s sentencing. His plea activates her and takes her “beyond” Germany to Howards End).

A troublesome notion surfaces, at this juncture, in a thesis directly influenced by Aristotelian ethics: is Forster then more Kantian than Aristotelian? A reasonable, teleological response might be that he is an Aristotelian, on the one hand, writing a text grounded in and alert to the “world of complex and conflicting claims” at a precise historical moment; he is a Kantian, on the other, responding to his own “I must” moment to situate the spirit, the law, of his own writing, and our own reading, transhistorically, beyond the text itself.

What, then, of “I must” ethical moments woven into the narrative and the performance within it as it is read? Will not Forster’s text exemplify more fully his own writing/reading law if it is tested on all characters whether through voluntary imposition or, equally helpful in an opposite way, through the voluntary *disavowal* of a presented “I must” moment by responding ‘I will not’? When testing respect for the moral law by constructing ethical moments, would not more be better than less? What, then, of Jacky Bast and Ruth Wilcox for whom the text appears to offer neither the opportunity to embrace such a moment nor the choice to disrespect it?

It is important to keep in mind that Forster's law regarding writing and reading is a moral law and not merely the aesthetic exercises performed by Tibby which ensure his immersion in Culture and nothing else. Miller's parallel analogy of Kant's respect for moral law through respect for a person exemplifying it, substituting a text for a person, has the same concerns. The "I must" moments under discussion here are self-wrought, intrinsic, voluntarily self-imposed, and obligatory. The performance of Jacky within the novel manifests time and again her inability to act on impulses other than fear and/or desire. Forster is clear on this and in his construction of her as "fond of flowers, generous with money, and not revengeful" (HE 310), a bothersome but harmless inconvenience, it appears Jacky is being set up. Even Helen Schlegel has a round of fun at the expense of "Mrs. Lanoline" (120). Jacky's "I must" moments are neither moral nor immoral; they are simply reactions to being tired, anxiety about a missing husband, desire for tea with a friend, desire and anxiety about Leonard's promise to marry her (" 'But you do love me, Len, don't you? Len, you will make it all right?' " [64-65]). Jacky is something else and an ethical reading must grapple with what that is and, in reading, "read" Jacky.

The most obvious questions surface first: is it Forster's latent misogyny that allows for the novelistic "manhandling" of Jacky? Is it his own privileged class which engenders a character so superficially constructed, brushed with apparently distracted, even unthinking strokes? I have nothing substantial to add to this extensive debate. My reading of Jacky gathers around something that is

more directly textual. She does not merely function as a thematic conceit engineered to cause Henry Wilcox grief. Nor can she be simply dismissed as an example of authorial carelessness and peevishness. The crucial word is “unthinkable.”

“We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable” (HE 58). So begins the paragraph which introduces Leonard and Jacky in their proper milieu. On his way home from reclaiming his umbrella at the Schlegels’, leaving one world and entering another, we read the dull “potted expressions of approval or disgust” (116) of a couple of Leonard’s neighbours and we contrast the erratic, high energy encounters, first with Margaret after the concert, then with Helen over the umbrella which have immediately preceded this chapter. In his flat, we are introduced to Jacky, but through a framed photograph. “Take my word for it,” says the narrator about the “simply stunning” smile; “take my word for it” remains posed under the text when the narrator immediately denies that “truth” by “complaining” that “true joy” is in the eyes which “did not accord with her smile, but were anxious and hungry” (61). Before we have met her, Jacky appears to be consigned to a dreadful place, or no place at all.

With her arrival home, Jacky acts on the misgivings emanating from the photograph and goes further. Leonard is reading Ruskin; Jacky is puffing at the feathers on her hat and ridding herself of the “ribbons, chains, bead necklaces that clinked and caught” (63). She interrupts his reading (“Is that a book you’re reading?”) to sit on his knee (“a massive woman of thirty-three and her weight hurt

him”) and “fondle him” (64), believing that this pseudo-seductive exercise will easily bring about a discussion about marriage. During the grim meal which is part of their bleak domestic routine, Forster points again to those eyes, as we sit and watch Jacky “occasionally looking at her man with those anxious eyes, to which nothing else in her appearance corresponded, and which yet seemed to mirror her soul” (66). An offer by Leonard “to play you something lovely” (66) on the piano has the effect of sending Jacky to bed, from where she beckons him six times before the chapter mercifully ends. It is painful to read. If the angel of Democracy has shamefully neglected Leonard, it does not even see Jacky. The narrative will award Leonard his ethical moment in the midst of squalor but does not seem to know what to do with Jacky. What *is* this massive woman of thirty-three doing with this frail boy of not yet twenty-one? What on earth was Forster thinking?

My argument centres around this notion of “thinking” or, thinking the “unthinkable.” The statement about the “very poor” with which “we have no concern” points uniquely to Jacky. We have no concern because we, as writers and readers of what Forster called “this low atavistic form” (Aspects 17), the novel, are not “poet[s]” or “statistician[s]” (HE 58); the very poor in this historical moment are beyond us. The warp of life takes up too much energy; there is no time for the woof. (Forster contrasts strikingly the “very poor” and the “poor” at Hilton: after the family has left Ruth Wilcox’s grave, Forster says of the poor, who had been given black garments “on Mr. Wilcox’s orders,” “It was *their*

moment” [HE 97, my emphasis]). As a “modern” Leonard craves better food for his “underfed . . . mind and body.” His craving makes him dramatically thinkable, able to stand within the novel, able to be read. Jacky is nothing but a not-so-young woman desperate to be married. She has nothing, or what she has is a result of what life-living essentials might have been taken away. What kind of girl she was in Cyprus, before her father’s death, before Henry Wilcox, we cannot say. We must read her as she is now, as Forster has “thought” her. Authorially and narratively Forster “thinks” Jacky one of the unthinkableables. Partnered with Leonard, she is nevertheless *in* the abyss, “where nothing counts” (58): from the outset of the novel she herself is one of those who “counted no more” (58).

How do you think the unthinkable? My argument is that Jacky exists in the novel to prove that she does not exist here, to prove that she is, in fact, unthinkable. An ethical moment then, if such a statement is reasonable, has no context within her performance. An “I must” moment, as Miller defines it and as an exemplification of Forster’s writing/reading moral law, can be neither denied nor bestowed when it is wholly irrelevant. Can the argument be made that Forster’s act of writing Jacky “disappears” her from the novel’s conclusion, deliberately not ineptly, because her historical existence leaves no imprint behind? In 1909, a year before *Howards End* was published, Forster answered a letter from his friend Masood which described Masood’s “music-hall experiences.” Forster wrote: “but that side of life seems more interesting than it really is. If you want to feel sad, think about poverty: that is interesting almost to madness if it grips you

once” (Lago 96). Such a reading of Jacky allows us to read *beyond* Forster’s misogyny and class and thus tease out the necessary ethical law embodied in that text and “voluntarily impose” it on ourselves.

In his 1934 essay on Forster, Peter Burra talks about “the clash” that is central to all of Forster’s novels. “Another aspect of the clash must be referred to,” he says: “Mr. Forster introduces into each of these five books what one can only describe as an elemental character.” He further describes the function of these characters: “Their greater wisdom, their particular knowledge, put into ironic contrast the errors and illusions of the rest” (29). These characters are Gino, Stephen, George and his father, Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore. Burra isolates the last two by pointing out “one rather strange accident that attaches to both of them: they belong to the enemy’s camp” (29).

I resist Burra’s assessment of Ruth Wilcox’s “elemental”-ness. One of my reservations has, indeed, to do with the enemy’s camp: not that she originates from there but her function within it. The line that demarcates Howards from Wilcoxes is in some ways bolder than the differences between Wilcoxes and Schlegels. The union of country Howard and merchant Wilcox has come about because there is no Howard man to inherit the place and, more important, no money. How much change has Ruth undergone in this union? We know how significant is her giving up her search early in her marriage for a more “inward light” at church services. Is the yielding up of the paddock (which she loved “more dearly than the garden itself!” [102]) for the garage any less significant?

Her husband and son desire motor cars to replace animals. Has Ruth shared with Henry or her children any folklore from the country? (Henry is questioned by Margaret about the pig's teeth in the wych-elm, years after Ruth's death, and his answer is "What a rum notion! Of course not!" [191]; Margaret tactfully says no more). Would the notion of "mistake upon mistake" (266), as Miss Avery cryptically asserts, ever cross Ruth's mind, even as she "knew" of her husband's unfaithfulness? With the birth of her children who, along with Henry, were forced out of the meadow because of hay fever, would Ruth have seen the irony of Wilcoxes saving what they cannot enjoy? These questions, prosaic as they are, have little to do with the "elemental" function of Ruth within the novel. But they do interrogate Burra's view by underscoring an incremental collapse of Ruth vis à vis the Wilcox world, a dilution of Ruth in the strange brew which is this marriage of a country mystic and a city businessman. And her children are in no way like her.

To observe the Howard/Wilcox mix that is Ruth is to note that with her family, with Wilcoxes, Ruth remains a muted Howard, a lone country figure in a brood of city moderns. Her elemental-ness in that context seems limited, even when she triumphs in the vine debate. It is when her friendship with Margaret begins that the germ of her Howardness is exposed to us. Upon learning that Margaret will soon have to leave the home in which she was born, Ruth reacts "vehemently" ("It is monstrous, Miss Schlegel") and declares "Howards End was nearly pulled down once. It would have killed me" (93). Not only do we believe

her declaration, we know that she has never shared such a declaration with her family. In the very few pages Forster devotes to a friendship that impacts so strongly upon the novel, Ruth travels a considerable distance, from a muted Howard to a Howard in full voice. When her impulsive offer to go down to Howards End and stay overnight is rejected by Margaret, Ruth already has acquired the right to be displeased: the offer takes the shape of necessity, urgent but beyond time. When Margaret changes her mind and appears at the station, Ruth points to the fogs in the station, asserts that they are “sitting in the sun at Hertfordshire,” and promises Margaret that “you will never repent joining them” (96). Margaret’s honest response is “I shall never repent joining you” (96). Ruth’s transcendent response, “It is the same” (96), primes us for the blossoming of a transHowardness, if elemental does not seem quite the right word, that comes into its own only with Margaret as its spokeswoman or its object. The unconscious talent of Wilcoxes to alter the Howard wife/mother’s true voice is demonstrated on the same page in the text as Ruth’s response to Margaret. No sooner have the women purchased their tickets to Howards End than Henry and Evie appear unexpectedly, having had to alter their motoring plans. A visit to the house that is one and the same with her very self becomes, in Ruth’s carefully bland words, “our little outing” (96); Howards End is never mentioned. “Before imagination could triumph” the trip is cancelled, leaving Margaret alone in the station to observe a woman leaving behind “her one passion in life -- her house” and going off with the family that induces her silence, but not before Mrs. Wilcox

“had recovered herself” (96). The notion of recovery fastens itself securely to the Ruth/Margaret friendship, Margaret recovering Ruth textually and, ultimately, symbolically.

Ruth speaks in two linguistic modes and it is Margaret who quickly allows her to function in her true one. Without Margaret, Ruth’s language is misty, her voice remarkably faint. Forster relies heavily on his narrator to explain and enhance Ruth’s performance. We may read that at the luncheon “she [Ruth] seemed more out of focus than usual, and nearer the line that divides daily life from a life that may be of greater importance” (86-87), but it is Margaret who aptly describes the luncheon as “gibbering monkeys,” asks forgiveness of Ruth and creates “a newborn emotion” (88) between them. Margaret is the perpetuator of their friendship, consistently bringing the game to Ruth. She is the decoder of Ruth’s mode of existence. Of her wish to give Margaret a Christmas gift Ruth explains, “You have stopped me from brooding. I am too apt to brood” (90). Margaret is, and will be, the reordered, actualized continuation of Ruth. It is through Margaret’s “I must” moment with Henry, after his collapse, that Ruth’s voice is most amplified.

It is this imbalance between Ruth’s faint voice (in Margaret’s absence and, more important, in her family’s presence) and the vision of her as a “mind” (HE 305), thinking Burra’s “greater wisdom” than “the rest” (29) that is so hard to set right. Only once in the novel, with the failed Helen/Paul affair causing such anger, do her vision (“Separate those human beings who will hurt each other most. The

rest can wait" [36]) and voice coalesce to secure resolution (" ' Miss Schlegel, would you take your aunt up to your room or to my room, whichever you think best. Paul, do find Evie, and tell her lunch for six, but I'm not sure whether we shall all be downstairs for it.' And they . . . obeyed her" [36]). Admittedly, it is a quiet triumph of the most elegant kind. It is also an isolated one and it appears early in the novel. Ruth's voice is not sustained, or, more precisely, it is sustained only through Margaret's consistent recovery of it. It is Margaret who sees Ruth as "the great wave" (110), the "mind" (305) that contains the fragments called Henry, Margaret and Helen and the only one who understands "our little movements" (305). As a mind, Ruth perhaps has no need for ethical moments. What lingers is how easy it is to dismiss her voice unless it is recovered, and recovered by Margaret only. (The most dramatic example of Ruth's voice being thwarted is, once again, her family's reading of her will).

If Ruth is a mind, then Mrs. Avery is her purely physical flesh and blood counterpart, both when Ruth is alive and after her death. Not elemental in Burra's sense at all (she "cackle[s] maliciously" about Wilcox men and their hay fever, she does not tug her forelock to "Charlie Wilcox" [HE 268]), Mrs. Avery does have particular knowledge that materializes in action meant to safeguard Ruth Howard/ Mrs. Wilcox and ensure the return home of that person, even in the guise of Margaret Schlegel/ Mrs. Wilcox. Upon encountering Margaret by surprise in Howards End, she says "Oh! Well, I took [not mistook] you for Ruth Wilcox. In fancy, of course -- in fancy. You had her way of walking" (202). Mrs. Avery's

particular knowledge serves her well in her particular function: the care of Ruth and the safeguarding of her home. In this, she needs no help. The relationship between Ruth and Mrs. Avery has a timelessness attached to it. When Ruth says to Margaret, "You see, I lived at Howards End long, long before Mr. Wilcox knew it. I was born there" (82), we intuit Mrs. Avery's presence at Ruth's birth.

It is difficult to ascribe "elemental" to a character who seems ineffective performing alone, without protectors or interpreters. There is one similarity in the construction of both Jacky Bast and Ruth Wilcox: for different reasons, both convey a sense of not being there. In the case of Jacky, her invisibility yields, in an ethics of reading, an "I must" moment that answers Forster's law. Ruth must remain faint, too high above the narrative for praxis: Miller's ethical moment, Forster's destination.

Nevertheless, Forster's job in *Howards End* remains one that is guided by a wise toughness which does not fold under the temptation to console (a temptation, says Iris Murdoch, "to which every work of art yields except the greatest ones" [13]). Forster's language shapes his world and moves us. It also moves us *along* in *our* world and ensures that the text we have held in our hands is not only paper. This is a first concern in the enterprise of ethical theory, a concern amply satisfied by *Howards End*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS CITED

- Booth, Wayne. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.
- Born, Daniel. "Private Gardens, Public Swamps: *Howards End* and the Revaluation of Liberal Guilt." *Novel* 25 (1992): 141-159.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. "Howards End." *Forster. A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Malcolm Bradbury. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966. 128-143.
- _____, *Possibilities. Essays on the State of the Novel*. London: Oxford UP, 1973.
- Burra, Peter. "The Novels of E.M. Forster." *Forster. A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Malcolm Bradbury. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966. 21-33.
- Chapman, Jeff, and Pamela S. Dear, eds. *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series*. Vol. 51. New York: Gale, 1996.
- Coetzee, J.M. *Foe*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1986.
- Davis, Lennard J. *Resisting Novels. Ideology and Fiction*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

_____, Review of *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, by Martha C. Nussbaum. *Nation* 263.3 (1996): 40-42.

Forster, E.M. *Abinger Harvest*. 1936. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1964.

_____, *Aspects of the Novel and related writings*. 1927. Ed. and introd. Oliver Stallybrass. London: Edward Arnold, 1974.

_____, *Howards End*. 1910. Ed. and introd. Oliver Stallybrass. Reset from Abinger ed. 1975. London: Penguin, 1989.

_____, *The Longest Journey*. 1907. New York: Vintage, 1962.

_____, *The New Collected Short Stories*. Introd. P.N. Furbank. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985.

_____, *A Room with a View*. 1908. New York: Quality Paperback, s.d.

_____, *Two Cheers for Democracy*. 1951. Ed. and introd. Oliver Stallybrass. London: Edward Arnold, 1972.

_____, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. 1905. Ed. and introd. Oliver Stallybrass. London: Edward Arnold, 1975.

Furbank, P.N. *E.M. Forster: A Life. The Growth of the Novelist (1879-1914)*. Vol. 1. London: Secker and Warburg, 1977.

- _____, *E.M. Forster: A Life. Polycrates' Ring (1914-1970)*. Vol. 2. London: Secker and Warburg, 1978.
- Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. "Ethics." *Critical Terms for Literary Thinking*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993. 387-405.
- _____, *Getting it Right. Language, Literature and Ethics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Herz, Judith Scherer. *The Short Narratives of E.M. Forster*. London: MacMillan, 1988.
- Lago, Mary, and P.N. Furbank eds. *Selected Letters of E.M. Forster. 1879-1920*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1983.
- Levenson, Michael. *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality. Character and novelistic form from Conrad to Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.
- Long, A.A., ed. *Problems in Stoicism*. London: U of London Athlone P, 1971.
- Miller, J. Hillis. *The Ethics of Reading. Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin*. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.
- _____, "Is There an Ethics of Reading?" *Reading Narratives: Form, Ethics, Ideology*. Ed. James Phalen. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1989. 79-101.
- Milosz, Czeslaw. "Reality." *The Partisan Review* 59.1 (1992): 20-28.
- _____, *The Witness of Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983.

Murdoch, Iris. "Against Dryness." *Iris Murdoch*. Ed. Harold Bloom. *Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 9-16.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.

_____, *Love's Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990.

_____, *Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994.

Potter, Dennis. *Seeing the Blossom. Two Interviews, a Lecture and a Story*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.

_____, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991.

_____, "The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature." *Raritan* XVI.1 (1996): 8-17.

Rosecrance, Barbara. "Howards End." *E.M. Forster*. Ed. Harold Bloom. *Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. 107-134.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Ed. and trans. Andrew Brown. Warminster, Wiltshire, UK: Aris and Phillips, 1987.

Stone, Wilfred. *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E.M. Forster*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966.

Summers, Claude J. *E.M. Forster*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983.

Trilling, Lionel. *E.M. Forster*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1943.

Widdowson, Peter. *E.M. Forster's Howards End. Fiction as History*. London: Sussex UP, 1977.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929. London: Triad Grafton, 1977.

WORKS CONSULTED

Claridge, L., and E. Langland, eds. *Out of Bounds. Male Writers and Gender[ed] Criticism*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1990.

Das, G.K., and John Beer, eds. *E.M. Forster: A Human Exploration*. London: MacMillan, 1979.

Duckworth, Alistair M. *Howards End. E.M. Forster's House of Fiction*. New York: Twayne, 1992.

Forster, E.M. *Albergo Empedocle and other writings*. Ed. and introd. George H. Thomson. New York: Liveright, 1971.

Forster, E.M. *Commonplace Book*. Ed. Philip Gardner. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1985.

Gardiner, Patrick. "Professor Nussbaum on *The Golden Bowl*." *New Literary History* 15 (1983): 179-184.

Gardner, Philip. *Writers and Their Work: E.M. Forster*. London: Longman, 1977.

Herz, Judith S. and Robert K. Martin, eds. *E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982.

Martin, John Sayre. *E.M. Forster. The endless journey*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976.

May, Brian. *The Modernist as Pragmatist. E.M. Forster and the Fate of Liberalism*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1997.

Montaigne, Michel de. *Four Essays*. Trans. M.A. Screech. New York: Penguin, 1991.

Nussbaum, Martha C. "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam." *New Literary History* 15 (1983): 201-208.

_____, *Poetic Justice. The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon, 1995.

Putnam, Hilary. "Taking Rules Seriously -- A Response to Martha Nussbaum." *New Literary History* 15 (1983): 193-200.

Rist, J.M. *Stoic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969.

Rorty, Richard. *Rorty and Pragmatism: the philosopher responds to his critics*.
Ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1995.

Sandbach, F.H. *The Stoics*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1975.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. "Value/Evaluation." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990.

Stape, J.H., ed. *E.M. Forster. Interviews and Recollections*. New York: St. Martin's, 1993.

Wilde, Alan. *Art and Order; A Study of E.M. Forster*. London: Peter Owen, 1965.

Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1966.

Wollheim, Richard. "Flawed Crystals: James's *The Golden Bowl* and the Plausibility of Literature as Moral Philosophy." *New Literary History* 15 (1983): 185-191.