

**Literature and Imaginary Geographies:**

**Aspects of E. M. Forster's Novels**

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## Acknowledgments

I suppose that I reread Forster's novels in my retirement to satisfy a number of curiosities which beguiled me. I'm not sure that Forster would have regarded any of them with approbation. Considering a wide range of middle- and upper-middle-class intellectuals who have empathized with less advantaged people, I wondered how effective was their proselytizing. Forster seemed to fit ill because he had empathy, but recognized that he did not have the experience to prognosticate in his writings. I allude to this discomfort below in the context of Jack London's 'people of the abyss' and Jonathan Rose's critique of the characterization of Leonard Bast, by comparison with the more sympathetic characterization of Stephen Wonham. Such an approach constituted one entry.

More specifically, *Howards End* made a profound impression, both the text itself and the commentaries on it. I soon realized, however, that one could not simply detach that novel, redoubtable as it was and mature as a literary work, but that one had to consider the totality of Forster's works up to and including his *Aspects of the Novel* (the Clark Lectures) and his short stories after he abandoned the novel as a genre and form, out of frustration. Since Andrew Thacker has explored *Howards End* so persuasively, my considerations are concentrated on the rest of the corpus of Forster's works. Mostly, they complement Thacker's insights, but occasionally suggest different positions. Some of these divergences result from comments in Forster's letters and commonplace book. It should be constantly borne in mind that Forster was a determinate voice as author, with an intention to be prescriptive. He might have disagreed considerably with current attention to reception theory. He directed his readers. The stimulation in Thacker's book remains, however, immense.

Despite our extremely different backgrounds, I found attractive traits in Forster: his recognition of 'flux', the possibility of 'transfiguration', the profundity of the 'abyss', and the sense of 'muddle' – the irresolution in our lives, not just then in the transformations occurring in Edwardian society, but always.

Forster, although unselfconsciously influenced by his social position, independent livelihood, perhaps cloistered life later at King's College, Cambridge, was pragmatic. He wrote from close experience. He did not conform to the notion of the 'regional novel', if such exists, for he wrote about numerous different landscapes and places, some with affection, others with some disregard, as an outsider, a visitor, if an intimate and regular one. In his novels, he nonetheless, illustrates for us places and locations. He went further, moreover, for he allowed the work of his imagination to extend to ideas of barriers and boundaries, particularly in his short stories.

Finally, I must offer an apology. In some places, the text consists of large chunks of quotations from Forster's writings. My only excuse is that it was impossible for me to convey Forster's appreciation for some landscapes without resorting to his own words.

## Abbreviations

- Aspects of the Novel* [Forster] *Aspects of the Novel*, edited by Oliver Stallybrass and with an Introduction by Frank Kermode (London, 2005) [1927]
- Commonplace Book* [Forster] *Commonplace Book*, edited by Philip Gardner (Stanford, CA, 1985) [1925-68]
- Howards End* [Forster] *Howards End*, with an Introduction by David Lodge (London, 2000) [1910]
- Interviews and Recollections* J. H. Stape, ed., *E. M. Forster. Interviews and Recollections* (Basingstoke, 1992)
- Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster* Frank Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster* (London, 2009)
- Letters I* *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster: 1879-1920* volume I, edited by Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank (Cambridge, MA, 1984)
- Longest Journey* [Forster] *The Longest Journey*, edited by Elizabeth Heine, with an Introduction by Gilbert Adair (London, 2006) [1907]
- Maurice* [Forster] *Maurice*, with an introduction by David Leavitt (London, 2005) [1913- ]
- Passage to India* [Forster] *A Passage to India*, with an Introduction by Pankaj Mishra (London, 2005) [1924]
- Room with a View* [Forster] *A Room with a View*, with an Introduction by Malcolm Bradbury (London, 2000) [1908]

- Selected Stories* [Forster] *Selected Stories*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell (London, 2001) [1911-28]
- Thacker, 'Through modernity' Andrew Thacker, 'Through Modernity: Forster's flux', in Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity. Space and Geography In Modernism* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 46-79
- Where Angels Fear to Tread* [Forster] *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, edited by Oliver Stallybrass, with an introduction by Ruth Padel (London, 2007) [1905]

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**Figure 1** Forster's Imaginary Landscape: *The Longest Journey*

**Figure 2** Figsbury Rings

**Figure 3** 'Cadover House'



### **Prologue: summary of the novels, characters and locations**

Despite his longevity (1879-1970), Forster's career as a novelist was fairly compact temporally, although his endeavours at short stories and literary criticism extended throughout his life. His novels thus consist of a fairly consistent approach such that it makes sense to analyze them as a single *oeuvre*, from *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) through to *A Passage to India* (1924). Since the last novel is concerned relatively little with England, it only receives an occasional allusion here. *Maurice* presents a conundrum, since it was commenced in 1913, restricted in its circulation as a manuscript to close associates for the (at that time) sensitivity of its overt homosexual content, revised by Forster intermittently, and published posthumously in 1971, after the repeal of criminal legislation against homosexuality in 1967. It is included here because of its allegories of place. *The Selected Stories* consist of brief pieces completed by 1928, so are consistent with the temporal span of the novels. Slightly before the final short story, Forster was invited to address the genre of the novel in the Clark Lectures at Cambridge in 1927, published as *Aspects of the Novel*. We can explore the place of place and space in his novels thus not only in the actual works, but in his reflections on the genre.

In *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), the narrative interchanges between events in Italy and England (suburban 'Sawston'). The *Longest Journey* (1907) has episodes in Cambridge, suburban 'Sawston', and rural (traditional) Wiltshire. Although the initial (in)action in *A Room with a View* (1908) occurs in Italy, the scene shifts to the Surrey downs. *Howards End* (1910) has substantial location in the City/metropolis, in a rural location (the eponymous 'Howards End') in Hertfordshire rapidly being enveloped by suburbs, in Shropshire (the fictitious 'Oniton') and, importantly, if only fleetingly, the border of Dorset and Hampshire. More precise details of these *loca* are introduced in Chapter One.

Here the focus is on Forster's imaginary geography of England. His travels took him to Italy and India, both of which appeared in his novels and his short stories. Forster lovingly describes the Italian landscape in his novels, especially *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*, but also in some of the short stories ('The Story of a Panic', especially). In both international locations, extraordinary events occur in special places – the landscape as trickster with a sort of agency (see Chapter 2). In general, these non-domestic territories are not addressed here. The concentration rests on Forster's conceptions of the English landscape.

To assist the reader, it is necessary to explain briefly some of the plots and characters in the novels. The *dramatis personae*, the characters, are profoundly influenced by and in some cases are metaphors for their countrysides and suburban locations. To a considerable degree, the characters are anthropomorphic representations of these locations. The essences of the plots of *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* may be familiar from the film versions of the novels.<sup>1</sup>

### *Where Angels Fear to Tread*

PHILIP HERRITON is the son of Mrs Herriton of Sawston and brother -in-law of Lilia, who is the widow of his late brother. One of Forster's principal concerns in the novel is the transformation of Philip's character and attitudes. Philip journeys to Italy to intervene in the relationship between Lilia and Gino. CAROLINE ABBOTT accompanies the widow, Lilia, to Italy, inadvertently succours the relationship between Lilia and Gino, and is involved in the later intervention over the child which was issue of the marriage of Lilia and Gino. She is a stalwart of Sawston.

### *The Longest Journey*

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<sup>1</sup> *Howards End* (Merchant/Ivory & Film Four 1992; screenplay by Ruth Praver Jhabvala); *A Room with a View* (Renton/Quinn.Edwards for ITV1, 2007; screenplay by Andrew Davies; but the dénouement unfaithful to the novel).

RICKIE (FREDERICK ELLIOTT) is educated in a public school, graduates from Cambridge, becomes a teacher at Sawston public school. He marries Agnes Pembroke.

AGNES PEMBROKE is a longtime friend of Rickie, engaged to Gerald, who dies, and becomes Rickie's wife.

MRS (EMILY) FAILING is Rickie's aunt who lives at Cadover House in Wiltshire. She assumed the voluntary wardship of Stephen Wonham.

STEPHEN WONHAM lives with Mrs Failing until she evicts him. He is the half-brother of Rickie, although initially unknown by Rickie. When first informed of the relationship, Rickie assumes the infidelity of his father, but in fact Stephen was his mother's child.

ANSELL, from a modest background (son of a 'provincial draper') is one of Rickie's undergraduate peers at Cambridge, a philosopher, and is encountered again later in the novel when he encounters Stephen Wonham.

#### *A Room with a View*

LUCY HONEYCHURCH journeys to Italy, where she encounters George Emerson. They have a passing liaison in a magical valley in the Italian landscape. Lucy returns to Windy Corner, her home in Surrey, is engaged to Cecil who she realizes later to be unsuitable for her, escapes with George Emerson back to Italy.

GEORGE EMERSON, a clerk in a railway company, and the son of the socialist Mr Emerson, meets Lucy in Italy, and re-encounters her when he and his father take the lease of a villa in Summer Street in Surrey.

#### *Howards End*

MARGARET and HELEN SCHLEGEL briefly meet up with the Wilcox family on holiday. They are sisters with independent means. Helen is invited to stay with the Wilcoxes at Howards End, beginning the

association between the two families. Margaret ultimately marries the widower, Henry Wilcox. Margaret, Helen, and their brother Tibby (Theobald) live in Wickham Place in London until that building is demolished after their lease expires. It was the home of their parents. Margaret is probably the prose – sensible – and Helen the poetry (imaginative but impulsive). They become entangled with Leonard Bast (and his wife, Jacky).

LEONARD BAST is an insurance clerk who initially is desirous of becoming more cultured. By chance, he becomes entangled with the Schlegel sisters. Through advice (received from Henry Wilcox) from them, he quits his current position to work in a bank, but the bank makes him redundant. Helen takes them under her protection, takes them to Oniton, the venue for a Wilcox marriage, and there Leonard and Helen Schlegel become briefly involved, resulting in Helen's pregnancy. Bast dies in a scuffle at Howards End with Charles Wilcox, the son of Henry.

THE WILCOX FAMILY is represented below mainly by reference to Henry Wilcox and his son, Charles. Henry Wilcox marries first Ruth Howard, of Howards End, then Margaret Schegel. Howards End, their first home, in Hertfordshire, is the inheritance of Ruth. Henry becomes a successful businessman through Imperial trade to Africa, acquiring as well as Howards End, a house in Ducie St. in the city and Oniton Grange in Shropshire. Charles Wilcox is his eldest son and works in his father's business offices in the city. He lives in Hilton near Howards End and expects to inherit Howards End, although he cares little for it.

AUNT JULEY is the aunt of the Schlegel sisters and is important here because she lives in Dorset, allowing the evocation of this part of England as the epitome of the whole country.

*Maurice*

MAURICE HALL attends a public school, as his mother is a widow. He is sent down from Cambridge,

although he continues his friendship with Clive Durham whom he met at the university. He takes a position in the city and becomes a suburban commuter. Ultimately, he elopes with Clive's gamekeeper, Alec Scudder.

CLIVE DURHAM is the son of a minor and declining gentry family who live in their decaying country house at Penge on the border of Wiltshire and Somerset. Clive meets Maurice at Cambridge, has a passing homosexual affair with Maurice, but ultimately renounces his homosexuality and marries.

## Introduction

The *genius loci* has only inspired me thrice, and on the third occasion did me out of £1.<sup>2</sup>

Yet indirectly the *genius loci* did address me, and *The Longest Journey* is the last of my books that has come upon me without my knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

He [Rickie] was equally sensitive to places. He would compare Cambridge with Sawston, and either with a third type of existence, to which, for want of a better name, he gave the name of 'Wiltshire'.<sup>4</sup>

One belongs to the place that one sleeps in and to the people one eats with.<sup>5</sup>

Here are four quotations, the first two of which are Morgan Forster's own reflections and the third the narrator's attribution of sentiment to Rickie, one of the main characters in Forster's *The Longest Journey*. (Throughout Forster's fiction, we have to remember that he retained the notion of the narrator (author) having knowledge of the mind of the principal character; the narrator was paramount. In that sense, as well as several others, Forster's novels look backwards. This idea troubled Forster later, the

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2 E. M. Forster, 'Memoirs', reprinted as Appendix B in *Longest Journey*, p. 362.

3 Forster, 'Memoirs', p. 366.

4 *Longest Journey*, p. 155.

5 *Longest Journey*, p. 213 [a reflection by Ansell, the philosopher]

contention arising from the realization that, if the narrator knew the mind of one character, why not all?)<sup>6</sup> These utterances reveal the complications and paradoxes of Forster and place. The author himself was a cosmopolitan, of middle-class provenance, who was not immersed in any particular place ('not rooted'), unless it was, in his second age, in King's College, Cambridge.<sup>7</sup> His novels, moreover, are not situated in any one location – no unity of place – but in multiple places, including Italy and India, although his affections for them changed, one replacing the other.<sup>8</sup> Apart from 'Summer Street', the pseudonymous village in the Surrey Weald, Foster's observations of places are founded on no more than intermittent visits. His comments are thus what the anthropologists term 'etic', those of the outsider looking in, but perhaps no less useful because external perceptions are also instrumental in defining (stereotyping) places and regions.

He nonetheless worried about 'place' in his notes. Only a couple of headings in his commonplace book engage with place, but other entries accommodate some reflections on rural place, as related below. Forster was especially anxious about the relative position of place: 'This bewilderment shows that our familiar notions are only local in their application ... Map geography is a convention which is useful for practical purposes but has nothing to do with experience', so when a place is transformed or rearranged (such as Stevenage railway station or the paths on St Georges Hills) does it remain the same place?<sup>9</sup>

Place is experienced from the inside, but also represented from the outside. Some authors will

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6 For an example of the omniscience of the narrator, see the attributions of Maurice in *Maurice*, p. 15; for the problem, Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, pp. 10-12, 24-5; *Aspects of the Novel*, pp. 81-4.

7 P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster. A Life* (2 vols, London, 1977-8) remains the most informative account of his friend's life. Some of the general remarks here are based on Furbank and also on *Selected Letters*. I have only had a chance of a cursory glance at Philip Gardner, ed., *The Journals and Diaries of E M Forster* (3 volumes, London, 2011). *Commonplace Book* comprises largely later memoranda by Forster, some in a sense in preparation for his Clark Lectures at Cambridge subsequently published as *Aspects of the Novel* in 1927.

8 There is no space to define the various connotations of place here; for a succinct introduction, Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2004).

9 *Commonplace Book*, p. 51 under the rubric 'Place'.

do their work through phenomenology, experience and intimacy with place, others through ideology, representation of space: the difference, to some extent, between insiders and outsiders. To some degree, as in the case of his depiction of Wiltshire in *The Longest Journey* and in some short stories, Forster belonged to the latter category, as a participant-observer anthropologist, although with the benefit of a repetitive visitor.

When Forster was invited to address the function and structure of the novel, he avoided the issue of place. In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster commenced with the notion of the narrative quality of the novel, with its precedence of time over place, although he denied that he would attempt to be philosophical about time, 'a most dangerous hobby for an outsider, far more fatal than place'.<sup>10</sup> The novelist's primary concern is to respect time in the sequence of the narrative. He did not, however, expand on the notion of place in the novel. At one point, he does admit that '[m]any novelists have the feeling for place – Five Towns, Auld Reekie and so on', but more to compare that characteristic with the much grander and impressive conception of space in Tolstoy: 'Space is the lord of *War and Peace*, not time'.<sup>11</sup> Here, as elsewhere, Forster diminishes the English novel by comparison with its grand European counterparts by Tolstoy (the heroic, epic and spatial), Dostoyevsky (the human soul), and Proust (modern consciousness).<sup>12</sup> By implication, then, he considered an appreciation of place in the English novel as somewhat insignificant for the genre.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps quite paradoxically, an attempt to elucidate Forster's attitude to place in his novels might seem self-defeating.<sup>14</sup> There is, nonetheless, an apparent development of place within Forster's novels.

10 *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 43.

11 *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 51.

12 *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 26.

13 See also the critique of Forster by Douglas C. D. Pocock, 'Geography and literature', *Progress in Human Geography* 12 (1988), pp. 87-102. For the proposition and its discontents that literature (fiction) might evoke the feeling of, for and about place, Joanne P. Sharpe, 'Locating imaginary homelands: literature, geography, and Salman Rushdie', *Geographical Journal* 38 ((1996), pp. 119-27.

14 See the fairly disparaging remarks by Forster about the 'provincialism' of some novels by British writers by comparison with his ideal writers, the Russian grand masters: *Commonplace Book*, p. 12. See, however, Ruth Padel, 'Introduction',



The exception is *Maurice*, where place is underdeveloped. The country house (Penge) of the Durhams on the border between Somerset and Wiltshire is derogated as 'a remote part of England', but otherwise the topography not described.<sup>15</sup> The author acknowledged that writing was, whilst a meticulous practice, also a subconscious process, a certain lack of awareness, 'a common state which it is convenient to call inspiration', with words flowing from the pen and ink.<sup>16</sup> So the argument here is that Forster's genius only slowly came to realize his understanding of the *genius loci*. The term was itself employed dismissively by Forster in *The Longest Journey*: 'The direction of the swim was determined a little by the genius of the place – for places have a genius, though the less we talk about it the better ...', but his reticence compares with his eloquence about places elsewhere in his novels.<sup>17</sup> In *A Room with a View*, the narrator seems fairly dismissive: 'By an odd chance - unless we believe in a presiding genius of place ...'<sup>18</sup>

As the first two quotations above from his memoirs indicate, he did, in retrospect, recognize something of the influence of place, although place never really featured in *Aspects of the Novel*. Perhaps we can already detect the overt insinuation of place in *Howards End*. The Schlegel sisters are decidedly social and sociable, captivated by and captivating other people. When, however, their lease of Wickham Place is on the point of expiring, Margaret realizes the importance of place. She recognizes that for Ruth Wilcox, the 'woof' of the world is Howards End. Initially, her reflection causes her some discomfort: that it is alarming to 'suppose that places may ever be more important than people'. Her experience of London and its people, nonetheless, induces her to move to the thought that:

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*Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. xi: 'All titles of novels published in Forster's lifetime [by Forster] conjure a place, a way of looking at a place, or a "journey" or "passage" towards it'.

15 *Maurice*, p. 74.

16 *Aspects of the Novel*, pp. 28-36: the imaginary convention of novelists in the equivalent of the Round Room of the British Museum.

17 *Longest Journey*, p. 58.

18 *Room with a View*, p. 53.

'I quite expect to end my life caring most for a place'.<sup>19</sup> Here, of course, Forster is partly indicating the later progress of the plot and thus establishing a consistency of 'narrative discourse'.<sup>20</sup> Soon, she also confesses to Leonard Bast that she introduces the poetic into her quotidian life through remembering 'some place – some beloved place or tree...'<sup>21</sup> Her final realization is that '[a] place, as well as a person, may catch the glow' – fulfillment of the earlier expressiveness.<sup>22</sup> We might conclude from these direct statements that Forster too was coming to appreciate the significance of place.

If, moreover, we take into account his short stories, which also elucidate the mystical quality of some places, he also addressed in his pseudo-science fiction the magical non-place ('utopia'), especially 'The Celestial Omnibus', which can, however, be read as an escape from the dull suburb of Surbiton, and 'The Machine Stops'.<sup>23</sup>

The 'Englishness' of Forster's novels has often received comment, sometimes associated with his recollection of his childhood home at Rooksnest near Stevenage in the guise of *Howard's End*.<sup>24</sup> In *Howards End*, Dorset, from the Purbeck Hills, is taken for the best characteristics of England.<sup>25</sup> The eulogy for the landscape of the border between Hampshire and Dorset in *Howards End* is well rehearsed, but cannot be omitted. It merits reproduction *in extenso*.

If one wanted to show a foreigner England, perhaps the wisest course would be to take him to the final section of the Purbeck hills, and stand him on their summit, a few miles to the east of Corfe. Then system after system of our island would roll together under his feet.

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19 *Howards End*, p. 111.

20 For 'narrative discourse', H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (second edn, Cambridge, 2008), pp. 16-20.

21 *Howards End*, p. 122.

22 *Howards End*, p. 288.

23 *Selected Stories*.

24 Nicola Bauman, *Morgan: A Biography of E. M. Forster* (London, 1993), pp. 30-43, cited by Thacker, 'Through modernity', p. 75, n. 7.

25 Rob Colls, *The Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002), p. 260.

Beneath him is the valley of the Frome, and all the wild lands that come tossing down from Dorchester, black and gold, to mirror their gorse in the expanses of Poole. The valley of the Stour is beyond, unaccountable stream, dirty at Blandford, pure at Wimborne – the Stour, sliding out of fat fields, to marry the Avon beneath the tower of Christchurch. The valley of the Avon – invisible, but far to the north the trained eye may see Clearbury Ring, that guards it, and the imagination may leap beyond that onto Salisbury Plain itself, and beyond the Plain to all the glorious downs of central England.<sup>26</sup>

Equally, in *The Longest Journey*, Wiltshire receives that accolade:

Here is the heart of our island: the Chilterns, the North Downs, the South Downs radiate hence.<sup>27</sup> The fibres of England unite in Wiltshire, and did we condescend to worship her, here we should erect our national shrine.<sup>28</sup>

Confusingly, then, Forster identified several places in his novels as redolent of England, including, if we also account for *A Room with a View*, the pseudonymous 'Summer Street' in Surrey, a county in which he was domiciled for some time. (Forster inherited a house in Abinger Hammer from his aunt Laura in 1924 and resided there for many years).<sup>29</sup> These diverse places, however, had a consistency: all were quite evidently rural, in contradistinction not to the burgeoning cities but to the tentacles of expanding suburban England, the Sawston of *The Longest Journey*, the threat to vestiges of the rural in 'Summer Street' in Surrey, and the encirclement of *Howards End* by suburban sprawl, the 'flux' of modernity,

<sup>26</sup> *Howards End*, p. 142.

<sup>27</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 126.

<sup>28</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 126 – and passim!

<sup>29</sup> *Commonplace Book*, p. xiv.

associated with the bifurcation of the middle class into its upper and lower components. In 1915, just five years after the publication of *Howards End*, Patrick Geddes adopted the description 'world city', adopted from the earlier German *Weltstadt*. The development of 'world cities' is associated with modernism.<sup>30</sup>

Not all rural enclaves, however, received Forster's approbation. His relative disdain for Northumberland is manifest in his memoranda. The querulous character of Mrs Failing was based on Forster's 'Uncle Willie' (William Howley Forster (1855-1910)), the Northumberland relative, and the imaginary house at Cadover in Wiltshire in *The Longest Journey* on Acton House in Felton in Northumberland.<sup>31</sup> The male space of the Wilcoxes pertains to the City, disembodied, fluid, equivalent to Bauman's 'liquid modernity'.<sup>32</sup> Yet, when Henry Wilcox leases out *Howards End*, he takes an alternative rural retreat at Oniton (identified as Clun in Shropshire), but again a somewhat ambivalent *locus* in the contested space of Englishness and Celticness, by contrast with the solidly English landscapes at *Howards End* (Hertfordshire) and particularly in Swanage and the Purbeck Hills. One wonders, however, whether the dismissal of Shropshire was also intended as a mild rebuke to Housman

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30 Thacker, 'Through modernity', p. 47. Forster reiterates 'continual flux': *Howards End*, pp. 92 and 117. For cosmopolitanism, Thacker, 'Through modernity', p. 47. For 'cosmopolitan' London, *Howards End*, p. 135. Jean Gottmann, 'What are cities becoming centers of? Sorting out possibilities', in *Cities in a Global Society* ed. by Richard V. Knight and Gary Cappert (Newbury Park, CA, 1989), pp. 62-3. *Howards End*, p. 115; for the advance of suburbia towards Howards End, *Howards End*, p. 116. Simon Gunn, 'Class, identity and the urban: the middle class in England, c.1790-1950', *Urban History* 31 (2004), pp. 29-47. For the rootlessness of the upper middle class, *Howards End*, p. 128. Contrast with Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973), chapter 16; he mentions Forster's 'earth imagery' on the same page as he referred to the 'regional novel': p. 254. 'A Radical out and out, she [Lucy] learned to speak with horror of Suburbia': *Room with a View*, p. 102. "'You forget the place is growing half suburban'": *A Room with a View*, p. 127. For remnants of rural community in 'Summer Street', Nigel Rapport, 'The body of the village community: between Reverend Parkington in Wanet and Mr Beebe in *A Room with A View*', in Rapport, ed., *British Subjects. An Anthropology of Britain* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 299-319. 'Summer Street' was perhaps Green Street: 'I called at Green Street not long ago, in the hopes of gleaning some news about you both ...': Forster to Malcolm Darling from Abinger Hammer, 29 June 1910: *Selected Letters*, p. 108 (82).

31 John Beer, *The Achievement of E. M. Forster* (London, 1962), p. 79; The King's College Archive Centre, Cambridge, The Papers of E. M. Forster (King's PP EMF) 27/136 (photograph of Acton House endorsed by Forster as Cadover House, 1903); see Figure 3.

32 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000)p. 2: 'fluidity' as the paradigmatic metaphor for modernity (see Forster's 'flux').

who had exhibited a lack of interest in Forster's fascination with Housman and his poetry after Forster's walking tour of Shropshire in 1907; Forster's approach to Housman received no response. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* was published first in 1896. At the least, the walking tour of 1907 divulges that Forster's perception of Shropshire was based on some experience. Forster's empathy for traditional rural England extended to the literature of George Meredith and Housman. Leonard Bast also refers to Richard Jefferies, the author of *Hodge* and it is perhaps no coincidence that the nickname of Stephen Wonham is 'Podge'. Forster reviewed the literary merits of Meredith in *Aspects of the Novel*, where he diminishes Meredith as a '*suburban* roarer' (my italics) by comparison with Hardy.<sup>33</sup> Although Wiltshire also represents traditional rural England in *The Longest Journey* (see Chapter One), slightly further west becomes more distant: 'The Durhams [the gentry family with an estate at 'Penge'] lived in a remote part of England on the Wilts and Somerset border'.<sup>34</sup> No doubt later experiences altered Forster's perceptions, but before 1920, he seems to have subscribed, if unconsciously, to a core-periphery model, however ambivalent such a concept might now seem, for he was able to define his centre, the representation of his England, and its more distant elements, perhaps evidence of a modernist mind.<sup>35</sup>

One aspect of rural decline which Forster treated with a certain amount of equanimity was the contemporary failure of landed estates. Penge, on the Somerset/Wiltshire border, the estate of the gentry family, the Durhams, epitomizes this reality for Forster: 'marked, not indeed, with decay, but with the immobility that precedes it'.<sup>36</sup> The family had become established there for four generations,

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33 *Howards End*, pp. 100-3, 128, 142-3, 298, but note the ambiguity about Englishness at p. 150, and the 'dull valley' at p. 145. Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, pp. 5-6, 160-1. A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad and Other Poems* with an introduction by Nick Laird (London, 2010), 'Introduction', p. xiii. *Longest Journey*, p. 87. *Aspects of the Novel*, pp. 89-93.

34 *Maurice*, p. 74.

35 Succinctly, Paul Claval, *An Introduction to Regional Geography*, trans. Ian Thompson (Oxford, 1998), pp. 238-47.

36 *Maurice*, p. 74.

initiated by LCJ Durham in the early nineteenth century. When Maurice visits the Durhams, his room is 'small, cheaply furnished'.<sup>37</sup> By the time of Maurice's second visit, '[t]he sense of delapidation has increased', the widowed Mrs Durham living in the main house because of the condition of the drains in the dower house.<sup>38</sup> The dreariness of the Russet Room is matched by the persistent rain.<sup>39</sup> The valet and gamekeeper maintain appearances against the 'decaying roofs'.<sup>40</sup> Penge inspires 'ungraciousness'.<sup>41</sup> On his final return to Penge, Maurice contemplates how derelict the estate is and 'how unfit to set standards or control for the future'.<sup>42</sup>

Forster's reflections were also ideologically informed, although he no doubt regarded himself as a pragmatist.<sup>43</sup> He belonged to a generation and class which was concerned by the erosion of rural England, less by the burgeoning cities, than the erosion of the traditional English countryside by the growth of suburbia. He wrote his four major English novels in the period of the upper-middle-class realization of 'Englishness' as a conscious invocation of the rural.<sup>44</sup> Occasionally, this concern is intimated in his novels, although ambiguously. Margaret Schlegel, expressing her concern for Leonard Bast, is castigated for interrupting the reading of a paper on the Society for the Preservation of Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty (redolent of SPAB) at a dinner party which she had arranged for her female peers.<sup>45</sup>

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37 *Maurice*, p. 75.

38 *Maurice*, p. 146.

39 *Maurice*, p. 149.

40 *Maurice*, p. 154.

41 *Maurice*, p. 157.

42 *Maurice*, p. 213.

43 For comparison, Ullrich Haase and William Large, *Maurice Blanchot* (London, 2001), p. 16.

44 Philip Dodd and Rob Colls, *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (Brighton, 1987); for a contrary perception, Peter Mandler, 'Against "Englishness": English culture and the limits to rural nostalgia, 1850-1940', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6<sup>th</sup> series, 7 (1997), pp. 155-75. For this movement as the epitome of an 'Englishness' of 'an imagined past of pleasant places', Charles O. Frake, 'Pleasant places, past times, and sheltered identity in rural East Anglia', in *Senses of Place*, edited by Stephen Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1996), pp. 229-57, esp. 229-30. For Forster's novels as allegories of the 'condition of England', Paul Peppis, 'Forster and England', in *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, edited by David Bradshaw (Cambridge, 2007), pp. .

45 *Howards End*, p. 108.

Even so, there is no coherent ideology in Forster's writings. He himself resorted on many occasions to the incoherence of 'muddle'.<sup>46</sup> When characters act in confusion, they are muddled or muddling through.<sup>47</sup> Virtually the entire plot of *A Room with a View* is predicated on muddles of action and thought, as though the narrator conceives of life as a constant muddle.<sup>48</sup>

The attribution of 'imaginary geography' to Forster is doubly apposite. In all his novels and his writings as a critic, he emphasized the role of imagination and creativity. Although, furthermore, he had experienced those places about which he wrote, sometimes intimately, other times as a temporary visitor, there is always a fictive reconfiguration of the landscape, from pseudonyms of toponyms to relocating buildings from one region to another (see Chapter 1).

One of the very recent interpretative frameworks for addressing the novel has posited the relative meanings of space and place, 'flux' and form.<sup>49</sup> The first Mrs Wilcox (Ruth) and the second (Margaret Schlegel) exhibit that attachment to place associated with the rural and idyllic, to Howards End itself. For Ruth, that association was generated from birth and the past, an inheritance and legacy in all its senses, whereas for Margaret it is a discovery, a transformation from the 'cosmopolitanism' of the City to a pastoral place, which might be one of the connections in 'Only connect'. The pastoral authenticity of Howards End is divulged when Wilcox explains why he abandoned it: it was a converted farm with a paddock and meadow, although the idyllic character had been compromised by the construction of a garage for the motor vehicles (and, incidentally, suburbia had encroached too

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46 *Maurice*, pp. 78, 111, 112. Ruth Padel, 'Introduction', *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, pp. xii, xviii ('his muddled, unfulfilled characters'), 78, 90, 108, 109, 117. Malcolm Bradbury, 'Introduction', *Room with a View*, p. xv: '[Forster's] career that, in the event, was to move from an Edwardian realism to an anxious modernism'.

47 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, pp. 108, 109, 117; *Howards End*, pp. 23, 33, 59, 64 (Helen Schlegel prone to 'muddle things'), 126, 234 ('muddle' about Howards End), 263 (Margaret accuses Henry of being 'muddled, criminally muddled'), 268-272 ('the anodyne of muddledom'); *Maurice*, pp. 155, 193, 201. *Longest Journey*, pp. 50, 141, 142, 147, 150, 205, 250, 257. Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, pp. 127-8. *Selected Stories*, p. 129.

48 *Room with a View*, pp. 25, 44, 73, 105, 127, 152, 154, 182, and esp. 188-9, 191, 195.

49 Thacker, 'Through modernity'.

closely).<sup>50</sup> Even so, in Margaret's case, it is also perhaps a transfer of an allegiance to a specific *locus* from Wickham Place to Howards End.

In selecting the place-name Howards End, Forster fixed on the particular ecology of Hatfield Forest, extending from the edge of Essex, Hertfordshire, and into part of Bedfordshire. Here, the early colonization of the forest communities had resulted in a dispersed settlement pattern of isolated hamlets with their epithets of Green and End: Peter's Green, Blackmore End, Wood End, Hall's Green, Levens Green, Albury End, Dane End, and a plethora of other small communities, established by assarting the woodland and composed often of a personal name and the denomination End or Green. Like the descriptive and affective comments on the Purbeck Hills and Swanage, Forster had a particular eye for the characteristically local, more than simply the generic pastoral.

The *genius loci* of this countryside actually informs the narrative too. Until recently before *Howards End*, novels about country existence had involved community and neighbourhood, as, of course, kinship and extended kinship: the 'knowable communities' of Raymond Williams.<sup>51</sup> In these localities, with their nucleated villages, contacts were 'face-to-face' and immediate. By contrast, in Howards End, in Hatfield Forest, there was isolation. In such circumstances, the family was self-sufficient, with little communication with neighbours. The geographical isolation reinforced the family-focus of the middle-class household. In the countryside, the Wilcoxes were no less socially, culturally and morally private than in the City.

The space of the fixed place is also gendered space, both for Ruth at Howards End, where the Wilcox men are indifferent to the place, and for Margaret in the domestic space in the place of Wickham Place, where Tibby's presence complements rather than detracts from the female domestic

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<sup>50</sup> *Howards End*, p. 115; for the advance of suburbia towards Howards End, *Howards End*, p. 116.

<sup>51</sup> *The Country and the City* (London, 1973), chapter 16.



dominance; Margaret admitted that it was an 'effeminate' house and household.<sup>52</sup> The Wilcox males move within a more open and fluid space, represented by their cars disrupting the static quality of the rural space at Howards End, but also appropriated a masculine space at Ducie Street in their separate smoking room.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout, the contrast between the City and the country is evident, but it is not necessarily completely antithetical. For the urban upper-middle class – by contrast with the urban lower- and lower-middle class – there is the connection between the City and the country, in Howards End and in Oniton, although the middle classes were generally rootless.<sup>54</sup> Taking then this geographical frame, to what extent is there a realism in the connection – however tenuous – between the City and provincial rural England? In this context, we ignore, for heuristic purposes, the expansion of the 'red dust' suburbs by which the City encroached on and (physically) connected with the country.

Another wider aspect which the novel addresses is the transitional image of the middle class, in particular the upper middle class. In the late nineteenth century, the middle classes were associated almost exclusively with the urban. The upper middle class was more particularly a cultural category. In the early twentieth century, the defining relationship of the middle class with the city and urbanism was disrupted. The middle class became more solidly bifurcated into two distinctive categories: upper and lower middle. The lower middle class retained something of the urban element, but in the form of the expanding suburbs. The upper middle class, nonetheless, established a 'national' identity, a political space rather than a geographically-defined one.<sup>55</sup>

The novel reflects those developments. The Schlegels represent the cultural category of upper middling society, whilst Bast the resolute association with urbanism. The Wilcoxes, however, made a

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52 *Howards End*, p. 37.

53 Thacker, 'Through modernity', p. 68; for the smoking room, *Howards End*, p. 134.

54 For the rootlessness of the middle classes, *Howards End*, p. 128.

55 Gunn, 'Class, identity and the urban: the middle class in England, c.1790-1950'.

journey. The Wilcoxes, when Henry initially felt the necessity to inhabit the City, took an apartment in the block newly constructed opposite Wickham Place, sustaining the association of rising middling sort with the urban. When Henry Wilcox leased Howards End and moved to Ducie Street, he arrived in the superior space of the City. Ultimately, in the move to Oniton, Henry engaged with the 'national' identity of the upper middle classes, defined by a concatenation of characteristics other than merely being urban.

The journey to Howards End for Mrs Munt, the aunt of the Schlegel sisters, involved a train excursion to Hilton in Hertfordshire.<sup>56</sup> Howards End has, indeed, been identified with Rooksnest, a house near Stevenage, with which Forster was familiar.<sup>57</sup> In escaping the adventitious suburbia, Henry Wilcox moved from Howards End to Oniton, his 'country seat', associated with Clun in Shropshire.<sup>58</sup>

Although imbued with middle-class sentiment, Forster recognized the restrictions imposed on him by the limitations of his experience and class. In turn, that acknowledgment led him to a conscious decision not to address the places and spaces of the lowest sections of society.<sup>59</sup> He constantly referred to the 'abyss', as the place of the poorest, but also as the 'deficiencies' of character. Maurice failed to understand the 'abysses' of his attitudes.<sup>60</sup> Almost certainly, however, Forster deployed the 'abyss' of character as a metaphor derived from Jack London's 'people of the abyss', which had impressed Forster, who, nonetheless, satisfied himself that he could not address those people or their places: so Bast, when first encountered, is not in the abyss, but could perceive it, had knowledge of people who had declined into it and 'counted no more'.<sup>61</sup> The nearest that Forster approximated to this desperate place was the

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<sup>56</sup> *Howards End*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>57</sup> Bauman, *Morgan*, pp. 30-43, cited by Thacker, 'Through modernity', p. 75, n. 7; Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, p. 83.

<sup>58</sup> *Howards End*, pp. 116, 117.

<sup>59</sup> Most poignantly, *Howards End*, p. 38.

<sup>60</sup> *Maurice*, p. 52. See also *Maurice*, pp. 85, 118, 131.

<sup>61</sup> *Howards End*, pp. 38-9.

abyss into which poor Leonard Bast was projected in *Howards End*: 'But Leonard was near the abyss...' <sup>62</sup> Towards the end of *Howards End*, Margaret Schlegel is temporarily reminded of the 'black abyss' of the recent past. <sup>63</sup> The people of the abyss, however, escaped Forster, for he could not address their issues. Bast was catapulted into the abyss, but that afterlife was curtailed by his death. The abyss, otherwise, is a mental condition or state for Forster, not a place inhabited by people of deprivation. <sup>64</sup> Class and place intersected and Forster had no experience of those classes of the abyss. To a large extent, that omission is a reason why we can discount *Howards End* as a real condition-of-England novel. <sup>65</sup>

When Forster does address the 'lower' class substantively, it is in a traditional rural context.

He had gone outside his class, and it served him right. <sup>66</sup>

Maurice thus, in his liaison with the gamekeeper, Alec Scudder, places himself outside his social group, but as importantly, place is the *locus* of the ambivalent intersections between classes. Classes have their separate places, but also encounter each other ambiguously in some other places. The country house at Penge is the interconnection between gentry, suburban upper-middle class and rural working class. There, homosexual desire happens between Maurice, the symbol of suburban England, with first the gentry, Clive Durham, and then the rural servant, Scudder.

In the end, however, there remains the question of what does literary work add to the

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62 *Howards End*, p. 193; 'obliged to assert his gentility, lest he slipped into the abyss where nothing counts' (p. 39); his recognition that 'in the end they fall over the edge' (p. 194); 'Mrs Lanoline [Jacky, Bast's partner] had risen out of the abyss, like a faint smell ...' (p. 98); '[Margaret] distressed again by the odours from the abyss' (p. 100); 'she [Margaret] smelt again odours from the abyss [Mrs Bast]' (p. 197); 'to have raised one person from the abyss' (p. 217).

63 *Howards End*, p. 287. See also references to precipice: pp. 261, 262, 283: 'They had tried not to go over the precipice, but perhaps the fall was inevitable'.

64 *Howards End*, pp. 52

65 Pace David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London, 1992), p. 10.

66 *Maurice*, p. 183.

interpretation of place? Perhaps this place is not the appropriate venue to examine that interrogative expansively. Thacker has devoted the introduction of an important book to precisely this issue.<sup>67</sup> Mike Crang has discretely presented the positive arguments.<sup>68</sup> The propositions apply somewhat equivocally to Forster. He was almost certainly influenced by others, but he made a virtue of his independence of thought and imagination; so we should not dismiss the subjective in his depictions. No doubt his opinions resonated with and influenced others in the signification and evocation of place. Indeed, he engaged in intertextuality, borrowing from others, but he had his predilections about what he read and how he engaged with it, revealed most poignantly in *Aspects of the Novel* (his Clark Lectures at Cambridge).

Three associated themes or aspects of Forster's novels are examined below. They are dissected separately, but they cannot in truth be isolated; it is impossible to disentangle the strands, which are interconnected in a complex way in the novels (and, no doubt, in Forster's mind).<sup>69</sup> For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to treat them seriatim: the landscape; the landscape as 'trickster'; and the intimacy of place and space.<sup>70</sup> The following text evolves in that abrupt and artificial manner, but some repetition is inevitable in reconnecting the three themes.

If one shuts one's eyes and thinks of the novel as a whole, it would seem to be a creation owning a certain looking-glass likeness to life, though of course with simplifications and distortions innumerable. At any rate it is a structure leaving a shape on the mind's eye, built now in squares, now pagoda shaped, now throwing out wings and arcades, now solidly compact and

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67 Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity*, pp. 1-7 (Thacker refers to 'cultural texts').

68 'Literary landscapes: writing and geography', in his *Cultural Geography* (London, 1998), chapter 4 (pp. 43-58).

69 For narrative voice and narrative discourse, H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge, second edn, 2008), on which I rely without frequent precise references.

70 For the activities of tricksters, Lewis Hyde, *Tricksters Make This World. Mischief, Myth and Art* (Edinburgh, 1998), on which, again, I depend, but with only occasional precise references.

domed like the Cathedral of Saint Sofia at Constantinople.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, 2004 edn), p. 82.

## Chapter 1

### Landscapes of affection and disaffection

#### Wiltshire and *The Longest Journey*

In 1911, Forster expressed his particular affinity with Wiltshire, even if evanescent. The occasion was one of his repetitive excursions to Salisbury, although some of his recollections in the 'Locked Diary' for 1911 contain comments on people of Wiltshire which resonate of Mrs Failing's criticisms of them in *The Longest Journey*, for which see below.

Wiltshire still draws me, and gives vivid thoughts. More than Italy now.<sup>72</sup>

In April 1907, he wrote from Holmleigh at Salisbury to Edward Dent, the publisher, about *The Longest Journey*.<sup>73</sup> On 10 February 1910, he began his letter to Malcolm Darling from Holmleigh in Salisbury, but completed it on the train as it sped through the 'Wiltshire Gap':

The sky is grey, the earth brown. The only approach to colour is in the valleys, whose green is ruled with the silver lines of irrigation: and in the cuttings where the chalk is eternally white.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Gardner, *Journals and Diaries of E M Forster*, 2, pp. 36-7.

<sup>73</sup> *Selected Letters*, I, p. 87 (64).

<sup>74</sup> *Selected Letters*, I, pp. 103-4 (79).

Later in the year, in August, he described his walking tours from Hilton Young's cottage near Marlborough.<sup>75</sup>

I have been for a weekend to Hilton Young, & thence walked in hilarity and solitude from Marlborough to Goring – three days, on the chalk downs all the time. It was fine.<sup>76</sup>

I have just been 4 days walking in Wilts and Berks, mostly alone. One never gets that awful toe-tiredness in England, and the scenery was something special all along.<sup>77</sup>

On 24 March 1911, he wrote to his love, Masood, that he had again been walking in Wiltshire with Greenwood. They walked from Swindon to Young's cottage near Marlborough, about fourteen miles (as he reckoned), and, although shrouded in a cloud 'rather beastly', managed, by compass, to find the proper direction. Forster intended to leave the next day, returning via Westbury, Wincanton and Sherburne. Forster was an inveterate hiker and Wiltshire at the time a special place for his forays.<sup>78</sup> Forster regarded *The Longest Journey* with great affection and satisfaction.<sup>79</sup> In an interview with Angus Wilson, he professed that:

The origins of *The Longest Journey* ... began with his hearing about a man with a half brother, and with a strong emotional attachment to Wiltshire that he [Forster] had at that time.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Selected Letters*, I, pp. 112-15 (84-87).

<sup>76</sup> *Selected Letters*, I, p. 114 (86).

<sup>77</sup> *Selected Letters*, I, p. 115 (87).

<sup>78</sup> *Selected Letters*, I, p. 121 (93). 'I wish I could go walking with you, but fear you would not care for it – you athletic brutes are so slack when it comes to the point: it is fragile creatures like myself who take their 15 miles a day for a week and thrive on it'.

<sup>79</sup> Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, p. 166.

<sup>80</sup> *Interviews and Recollections*, p. 36.

Several contexts of place and Wiltshire coalesce in *The Longest Journey*: the metonymic Stephen Wonham as the epitome of Wiltshire and old England; the narrator's description of the constituent *pays* of Wiltshire and the responses of the characters to their environment; and the mystical and magical qualities of some places which punctuate that landscape.

Alongside Rickie, Stephen Wonham is a central character representing Wiltshire and rural England. Forster elaborates the character, actions and life-course of Stephen. The characterization is complete: he is one of Forster's own 'round' characters.<sup>81</sup> We might compare this comprehension and comprehensiveness with the rather uncomprehending and abrupt portrayal of the urban, lower-middle-class clerk, Leonard Bast, in *Howards End*. The characterization of Bast is unprepossessing and lacking in empathy, and his denouement fateful, projected towards that 'abyss' which Forster didn't really understand, despite his reading of Jack London.<sup>82</sup>

If we attempt to assign epithets to Stephen, we would describe him as: obstinate; truculent; obdurate; uninhibited; belligerent; unsophisticated; robust; pugnacious; and devoid of etiquette. He viewed the word structured in black and white: 'One nips or is nipped.'<sup>83</sup>

'He [Stephen] worried infinity as if it was a bone. Gnashing his teeth, he tried to carry the eternal subtleties by violence.'<sup>84</sup>

'He [Stephen] was more genial, but there was the same brutality, the same peevish insistence

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81 *Aspects of the Novel*, pp. 73-81.

82 Jonathan Rose, 'What was Leonard Bast Really Like? ', in idem, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (London: Yale, 2001), pp. 393-438; the key passage is perhaps *Howards End*, p. 98; Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, pp. 97-110 (two points here: perhaps Kermode classifies Bast slightly incorrectly; and he correctly indicates how Forster's attitude to class altered later).

83 *Longest Journey*, p. 117.

84 *Longest Journey*, p. 90.



on the pound of flesh.<sup>85</sup>

He accordingly involves himself in physical scrapes with Flea Thompson, with the soldier with whom he rides towards Salisbury, and with Ansell. In other circumstances, without the narrator's intimations, we might consider these traits intimidating or pejorative. Forster, as the narrator, invites us, however, to conclude that Stephen is robust, indifferent, uninhibited, direct, a force of nature, honest – Wiltshire and rural England personified. The significance, as has often been remarked, in the dénouement is that Rickie dies, sacrificially, in saving his drunken half-brother, Stephen.<sup>86</sup> He died without progeny, expired, although Stephen made plans for the publication of his writings. By contrast, Stephen married and the concluding sentence of the novel is his 'salute' to his daughter whom he had taken outside at night according to his custom; the rural idyll was perpetuated.<sup>87</sup>

Though he could not phrase it, he believed that he guided the future of our race, and that, century after century, his thoughts and passions would triumph in England.<sup>88</sup>

Equally, significantly, after falteringly wandering around the suburban world, encountering the philosopher Ansell, Stephen returned to Wiltshire where, through him, rural England would endure.

“From Wiltshire. Do you know Wiltshire?” And for the first time there came to his face the shadow of a sentiment, the passing tribute to some mystery. “It's a good county. I live in

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85 *Longest Journey*, p. 106 (Rickie's assessment). 'The other [Stephen], who was always honest, stayed away [from Rickie's funeral]'; *Longest Journey*, p. 282; 'Meanwhile he [Stephen] was simple and frank, and what he could tell he would tell to anyone. He had not the suburban reticence'. *Longest Journey*, p. 213.

86 *Longest Journey*, p. 282.

87 *Longest Journey*, p. 289.

88 *Longest Journey*, p. 289.

one of the finest valleys out of Salisbury Plain.”<sup>89</sup>

Stephen epitomized that part of the country which he inhabited and to which he returned. Ansell is compelled to recognize in Stephen's face frankness, pride and beauty, judging beauty as truth. Its owner is ignorant of mercy or tact; he was coarse, but not vulgar or wantonly cruel.<sup>90</sup>

Whilst he ostensibly intended Stephen to represent Wiltshire, however, Forster recognized the different *pays* of the county, the essential distinction between the Chalk and the Cheese. Stephen can, consequently, be determined further: he represented the uplands, the Downs where steadfastness, isolation, solitude and self-reliance were the watchwords of character. Mrs Failing's desultory attitude to her locality was repeated in her attitude towards Stephen:

Over the valley she saw a grave sullen down...<sup>91</sup>

Wiltshire people, she declared, were the stupidest in England. She told them so to their faces, which made them no brighter. And their county was worthy of them: no distinction in it – no style – simply land.

Not indigenous to the county, but transplanted there at marriage, her perception of the shire remained cynical.

Stephen's return to the Downs in the *dénouement* is not surprising, for he is their anthropomorphic representation, their synecdoche.

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89 *Longest Journey*, p. 212 (on his encounter with Ansell whilst perambulating suburban England in despair and confusion).

90 *Longest Journey*, p. 216.

91 *Longest Journey*, pp. 89, 98.

The wind blew from the Plain. Cadover and its valley had disappeared, and though they had not climbed much and could not see far, there was a sense of infinite space. The fields were enormous, like fields on the Continent, and the brilliant sun showed up their colours well. The green of the turnips, the gold of the harvest, and the brown of the newly turned clods, were each contrasted with morsels of grey down. But the general effect was pale, or rather silvery, for Wiltshire is not a county of heavy tints. Beneath these colours lurked the unconquerable chalk, and wherever the soil was poor it emerged. The grassy track, so gay with scabious and bedstraw, was snow-white at the bottom of its ruts.<sup>92</sup>

By contrast, Rickie had a predilection for the valleys and their clustered villages:

This is Nature's joke in Wiltshire – her one joke. You toil on windy slopes, and feel very primeval. You are miles from your fellows, and lo! A little valley full of elms and cottages.<sup>93</sup>

Their path lay upward, over a great bald skull, half grass, half stubble. It seemed each moment there would be a splendid view. The view never came, for none of the inclines were sharp enough, and they moved over the skull for many minutes, scarcely shifting a landmark or altering the blue fringe of the distance. The spire of Salisbury did alter, but very slightly, rising and falling like the mercury in a thermometer. At the most it would be half hidden; at the least the tip would show behind the swelling barrier of earth. They passed

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92 *Longest Journey*, pp. 109-10.

93 *Longest Journey*, p. 111.

two elder trees – a great event ... They were in another valley. Its sides were thick with trees. Down it ran another stream and another road; it, too, sheltered a string of villages. But all was richer, larger, and more beautiful – the valley of the Avon below Amesbury.<sup>94</sup>

To Forster, the outsider and transitory visitor, then, the ecological and topographical distinctions within the county were immediately obvious and profound: the rugged individualism necessary to survive on the sparsely-populated Downs by comparison with the communal society of the valleys and vales.<sup>95</sup>

He [Rickie] enjoyed his walk. Cadford was a charming village, and for a time he hung over the bridge by the mill. So clear was the stream that it seemed not water at all, but some invisible quintessence in which the happy minnows and the weeds were vibrating ... Then he lifted his eyes to the down. The entrenchment showed like the rim of a saucer, and over its narrow line peeped the summit of the central tree. It looked interesting. He hurried forward with the wind behind him. The rings were curious rather than impressive. Neither embankment was over twelve feet high, and the grass on them had not the exquisite green of Old Sarum, but was gray and wiry. But Nature (if she arranges anything) had arranged that from them, at all events, there should be a view. The whole system of the country lay spread before Rickie, and he gained an idea of it that he never got in his elaborate ride. He saw how all the water converges at Salisbury; how Salisbury lies in a shallow basin, just at the change of soil. He saw to the north the Plain, and the stream of the Cad flowing down from it, with a tributary that broke out suddenly, as the chalk streams do; one village had clustered round the

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94 *Longest Journey*, pp. 110-11.

95 We must beware, of course, excess in this interpretation, an accusation of an ecological determinism sometimes levelled against David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion. Popular Culture in England, 1603-1660* (Oxford, 1985).

source and clothed itself with trees. He saw Old Sarum, and the hints of the Avon valley, and the land above Stonehenge. And behind him he saw the great wood and beginning unobtrusively, as if the down too needed shaving; and into the road to London slipped, covering the bushes with white dust. Chalk made the dust white, chalk made the water clear, chalk made the clean rolling outlines of the land, and favoured the grass and the distant coronals of trees.<sup>96</sup>

Forster returned to the Wiltshire landscape in his short story, 'The Curate's Friend', the 'action' of which takes place on the Wiltshire Downs in September (see also Chapter 2 below). The eulogy for Wiltshire as the 'central' node in the web of England is portrayed through a metaphor of the spider.

We gave some perfunctory admiration to the landscape, which is indeed only beautiful to those who admire land, and to them perhaps the most beautiful in England. For here is the body of the great chalk spider who straddles over our island – whose legs are the south downs and the north downs and the Chilterns, and the tips of whose toes poke out at Cromer and Dover. He is a clean creature, who grows as few trees as he can, and those few in tidy clumps, and he loves to be tickled by quickly flowing streams. He is pimpled all over with earth-works, for from the beginning of time men have fought for the privilege of standing on him, and the oldest of our temples is built upon his back.

Forster identified again the centre of England, without reference to the periphery. The landscape receives only a 'perfunctory' gaze from the curate's party because all its members are conversant with the locality. The centre of England consists topographically and geomorphologically of the chalk and

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<sup>96</sup> *Longest Journey*, pp. 125-6.

limestone escarpment, the Jurassic scarp, which is also a metaphor for the centre of England culturally. It is an ancient landscape, steeped in the mists of time, with mystical elements – the religious that Forster always addressed in his writings. This religious component engaged with the spiritual in the widest sense, here with the beech copses of the chalk uplands (see Chapter 2).

From an external perception of Wiltshire, Forster constructed his own imaginary geography for the context of *The Longest Journey*. The essence of that topographical description is contained in a blunt denunciation by Rickie's aunt, Mrs Failing.

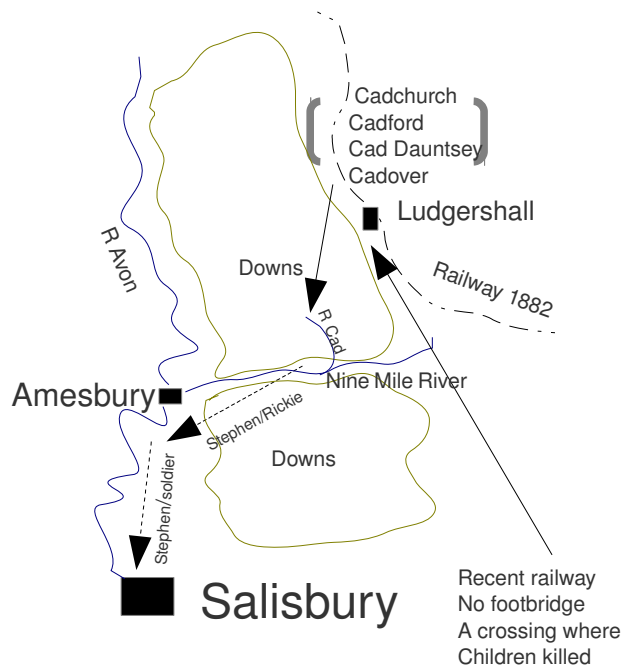
There's the Cad, which goes into the something, which goes into the Avon. Cadbury Rings opposite, Cadchurch to the extreme left: you can't see it. You were there last night. It is famous for the drunken parson and the railway station. Then Cad Dauntsey. The Cadford, that side of the stream, connected with Cadover, this. Observe the fertility of the Wiltshire mind.<sup>97</sup>

Combined with other passages, such as the ride of Rickie and Stephen, Rickie's meanderings, and the travel to the county by rail, we can reconstruct in a vague fashion, this imaginary geography. Forster's geography is not entirely fictional and incorporates the basic elements of the landscape with which he was familiar. The author alludes to actual places (Amesbury and Salisbury), but introduces fictitious toponyms (the locality with the first element or prototheme Cad-); one real topographical feature is the river Avon. In the formation of his characters, Forster reckoned that he obtained sixty percent from real people; in his description of place he probably used a hundred percent of the locations which he had visited.

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<sup>97</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 101.

**Figure 1 Forster's Imaginary Landscape: *The Longest Journey***



### **Surrey and *A Room with a View***

Although these two locations feature in *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*, the descriptive material is more dispersed than for Wiltshire in *The Longest Journey*. One of their portents was the encroachment of the suburbs (see below), so that they are becoming residual landscapes. Unlike with Wiltshire, moreover, Forster had a more continuous relationship, for he had inhabited Rooksnest in Hertfordshire as a youngster and inherited a house near Weybridge in maturity.

Windy Corner, the Honeychurch's house in Surrey, was located not too far from Dorking railway

station and the nearest village is 'Summer Street' (Holmbury St Mary).<sup>98</sup> Although an unimpressive construction – rather a cube – Windy Corner is transformed by its prospect, despite the encroaching piecemeal suburban development.<sup>99</sup>

But it was transfigured by the view beyond, for Windy Corner was built on the range that overlooks the Sussex Weald. Lucy, who was in the little seat [the rustic seat on the terrace outside Windy Corner], seemed on the edge of a green magic carpet which hovered in the air above the tremulous world.<sup>100</sup>

The significance of the narrative discourse is here emphatically defined by *transfigured*, for the author was obsessed by the the transformation of people.<sup>101</sup> The country air is percolated by the scent of wet birches and pines which cleanse the atmosphere after the pollution of the stench and dust of intrusive cars.<sup>102</sup> The virtue of this countryside is confirmed by the adulation of Mr Emerson, George's father, who, although a Socialist (and thus not consistent with the liberal politics of Forster), has connected the poetry and the prose, the passion with the common sense: 'Listen to the wind among the pines! Yours is a glorious country'.<sup>103</sup> The Honeychurches constantly remark upon their 'dear view', even 'salute the dear view'.<sup>104</sup> Like Forster, Lucy came to appreciate the redeeming features of the English landscape as the Italian receded from her mind; 'Ah, how beautiful the Weald looked!', she exclaims *twice* to herself in her garden.<sup>105</sup>

98 *Room with a View*, pp. 181, 197.

99 *Room with a View*, p. 164.

100 *Room with a View*, p. 81.

101 So, *Room with a View*, p. 150 ('love which our bodies exact and our hearts have transfigured'); *Longest Journey*, pp. 60, 199, 225, 272,

102 *Room with a View*, p. 114.

103 *Room with a View*, p. 118. For his connecting the poetry and the prose, *Room with a View*, p. 189.

104 *Room with a View*, pp. 139, 181.

105 *Room with a View*, p. 145.



## Suburbia

Despite his taciturnity about place, the attachment to place is visible from the incipience of Forster's writing career. Often, it assumes the rejection of one place in favour of another; it is contained within a rejection of one social culture for another. In most cases, the social culture rejected is an upper-middle-class one which is stiff and restrained and which becomes associated with a specific place.

Some people spend their lives in a suburb, and not for any urgent reason. This had been the fate of Rickie. He had opened his eyes to filmy heavens, and taken his first walk on asphalt. He had seen civilization as a row of semi-detached villas, and society as a state in which men do not know the men who live next door. He had found himself become part of the grey monotony that surrounds all cities. There was no necessity for this – it was only rather convenient to his father.<sup>106</sup>

Thus Rickie recounted his earlier life to his peers at Cambridge when he was an undergraduate. His narrative simply poured forth for no apparent reason; his sudden confession was compulsive and impulsive. The full import of the suburban existence is only understood in the later development of the marriage of his father, Mr Elliott, and mother, for his father is indifferent to their relationship and, to all intents and purposes, abandons his wife. He is an unfeeling and unsentimental creature – suburbanite. The collapse of that marriage is integral to the plot, for it projects the birth of the illegitimate Stephen Wonham, Rickie's half-brother. Derogatory suburbanism is, nonetheless, a constant feature of Forster's

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<sup>106</sup> *Longest Journey*, pp. 21-2.

novels which have some location in England.

Such places were represented by Forster in 'Sawston', an unsentimental evocation of Tunbridge, where his mother lived to be close to her (day-)scholar son, and Tonbridge school which formed a significant part of Forster's early years, combined with Forster's regrets about suburban development. The latter is depicted by Caroline Abbott's gaze over the 'raw over-built country'.<sup>107</sup>

In his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), the place abandoned is 'Sawston', suburban, insincere, joyless, as Philip Herriton and Caroline Abbott agree.<sup>108</sup> For Caroline, however, Sawston has its redeeming features, if merely benign.

Sawston, with its semi-detached houses and snobby schools, its book-teas and bazaars, was certainly petty and dull; at times she found it even contemptible. But it was not a place of sin, and at Sawston, either with the Herritons or with herself, the baby should grow up.<sup>109</sup> She was here to champion morality and purity, and the holy life of an English home.<sup>110</sup>

Here is the close association with Tunbridge and the private school there which Forster attended. Its atmosphere was 'placid'.<sup>111</sup> Its suffocating atmosphere is declared by the widow Lilia's refusal to be any longer 'cooped up at Sawston'.<sup>112</sup>

Despite their best efforts – including journeys to Italy (which Philip renounces, rediscovers, and rejects again) – both Philip and Caroline are products of the environment of Sawston. When the two agree in a heated exchange on their detestation of Sawston, they infer some common characteristics:

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107 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 56.

108 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 56.

109 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 64.

110 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 91.

111 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 17.

112 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 27.

idleness, stupidity, respectability; whereas Caroline derogates the petty unselfishness, Philip questions whether it is not selfishness, to which Caroline explains that the 'unselfishness' consists of insincerity and dourness.<sup>113</sup>

All her life had been spent at Sawston with a dull and amiable father, and her pleasant pallid face, bent on some respectable charity, was a familiar object of the Sawston streets.<sup>114</sup>

Philip, after his first experience of Italy, intended to change Sawston, an endeavour which he ultimately renounced: he recognized his inability to transform the place, accepting again his 'placid life'.<sup>115</sup>

For much of the novel, Caroline epitomizes the suburban Sawston. Even when she is engaged by the Italian way of life in Monteriano, she easily relapses when Philip Herriton makes an inappropriate comment: 'she became again Miss Abbott of Sawston ... most appallingly dull', a 'stiff suburban woman'.<sup>116</sup> Caroline Abbott *is* Sawston.

Even such an uninspiring place as Sawston appears, to Forster, to exert some agency. For it is in her renunciation of Sawston's attitudes in an uncharacteristic attempt at boldness, that Caroline actually initiates the desperate marriage of Lilia and the indolent Gino.<sup>117</sup> Her adventurousness results in entirely unintended consequences. In reacting against Sawston, Caroline's plan conceives the crisis which is the principal plot of the novel.

Sawston recurs as the epitome of rejected place in *The Longest Journey*. The contrast of place is, again, Sawston, the 'suburb', the 'tract called Sawston', with its 'deathly dullness' and its fee-paying

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113 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 56.

114 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 17.

115 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, pp. 50-1.

116 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, pp. 84, 87.

117 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, pp. 55-6.

school, where, *faute de mieux*, Rickie obtains employment as a teacher.<sup>118</sup> When Stephen Wonham journeys to Sawston and encounters Ansell, the voice of the narrator informs us that 'He had not the suburban reticence'; he represents the openness, if lumbering, of Wiltshire against the narrowness of bourgeois, suburban Sawston.<sup>119</sup> When Stephen later stumbles from suburb to suburb, from suburb to London, and from London back to suburb, the disdain for the closed characteristics and the people are explicit.<sup>120</sup>

If Wonham represents Wiltshire and Old England, Maurice (in the eponymous novel *Maurice*) personifies, in his earliest years, the dullness of suburbia: 'stepping into the niche that England had prepared for him', as an unauthorized clerk at the stockbrokers, Hill and Hall.<sup>121</sup> When Maurice is sent down from Cambridge, Dr Barry excuses the tragedy with the rationale: 'What do you want with a university degree? It was never intended for suburban classes'. His suburban domestic existence extends to domination of his mother and her household. 'By twenty-three he was a promising suburban tyrant, whose rule [over the otherwise female domestic household] was the stronger because it was just and mild'. His suburban life consists of the regular regime of a substantial breakfast, the train to the City, the *Daily Telegraph*, work interrupted by lunch at 1, a considerable dinner, the evening paper, billiards or bridge, and '[laying] down the law'.<sup>122</sup> His existence represents the mundaneness of the suburbs, his 'suburban soul'.<sup>123</sup>

What, then, should we assume lies behind the narrator's profession in *Maurice* that 'the suburbs no longer exact Christianity'?<sup>124</sup> Forster himself abandoned strong Christian belief. So, when Maurice,

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118 *Longest Journey*, pp. 32, 68; Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, p. 84.

119 *Longest Journey*, p. 213.

120 *Longest Journey*, pp. 255-6.

121 *Maurice*, p. 45. Forster's 'Terminal Note' [1960], *Maurice*, p. 220: 'If Maurice is Suburbia, Clive is Cambridge' (the latter not quite so, as Clive is also the Penge estate).

122 *Maurice*, pp. 88-9.

123 *Maurice*, p. 48.

124 *Maurice*, p. 44.

influenced by Durham, confesses his disbelief to his mother, we might infer some comment about the decline of Christianity. Perhaps, however, the implication is that the suburbs have renounced any spirituality, any wider religious passion. Christianity is simply a case in point in the suburbs which are anodyne, devoid of spirit, and joyless.

The malevolence of the suburbs destroys special places. The 'Sacred Lake' near Windy Corner (see below, chapter 2) is being especially eroded. The revelry engaged in by Freddy Honeychurch, George Emerson and the normally restrained Mr Beebe at the lake earns a rebuke for Freddy.

My dear baby, how tiresome you've been! You had no business to take them bathing in the Sacred lake; it's much too public. It was all right for you, but most awkward for everyone else [who came across the three by chance]. Do be more careful. You forget the place is growing half suburban.<sup>125</sup>

Even special places are being eroded and surrounded by the tentacles of the suburbs, depriving them of their special characteristics.

There in Surrey, in the traditional village of 'Summer Street' (Holmbury St Mary near Dorking), semi-detached cottages 'were ruining' the locality, to the dismay of the local landowner, from a traditional gentry family, Sir Harry Otway.<sup>126</sup> When we are introduced to Summer Street, we depart the woods into a sloping triangular meadow, on the periphery of which are lined pretty cottages and the new stone church, 'expensively simple, with a charming shingled spire'. Almost immediately, however, this paradisaical scene is shattered by encountering the two new villas, Cissie and Albert, identified by

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<sup>125</sup> *Room with a View*, p. 127.

<sup>126</sup> *Room with a View*, p. 52.

these monikers on the garden gates. Three noticeboards of Dorking estate agents disrupt the tranquil prospect, in a shabby, unkempt 'pocket-handkerchief' garden. The local builder, Mr Flack, is responsible for this irreverence to the traditional building of the region. So, the villas are constructed of red and cream brick, with more economical slate roofs rather than traditional tiles. Bow windows, columns and decoration interrupts the façade, '[f]or he had read his Ruskin'.<sup>127</sup> For his failure to act earlier to preserve the character of the village, Sir Harry Otway, the local squire of a traditional family, considers that he, the custodian of the countryside there, had neglected his duty and 'the countryside was laughing at him as well'. He had spent money [in buying the villas to lessen the potential damage], and yet Summer Street 'was spoiled as much as ever'.<sup>128</sup> The local inhabitants fully expect the vacant villa, Cissie, to be taken by such as a 'bank clerk', commuting between the City and the Weald, 'the wrong type of people'. An indelible mark has been splattered on the traditional landscape, not full-blooded suburban intrusion, but an ineradicable stain. Here too, Forster wrote from his personal experience, from his temporary residence near Weybridge.

Windy Corner, the abode of the Honeychurches near Summer Street, had been erected by Lucy Honeychurch's father, a local solicitor, initially as a speculative venture, but almost immediately thereafter as his own residence. Precipitately, the character of the area became transformed as other large houses were constructed on the brow of the southern scarp slope and amongst the trees on the downs and then by the advance of 'Tottenham Court Road' (sic).<sup>129</sup> The locality was populated by Londoners, 'who mistook the Honeychurches for the remnants of an indigenous aristocracy'. Lucy especially after her sojourn in Italy, identifies these new incomers with dullness, and, in her contrariness, 'learned to speak with horror of Suburbia', of its 'identical interests', introversion, and

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<sup>127</sup> *Room with a View*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>128</sup> *Room with a View*, p. 96.

<sup>129</sup> *Room with a View*, p. 84.

incestuous culture.<sup>130</sup>

It is nevertheless in the short stories that Forster castigates suburbia with the most animation. 'The Celestial Omnibus' defines the triviality of suburbia and the escape through the imagination (of a child). The anonymous boy lives at Agathox Lodge, 28, Buckingham Park Road, Surbiton, declaimed precisely in the first sentence of the story, establishing the middle-class suburban locale. Almost immediately, the story introduces Mr Bons (snob), superficially wise, serious, but, it is later established, too dull and without imagination. By the second page, there is a detailed description of Buckingham Park Road: below number 39, the quality of the houses declines, and, horror of horrors, number 64 is even devoid of a separate entrance for the servants. Two of the dwellings have the monikers 'Ivanhoe' and 'Belle Vista'. Nearby, a railway cutting, most suburban, channels the track which conveys suburban commuters. The boy is frustrated and desires something more adventurous. Through his imagination, he is able to take the mysterious 'celestial omnibus' to a heavenly, natural utopia. The querulous Mr Bons, accompanying the boy with the intention to discredit, meets an unfortunate end, despatched from the omnibus.<sup>131</sup>

## London

Not much need be added to the existing literature about Forster's attitude to London. In the *Literature of London*, Forster apparently receives no reference, and yet he portrayed the metropolis and its upper-middle-class life to a considerable degree.<sup>132</sup> The City as it was being transformed by this new elite, engendered mediocrity and conformity. In his depiction of Henry Wilcox and his son, Charles with their Imperial and West African Rubber Company, Forster perhaps owed a debt to Conrad's *Heart of*

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<sup>130</sup> *Room with a View*, p. 102.

<sup>131</sup> 'The Celestial Omnibus' in *Selected Stories*, pp. 30-46.

<sup>132</sup> Laurence Manley, ed., *Literature of London* (Cambridge, 2011).

*Darkness* (1897), but the darkness is located not in Africa, but in the tentacles in London, not in the adventures of Marlow, but the 'ordinariness' and orderliness of the offices of an upper-middle-class family of managers.<sup>133</sup> Margaret Schlegel wonders whether she perceives only the Imperial rather than the West African context, but the author's prescription seems to focus on the character of the enterprise and the Wilcox family. (Forster's own remarks about Conrad's novels are mostly confined to the relationship of the narrator to the characters).

Whilst Henry Wilcox and Leonard Bast represent two points on the spectrum of London society, one increasing numerically in the capital and other advancing through capital, the Schlegels and their circle belong to an older metropolitan tradition of intellectual annuitants, reflective and intellectual, but incapable of changing the world for the better. That representation of London persists with Cecil Vyse, who is temporarily engaged to Lucy Honeychurch. He basically despises the people of Windy Corner and Summer Street in Surrey. His intellectual concerns produce a social distance when the people involved do not belong to his particular London society. Although he professes that the classes should mix, it is evident that he excludes himself from the prescription.<sup>134</sup> Nor could Lucy, not unintelligent, adjust to his metropolitan social world.<sup>135</sup> The metropolis was composed of a plurality of types of people, but Forster's rural locations retain their traditional hierarchy, conformity and homogeneity. Whilst much has been interpreted from Forster's constant reference to 'flux' and the 'architecture of hurry', Forster's attention to London does not really extend outside the bounds of *Howards End*.<sup>136</sup> Although in that novel are featured Wickham Place, Ducie Street, and Bast's flat in Block B in Camelia Road, the topographical complexities are not explored in the manner of some contemporary 'modernist'

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133 Leo Mellor, 'London and modern prose, 1900-1950', in Manley, ed., *Literature of London*, p. 203. *Aspects of the Novel*, pp. 84, 125, 162-3, 167. For the key passage about the offices, *Howards End*, p. 167.

134 *Room with a View*, p. 109.

135 *Room with a View*, p. 113.

136 *Howards End*, pp. 40, 92-3.



literature, in the experimentation of Joyce and some of Woolf, which has been conceived as one significant element in the writing of modernism.<sup>137</sup> London appears fleetingly in *The Longest Journey*, when Stephen Wonham, expelled from Cadover, 'entered the heart of the modern world', where he found employment at a removal firm. His colleagues are deprecatingly described, mentally and physically. As Mr Failing had remarked: 'There's no such thing as a Londoner. He's only a country man on the road to sterility'.<sup>138</sup> Stephen quickly left in disgust, repelled by the falsity of his cockney colleagues. Maurice represents the expanding upper-middle class of Londoner, engaged in stockbroking, but his life is routine and boring. It is only in *Howards End*, his penultimate long story, that Forster introduces London as a significant locus in the narrative and in which he allows a more sympathetic depiction of the middle classes of London, the independent Schlegels, but also to some extent Henry Wilcox, for, although he is unsentimental, often unprepossessing, and unobservant, there is an allowance that the fortunes of the nation have depended also on people of his status and profession.

In general, Forster is benign about London by comparison with his deprecation of suburban sprawl. Whilst the suburbs are pernicious, with negative influences and connotations, London is merely restrictive and limiting. Its conventionality is a restraint: 'London delimits the very liberties Maurice craves, and which he associates with the forests of rural England: the greenwood'.<sup>139</sup>

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137 Rachel Potter, 'Modernism and Geography', in her *Modernist Literature* (Edinburgh, 2012), ch. 2 (pp. 80-112).

138 *Longest Journey*, p. 246.

139 Leavitt, 'Introduction', *Maurice*, p. xxiii.

## Chapter 2

### Forster's characteristics of place

#### Trickster in the landscape and 'sacred' place

Pan shows his cloven hoof in almost everything he wrote, and I always felt, and still feel, that Morgan had never actually met that god.<sup>140</sup>

Indeed, though the supernatural element in the book is not supposed to be “compulsory”, I'm afraid that only those readers who “take” it, will get through with any ease.<sup>141</sup>

Paganism is infectious ...<sup>142</sup>

Forster confessed to his own lack of Christian commitment, but constantly reveals in his reflections an influence of or interest in Pan, paganism, and spirituality. His belief was not irreligious, but that sort of religion which is mystical. The problems which confront us, however, are several. When we read his commonplace book (see below), letters and diaries, how do we understand his comments? Are even these writings rhetorical, representing himself to himself and to others? In his novels, how far does the

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<sup>140</sup> Quotation of David Garnett in *Interviews and Recollections*, p. 57.

<sup>141</sup> Forster to Christopher Benson, 13 December 1910: *Letters*, p. 119 [91].

<sup>142</sup> *Room with a View*, p. 139.

narrative discourse or the voice of the narrator convey just the story and unfold the plot or are his own sentiments and emotions inevitably, perhaps purposely, inflected? In answer to these interrogatives, we might consider a sentence in *The Longest Journey*.

Those elms were Dryads – so Rickie believed or pretended, and the line between the two is subtler than we admit.<sup>143</sup>

The narrative voice here is unmistakably conflated with the author's, for Forster made an almost identical comment in his commonplace book about his own experience (see below). Forster had his own sense of the magical and spiritual attributes of English landscapes steeped in the mystery of time. The same resonance inheres in Rickie's admission 'that I believed, actually believed, that Fauns lived in a certain double hedgerow near the Gog Magogs ...'<sup>144</sup>

Pan is so pervasive in *The Longest Journey* that he is almost a character in the novel. 'Pan ovium custos' is recited more than once.<sup>145</sup> When Rickie's novel is prepared for posthumous publication, one suggestion for the title is *Pan Pipes*, since it is constructed predominantly around the theme of Nature and the mystical landscape.<sup>146</sup> Stephen Wonham is a child of Nature, illegitimate, the progeny of poetry (the illicit affair between his mother and her adulterer).<sup>147</sup> He is repeatedly described as a pagan (although he is actually only an atheist).<sup>148</sup>

Forster had, of course, a strong attachment to some of the English countryside, associated with his own happiness. The evocation of Wiltshire in *The Longest Journey* (1907) ran lightly from his pen.

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<sup>143</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 4.

<sup>144</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 71.

<sup>145</sup> *Longest Journey*, pp. 117, 160.

<sup>146</sup> *Longest Journey*, pp. 140, 283-4.

<sup>147</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 242 ('child of poetry') ('a pagan's yearning').

<sup>148</sup> *Longest Journey*, pp. 123, 134,

When he composed the 'Author's Introduction' to the reissued novel in 1960, he devoted some space to 'isolating' Wiltshire. In fact, the place assumes a retrospectively mystical and spiritual inspiration to him. Noting that he inscribed in his diary on 12 September 1904, 'I walked out again to Figsbury Rings', he continued:

Much lies behind this entry. It recalls an emotional thrill which set my pen going.<sup>149</sup>

Although compelled to abandon his first special place (Cambridge) after graduation, Rickie discovered his other mystical place deep in the ancient English landscape of Wiltshire, which is also anthropomorphically represented by Stephen ('the Wonham boy'). Forster deliberately included a link between magical places. When the quadruplet of Rickie, Agnes, Mrs Failing and Stephen climbed up to Cadbury Rings, associated by Stephen with pagans and Mrs Failing with ghosties, Rickie 'was reminded for a moment of that chalk pit near Madingley, whose ramparts excluded the familiar world.'

A valley, containing a stream, a road, a railway; over the valley fields of barley and wurzel, divided by no pretty hedges, and passing into a great and formless down – this was the outlook, desolate at all times, and almost terrifying beneath a cloudy sky. The down was called “Cadbury Rings” (“Cocoa Squares” if you were young and funny) because high upon it – one cannot say “on the top”, there being scarcely any tops in Wiltshire – because high upon it there stood a double circle of entrenchments. A bank of grass enclosed a ring of turnips, which enclosed a second bank of grass, which enclosed more turnips, and in the middle of the

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<sup>149</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. xxii.

pattern grew one small tree.<sup>150</sup>

The prescience of future events is indicated too, for 'Agnes was here, as she had once been there'.<sup>151</sup>

Significant here is that the revelation about his step-brother occurred as they approached the tree in the centre of the Rings – a feature redolent of the wych-elm, ancient in its English genealogy, at *Howards End*. The reader might be led to expect then some magical occurrence as happened in the dell of the Dryad near Madingley – and so it eventuates, but in a drastic event. For it is here that Rickie is informed that Stephen is his half-brother, sending Rickie into a mad scramble and loss of consciousness. As he and Mrs Failing approach the tree in the centre of the Rings, Rickie finally realizes that Mrs Failing is insinuating that Stephen is Rickie's brother – or technically, half-brother. 'The tree in the centre revolved, the tree disappeared ...' and Rickie had the vision of the room where his father stayed in London – recognizing the possibility of his father's extramarital liaison.<sup>152</sup> The Rings encircled him as the Past. In his haste to escape these circumstances, he ran, missed the exit through the Rings, and collapsed with faint.

His mouth went cold, and he knew that he was going to faint among the dead. He started running, missed the exit, stumbled on an inner barrier, fell into darkness.<sup>153</sup>

The tree in the centre of the Rings is as important here as the mnemonic valency of the wych-elm at *Howards End*. Its spirit too is involved in the transformational moment. Trees, as will be explicated below, represent the mystical, ancient landscape.

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<sup>150</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 97.

<sup>151</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 128.

<sup>152</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 130.

<sup>153</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 130.

**Figure 2 Figsbury Rings**



Evening walk 8.8.28 round by the yew tree on the Pilgrims Way that I have kidded myself into thinking terrifying. It isn't.<sup>154</sup>

Trees and woodland are the sprites that make things happen in Forster's short stories. In all the

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<sup>154</sup> *Commonplace Book*, p. 39.

Forster landscapes in all his novels and his short stories, certain places are *almost* invested with their own agency; *almost* because Forster never quite conclusively gives them the attribute. By implication, events happen here because of the mystical character of the place. The place almost causes the happenings to occur. Yet the occurrence is a combination of human agency and the mysterious elements of the place. *Elements* are important since these places are elemental. Perhaps Mr Emerson conveys Forster's idea when, according to his son, he proclaimed that 'crowds' of trees, houses and hills, possess a power over 'us' which is 'something supernatural'.<sup>155</sup> The further aspect of this perspective is Forster's insistence on the superiority of poetry over prose, a constant iteration in his novels and short stories. Whilst the poetic can be discovered in various genres, it is also often associated with the countryside, the rural, Nature with an upper-case N.<sup>156</sup>

The wych-elm at Howards End also represents the mystical points in the ancient English landscape. The tree makes a strong impression on the impressionable Helen Schlegel when she sojourns with the Wilcoxes.<sup>157</sup> Inserted in the elm are pig's teeth, now almost invisible, but which Ruth Wilcox reckons were placed there by the 'country people' as a votive, so that chewing the bark of the tree cures toothache.<sup>158</sup> The wych-elm, of course, had no special resonance for the Wilcoxes, who, after Ruth Wilcox's demise, desecrated the tree by attempting to build a garage among its roots.<sup>159</sup> Although Henry Wilcox later expresses an intention to keep the tree unspoilt, he disabuses his fiancée, Margaret Schegel, that the tree possesses any therapeutic power, but Margaret, despite his rebuff, believes that 'sacred' trees still exist in England.<sup>160</sup> When, after their marriage, Henry and Margaret make a fleeting

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155 *Room with a View*, p. 147.

156 For example, in *Selected Stories*, pp. 4, 16, 38, 45 ('For poetry is a spirit' – and not for rote learning), 50, 72 ('poetry of earth'), 83 (poetry of clear running water).

157 *Howards End*, pp. 3, 61.

158 *Howards End*, p. 61.

159 *Howards End*, p. 115.

160 *Howards End*, p. 162.

visit to Howards End, Margaret contemplates the wych-elm, 'a comrade, bending over the house, strength and adventure in its roots, but in its utmost fingers tenderness ... The message was not of eternity, but of hope on this side of the grave'.<sup>161</sup> Sensitivity – and imagination, which the Wilcoxes lacked – is necessary to appreciate the spiritual side of the landscape.

How concretely Forster recognized these special places is moot. Sometimes, despite investing them with an agency as the fabricator of events, Forster's concern seems superficial rather than deep. The young men, George Emerson and Freddy Honeychurch, revel in the 'Sacred Lake' near Windy Corner in Surrey, where Mr Beebe, their accomplice, abandoned all decorum. They returned to Nature with a capital N, rediscovering the wildness of the wilderness. The 'Sacred Lake' is not just a common moniker, but is invested with a special spirit; the duo plunge into 'the divine'.<sup>162</sup> The rain-swollen pool comprised a 'passing benediction', 'a holiness', 'a spell', 'a momentary chalice for youth'.<sup>163</sup> Elsewhere, Forster refers to places as 'holy'. On Summer Street is conferred the epithet 'shrine', as a centre for leisured society, but perhaps with punning implications.<sup>164</sup> This holy, however, does not accord with *das Heilige* of Otto, for it contains no tremulous experience and Forster's sentiments were not religious – although Forster did countenance the 'transfiguration' of the landscape of the Sussex Weald in the 'tremulous world'.<sup>165</sup> Nor, despite the superficial resemblance, should it be compared neatly with the cosmogenic centres propounded by Eliade.<sup>166</sup> Forster never intimates that these points are original places. They are ancient and traditional, but not always 'natural', and sometimes constructed by humans – although churches rarely exhibit such characteristics. Nor are they uniformly liminal spaces,

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161 *Howards End*, p. 176.

162 *Room with a View*, pp. 117-23, 127.

163 *Room with a View*, p. 123.

164 *Room with a View*, p. 94.

165 *Room with a View*, p. 81. Transfiguration is another motif of Forster: *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, pp. 6, 129, 134.

166 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* translated by John W. Harvey (London, 1969; original German publication 1917); Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return. Cosmos and History* (reprinted, Princeton, NJ, 1992).



transitional avenues between this immanent world and a transcendental one, although sometimes they so exist. More often, they are implicitly locations where sprites and tricksters reside in this world, turning their tricks on humans. So Rickie does not encounter another world at the Rings, but is tricked.

This world is nonetheless punctuated by these places, punctual points in the landscape where transfigurations and drastic events occur. Not all the happenings are deleterious, but it depended very much on the context. The foreboding is often situated in England, although the most sinister in the Marabar Caves in *A Passage to India*.<sup>167</sup> In Italy, the matter is different, so that is the venue for the romantic encounter between Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson. This magical valley at Fiesole weaved its charms, resplendent with its blue violets, a constant motif of Forster for the magic of the Italian landscape for happiness and contentment.<sup>168</sup> Lucy stumbles onto a terrace where George is musing, the landscape there witnessing, perhaps inducing, George's embrace of her and his first kissing of her. The terrace is luxuriantly covered with violets.

From her feet the ground sloped sharply into the view [the prospect], and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying around the tree stems, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth.<sup>169</sup>

The narrator attributes the compulsive encounter to the interference of Pan; the unexpected was instigated not by the defunct 'great god Pan', but by 'the little god Pan, who presides over social

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167 See the comments of Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, pp. 67, 72.

168 *Room with a View*, pp. 61-3, 136.

169 *Room with a View*, p. 63.

contretemps and unsuccessful picnics' (the latter phenomenon reiterated in Forster's short stories).<sup>170</sup>

Lucy has, moreover, been confused by the landscape and the especial environment, for, as the sky seemed golden and the ground an iridescent blue, she imagined the figure (George) as 'someone in a book' – submitting to a fairytale.<sup>171</sup>

This event in Italy is approximately replicated in the dell near Madingley. Rickie as an undergraduate at Cambridge had encountered the dell, which he believed a special place, with an elemental force. For Rickie, the dell becomes 'a kind of church', 'his holy place', with an 'intimate spirit', where 'anything you did would be *transfigured*' (my emphasis signifying Forster's commitment to the idea of transmutation and transformation in and by the landscape).<sup>172</sup> It apparently inspires Rickie's writing of a novel, involving a contrast between the city and the country, the union of a 'stupid, vulgar' husband and his carefree, vivacious wife, who flees and, as a dryad, is transformed into a tree (perhaps a precursor for Forster's short story, 'Other Kingdom', for which, see below). When Rickie, in a fairly platonic gesture, takes Agnes Pembroke on an excursion, their conversation turns to his intended novel. In response to her questions, he remarks on the dell which is the inspiration for the disappearance of the young woman. Reluctant to share the dell with another person – especially this young woman – Rickie pretends to have passed the dell, but she discovers it. Rickie remains circumspect: 'It was too beautiful ... its enchanted air. It was perilous'. Agnes, however, persists and enters the dell: 'she vanished pure and cool into the dell'. She calls to him from the dell, with the effect of a siren, which he could not finally resist. There they suddenly become lovers. The dell has transformed – transfigured – their relationship.<sup>173</sup> When Stephen intends to publish Rickie's story posthumously, he invites the advice of Mr Pembroke, the late Rickie's father-in-law. In discussing a

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<sup>170</sup> *Room with A View*, p. 64.

<sup>171</sup> *Room with a View*, p. 67.

<sup>172</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 18.

<sup>173</sup> *Longest Journey*, pp. 70-4; Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, p. 56.

title, Mr Pembroke alludes repeatedly to the primary concern with Nature and Pan.<sup>174</sup>

The event in the dell – the instigation of the affair between Rickie and Agnes – is replicated at the wych-elm at Howards End. Indeed, the entire plot of *Howards End* is predicated to some degree on an encounter by the wych-elm. In the first letter which is the exposition of the novel, Helen Schlegel admits how she already 'quite love[s]' the tree, which is positioned to the left of the house at Howards End on the boundary between the garden and the meadow.<sup>175</sup> In the following sentence in the letter, she refers to 'ordinary elms' there. The exposition signals immediately the significance of the wych-elm. The event which triggers the first crisis is the kiss bestowed on Paul Wilcox, the younger son, on Helen 'under the column of the vast wych-elm'.<sup>176</sup> The 'chance collision of human beings' causes consternation in the two families and is unsuccessful. The two fleeting lovers are primed for their encounter, he flush with success and she susceptible to passion. Yet the wych-elm is not merely a supporting role; it is central to the encounter. For 'the poetry of the kiss, the wonder of it, the magic that there was in life for hours after it' aligns with the poetry of Helen and the mystical nature of the wych-elm. Poetry resides in the landscape too. In this case of failed amour the wych-elm is the veritable trickster in the landscape. (The entire point of *Howards End* is, of course, to connect the poetry and the prose, the former to which Forster constantly alludes).<sup>177</sup> 'The blundering little encounter at Howards End was vital', reflected Margaret on Helen's predicament during the final crisis of the novel. Had Helen's life since been determined by that frisson? Helen still confessed that, although thoughts of Paul had dissipated, the 'magic of the caress endured'.<sup>178</sup> When Helen and Margaret are reconciled at Howards

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174 *Longest Journey*, p. 284.

175 *Howards End*, p. 3.

176 *Howards End*, p. 21.

177 For references to poetry, *Howards End*, pp. 5, 10, 21, 25, 42, 64, 101, 124, 125, 149, 159, 185, 194, 203, 221, 228, 257, 258; *Maurice*, p. 80. The intimations of what is to follow are contained in *Longest Journey*, pp. 14, 40, 88, 89, 102, 103, 141, 174 ('It means that poetry, not prose, lies at the core'), 181 ('They had trespassed into poetry'), 191, 211, 222, 242, 271, the title of which novel derives from Shelley (*Longest Journey*, p. 127).

178 *Howards End*, p. 237.

End in the final crisis, their conversation takes place under the wych-elm.<sup>179</sup> If, indeed, the 'westerly gale' demolished the wych-elm, then would occur 'the end of all things'.<sup>180</sup>

In the later short stories, the disappearance of a person into the landscape, amongst trees, is a recurrent motif. The 'Other Kingdom' is pervaded by Forster's invocations of nature and Pan. Within twenty lines, Miss Beaumont recites the gods who live in the natural world and shortly afterwards she sings to her betrothed, Harcourt Worters, about the gods inhabiting the woods. Coincidentally, Worters reveals that he has just purchased a long lease of Other Kingdom Copse, one of the finest beech woods in Hertfordshire. Into the wood, Miss Beaumont forever disappears like a faun or dryad.<sup>181</sup>

Located in Italy, not England, the short story 'The Story of a Panic' is essentially a refutation of Leyland's despair that 'Yes. The great God Pan is dead', as the countryside has been eroded. The boy Eustace is, in tremulous weather, apparently visited by goats indicated by a trail of hoof marks – that is, by Pan. Eustace then continues 'scurrying in front of us [the party] like a goat'. The essence of the plot is to convey the persistence of the poetry of Nature into the prosaic [the prose] modern era of expansive construction and change.<sup>182</sup> Here and elsewhere, Forster's distinction between the poetry and the prose resonates around the poetry of Nature, perhaps with an acknowledgement of Housman's poems in the wider context.

In an English context, the influence of Pan often correlates with beech copses on the chalk and downs. The copse of 78 beeches is pertinent in 'Other Kingdom'. When the narrator dismisses Other Kingdom Copse as similar to any other beech copse, so that it does not require description, the implication is also that Pan inheres in all beech copses.<sup>183</sup>

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179 *Howards End*, pp. 257 and (especially) 269 (the eternal rustling of the wych-elm).

180 *Howards End*, p. 286.

181 'Other Kingdom' in *Selected Stories*, pp. 46-70.

182 'The Story of a Panic', *Selected Stories*, pp. 1-23, esp. pp. 4 (the poetry lost from Nature and Pan in the woods), 5 (death of Pan), 9 (visit ostensibly by goats), 11 (Eustace with the gait of a goat), 16 (poetry and Nature).

183 'Other Kingdom', *Selected Stories*, p. 53.

'The Curate's Friend' collects together a whole range of these poetic motifs. 'It is uncertain how the Faun came to be in Wiltshire', but the Faun inhabited any 'country' with beech 'clumps', sloping grass and very clear streams.<sup>184</sup> Here is then the combination of Wiltshire, the Pan-inspired landscape, and a transformational event. Indulging in a picnic with his party on the Wiltshire downs in September, the curate encounters the Faun ('[t]he great pagan figure'), invisible to the remainder of the party.<sup>185</sup> The Faun prevents the curate from a successful liaison with Emily, but with serendipitous consequences for the rest of the curate's career. The curate's conversation with the Faun develops after the curate fled into the beech copse on first sight of the Faun.

In *Howards End*, Forster referred indirectly to the mystical elements of the landscape. At only a couple of points in this novel of 1910 did he comment directly on the supernatural. 'Of Pan and the elemental forces the public has heard a little too much ...' The 'earth as an artistic cult' is being eclipsed by London, the one Victorian, the metropolis Georgian. Henceforth, literature will probably concentrate on the town rather than the country.<sup>186</sup> The narrator here is lamenting a personal loss.

### **Intimacy in place and space**

He valued emotion – not for itself, but because it is the only final path to intimacy.<sup>187</sup>

Our tour [of Hinchingsbrooke] took an hour and Forster had not said a word. Then he rounded on me explosively, "To abandon it like that! ... to leave it empty! ... just to clear out! What

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184 'The Curate's Friend' [the faun], *Selected Stories*, pp. 71-8 (quotation at p. 71).

185 'The Curate's Friend', *Selected Stories*, p. 75 (quotation).

186 *Howards End*, p. 92.

187 *Longest Journey*, 168.

will happen to all its art treasures?" He was desperately concerned. "Houses are important you know. A house gives security. It is an anchorage."<sup>188</sup>

He [Rickie] was extremely sensitive to the inside of a house, holding it an organism that expressed the thoughts, conscious and subconscious, of its inmates.<sup>189</sup>

The late Mr Honeychurch had effected the cube, because it gave him the most accommodation for his money ... So impertinent [the house] – and yet the house 'did', for it was the home of people who loved their surroundings honestly. Other houses had been built by expensive architects, over others their inmates had fidgeted sedulously, yet all these suggested the accidental, the temporary; while Windy Corner seemed as inevitable as its ugliness of nature's own creation. One might laugh at the house, but one never shuddered.<sup>190</sup>

Houses have their own ways of dying, falling as variously as the generations of men, some with a tragic roar, some quietly but to an afterlife in the city of ghosts, while from others – and thus was the death of Wickham Place – the spirit slips before the body perishes.<sup>191</sup>

The exposition of *A Room with A View* occurred to the novelist because his mother requested such a room on the excursion of mother and son in Italy. We might suspect, however, that Forster's

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188 Quotation of Lady Faith Culme-Seymour in *Interviews and Recollections*, p. 81.

189 *Longest Journey*, p. 155.

190 *Room with a View*, p. 164.

191 *Howards End*, p. 219.

personal attachment was to *A Room of One's Own*: an intimate and familiar space.<sup>192</sup> Living in digs in his first year at King's, Cambridge, caused him considerable travail. His subsequent time in college proved much more comfortable and comforting. Partly, the condition was his relative isolation in digs, relying entirely on his friends from Tunbridge, whilst in college he had the opportunity for wider and newer associations. We might suspect too that the improvement in his ease was occasioned also by the intimacy of his surroundings: the personal and intimate space of his room. Accordingly, even the smallest space may offer the most comfort. Perhaps Rickie Elliott was never as relaxed as in residence at Cambridge, 'for just then he loved his rooms better than any person'.<sup>193</sup> Another potential influence on Forster's attitude to room as place was his antipathy to his boarding at Tonbridge School. That persistent disgruntlement is expressed in the internal declaration of Rickie when engaged as a teacher at the public school at Sawston that, '[f]or his heart', he would prefer his young charges not to occupy the cubicles and dormitories, but to remain at their own dear homes, surrounded by familiar people and material environment.<sup>194</sup> That cognition of the intimacy of space might explain the attention with which Forster described houses and rooms in his novels.

In nostalgically modelling *Howards End* on Rooksnest near Stevenage, his own childhood home, Forster betrayed his own predilection for the intimacy of particular space.<sup>195</sup> The sentiments of the two Mrs Wilcox may be defined by that phenomenology of space described by Gaston Bachelard. For both, the intimacy of space is associated with the homes of their birth and childhood: the one at *Howards End*, the other initially at Wickham Place and later at *Howards End*. The difference between the City and the country is no barrier to this sentiment of belonging in a finite and circumscribed cosmology of the home. For this reason, it is interesting that Raymond Williams made few allusions to Forster in his

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192 The title, of course, of Virginia Woolf's novella of 1929.

193 *Longest Journey*, p. 58 (and 59).

194 *Longest Journey*, p. 160.

195 Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster*, p. 83.

exegesis of the City and the country. Bachelard's intimacy with a particular space is achievable in urban or rural environment.

But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways, we would recapture the reflexes of the "first stairway," we would not stumble on that rather high step. The house's entire being would open up, faithful to our own being. We would push the door that creaks with the same gesture, we would find our way in the dark in the distant attic. The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hands.<sup>196</sup>

Our original house thus remains at the head of a hierarchy of houses with which we are associated and continues as our archetypal intimate space, the others 'but variations on a fundamental theme'.<sup>197</sup> The manner in which Ruth wandered about the garden at Howards End reflects the daydreams and dreams experienced in the intimate space of the original home: 'To inhabit oneirically the house we were born in means more than to inhabit it in memory...'<sup>198</sup> For Ruth, Howards End indeed seems to constitute the 'oneiric house'.<sup>199</sup>

When Forster confronted particular spaces in his novels, he engaged in what Bachelard later conducted as topo-analysis, or, as Thacker has reiterated, 'reading the room as a text'. Forster reproduced those 'images of intimacy' suggested by Bachelard.<sup>200</sup> In Forster, however, the detail of

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196 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space. The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, translated by Maria Jolas, with a new foreword by John R. Stilgoe (Boston, MA., 1994), pp. 14-15.

197 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 15.

198 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 16.

199 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 17.

200 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, pp. xxxvi, 15.



description, the topo-analysis, does not always correlate with topophilia.<sup>201</sup> Forster sometimes, as in the case of the domestic arrangements of the Wilcoxes in Ducie Street or Mrs Failing at Cadover, explored topo-analysis to convey a contrasting absence of intimacy.

If *Howards End* establishes the potential of the house as home as intimate space, the attic of Stephen Wonham epitomizes the confined, intimate space of affective and emotional comfort. Within the rest of the house, there is the intimation that Stephen feels uneasy and discomforted: at his most combative and awkward.<sup>202</sup> His own room – his room of his own – is situated in the pediment of Cadover house. This attic contains a solitary round window, to see out of which Stephen has to prostrate himself, a trapdoor, three iron girders, three beams, six buttresses, 'no ceiling unless you count the walls, no walls unless you count the ceiling', and the 'gurgly' cistern which provides the hot water.<sup>203</sup>

Here he lived, absolutely happy, and unaware that Mrs Failing [his guardian] had poked him up here on purpose, to prevent him from growing too bumptious.<sup>204</sup>

In complete serenity, he built in this tiny space shelves, cupboards and drawers, works, sings, and practises on the ocharoon. When the weather is decent, he climbs out onto the pediment after bathing and dries in the sun. His satisfaction he expresses by the reiteration of 'Good, oh good!', in appreciation of his personal, if desultory, space. The external pediment acts as an extension into a wider space, often an oneiric space, where he daydreams – an 'intimate immensity'.<sup>205</sup> The space of the attic was thus confined and restricted, but not restrictive.

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201 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 12.

202 *Longest Journey*, pp. 86-95.

203 For the garret room as intimate space, as 'my room', Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 13.

204 *Longest Journey*, pp. 117-19.

205 Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, ch. 8.

**Figure 3 'Cadover House'<sup>206</sup>**



Not every private space produced this warmth of affection and intimacy, however, for the combination was reserved for people of special sensitivity. Stephen feels 'at home' in his attic, but Mrs Failing is never reconciled to Cadover, which Forster describes as ugly and unimpressive. She was out of place in Wiltshire and out of sorts in Cadover house. (We might mention again here that the house was also out of place, as Cadover House was a transplantation of Forster's Uncle Willie's house in Northumberland, an example of Forster appropriating actual features into a fictitious context). Rickie was more discomforted there, permanently suspicious of the house where he conceived that most of the intra-familial problems had originated, imposing on him 'the most awful feeling of insecurity'.<sup>207</sup> Nor

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<sup>206</sup> King's College, Cambridge, EMF/27/136, reproduced with the permission and through the kindness of the Provost and Fellows of King's College, and with the kind assistance of the College's Archivist.

<sup>207</sup> *Longest Journey*, p. 100.

did Clive Durham have much contentment with the familial home at Penge, exclaiming on the arrival of Maurice that the house will be transformed and he will finally learn to love it.<sup>208</sup>

Reverting to *Howards End*, the sitting room of Leonard Bast and Jacky receives some attention from Forster. Besides an armchair, it is furnished with two other chairs, a tripod table, and a *cosy* corner (my italics).<sup>209</sup> A window is inserted in one of the walls, but another wall supports a mantelshelf. By the door stands a bookcase. The piano is surmounted by one of the sentimental paintings by Maude Goodman. So, the room is 'amorous' and 'not unpleasant' when the curtains are drawn and the stove unlit. On the other hand, it is described as a 'little hole'. The mantelshelf 'bristles' with Cupids, which, we learn, are amongst Bast's few possessions, along with a photograph frame and some books. Bast rents the flat furnished. More pertinently, it resonates of the 'shallow makeshift' in the modern 'dwelling-place' – not home – too easily acquired and relinquished. Despite the descriptive attention, the narrator's intention is to persuade that the room is intimate only under certain conditions, but otherwise transiently occupied, unprepossessing, and most of all, with no sentimental integrity. People of Bast's condition do not enjoy the intimacy of space which is allocated to them. Block B of flats is effectively a cellar, elevated by house-agents to the status of semi-basement.<sup>210</sup>

Both Ruth Wilcox, whose original home is Howards End, and Margaret Schlegel, are sensitive to the spirit of the house at Howards End. When invited by Ruth to visit the house, it is imperative that Margaret agree with the date suggested by Ruth.

'Another day' will do for bricks and mortar, but not for the Holy of Holies into which  
Howards End had been transfigured.<sup>211</sup>

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208 *Maurice*, p. 76.

209 For corners, Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, ch. 6.

210 *Howards End*, pp. 40-1.

211 *Howards End*, p. 73.

The Wilcoxes have no such appreciation, destroying the very facets in which Ruth delighted, the meadow and the wych-elm, then abandoning the house to a tenant, Hamar Bryce.<sup>212</sup> Paradoxically, when Bryce wishes to sublet as he is voyaging abroad, Henry Wilcox expresses his concern to preserve the integrity of 'that fine' wych-elm.<sup>213</sup> Charles, who had expected to inherit the house, decided to live in the suburban location of Hilton, but remains aggressively anxious that Margaret, betrothed to his father, intends to disinherit him of the house.<sup>214</sup> For the Wilcoxes other than Ruth, the house is merely an inconvenient converted farmhouse, unsuited to their purposes – but then that attitude prevails towards most of their multiple houses. Henry Wilcox's purely financial interest in the house is revealed again when the married couple visit the derelict building, upon which he expounds about how the transformation of agriculture had made non-viable such small holdings.<sup>215</sup>

To them [the Wilcoxes] *Howards End* was a house; they could not know that to her [the late Ruth Wilcox] it had been a spirit, for which she sought a spiritual heir ... Is it credible that the possessions of the spirit can be bequeathed at all? Has the soul offspring? A wych-elm tree, a vine, a wisp of hay with dew on it – can passion for such things be transmitted where there is no bond of blood?<sup>216</sup>

Henry Wilcox and his family accumulated houses like a business, as Helen Schlegel remonstrates: 'the Wilcoxes collect houses as your Victor collects tadpoles'.<sup>217</sup> Wilcox senior counsels Margaret with a

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212 *Howards End*, p. 117.

213 *Howards End*, p. 161.

214 *Howards End*, pp. 157-8.

215 *Howards End*, p. 175.

216 *Howards End*, p. 84.

217 *Howards End*, p. 145.

strategy to decide on the district, then the price, and to be obstinate about them, in the manner in which he acquired his large house in Ducie Street and Oniton Grange.<sup>218</sup> After his pretence to offer to let the house in Ducie Street to the Schlegels, dismissed from Wickham Place, Margaret more or less surmises his attitude: the 'solemnity' with which the middle classes consider their houses. The implicit sign is that Wilcox knows the exact size of the rooms.<sup>219</sup> Wilcox senior is as detached about Oniton Grange. He miscalculated on discovering it and soon regrets his decision to purchase it, intending to relinquish it as soon as possible. Its remoteness is the greatest disadvantage – peripheral in terms of access from London.<sup>220</sup>

But the Wilcoxes have no part in the place [Oniton], nor in any place ... They have swept into the valley and swept out of it, leaving a little dust and a little money behind.<sup>221</sup>

It is interesting that Forster does not offer an expansive description of Oniton Grange, only the rural environment. The Grange constituted no more than a grey mansion, 'unintellectual but kindly', redolent of the country houses constructed everywhere in the early nineteenth century.<sup>222</sup> It seems, moreover, that Forster deprecated these smaller country houses as incapable of becoming intimate homes: Penge (Somerset/Wiltshire border in *Maurice*); Oniton Grange; Cadover House (Wiltshire in *The Longest Journey*). Yet even Henry Wilcox almost – almost – understand at one instant the importance of the house in which one has lived. He could understand why Helen Schlegel would desire to spend a night at Howards End if it had been her 'old home, because a home, or a house'

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218 *Howards End*, p. 132.

219 *Howards End*, p. 140.

220 *Howards End*, pp. 178, 221-2.

221 *Howards End*, p. 213.

222 *Howards End*, pp. 180-1.

(altering the noun intentionally) in which one has lived 'becomes in a sort of way sacred' – but he could not fully comprehend why, other than a vague notion of associations. The Wilcoxes had those precise associations, but not the attachment to the house. The realization was fleeting.<sup>223</sup>

It is, indeed, the province of Margaret to discover and appreciate the place and its context. Margaret's fascination with Oniton is expounded, captivated by its 'romantic tension'. The Welsh hills, the fast-flowing rivers, the random lower hills, 'thrilled her with poetry' – perhaps in homage by Forster to Housman's *oeuvre*.<sup>224</sup>

In valleys of springs and rivers,  
     By Ony and Teme and Clun,  
 The country for easy livers,  
     The quietest under the sun,<sup>225</sup>

Into my heart an air that kills  
     From yon far country blows:  
 What are those blue remembered hills,  
     What spires, what farms are those?<sup>226</sup>

Enchanted by the prospect (future) and the prospect (vistas – 'an eternal joy'), Margaret determined to make the inelegant house an intimate place.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *Howards End*, p. 261.

<sup>224</sup> *Howards End*, p. 185.

<sup>225</sup> Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, L, p. 65.

<sup>226</sup> Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, XL, p. 51.

<sup>227</sup> *Howards End*, p. 185.

She was determined to create new sanctities among these hills.<sup>228</sup>

Helen and Margaret Schlegel have the same attachment to their paternal home in Wickham Place, furnished with heirlooms passed down from generations, particularly their father's books and their mother's marble-topped chiffonier.

Round every knob and cushion in the house sentiment gathered, a sentiment that was at times personal, but more often a faint piety to the dead ...<sup>229</sup>

Again, the house is almost invested with some agency by Forster: not only had it assisted in 'balancing their lives', but 'almost to counsel them'.<sup>230</sup> Helen, as the more sensitive of the two Schlegel sisters, remarked even that only furniture 'endures' while men and houses 'perish'.<sup>231</sup>

The poignancy of the small place is also attributed to Margaret Schlegel on one of her visits to Howards End, after the tenant had emigrated and the house left empty and internally decaying. 'Desolation greeted her.' Confined to the small house by the weather as she awaited Henry Wilcox, she instinctively contrasted the open, but unappealing space of the drive there in the motor car and the intimacy of her present surroundings: 'the sense of space which the motor had tried to rob from her.' 'She remembered that ten square miles are not ten times as wonderful as one square mile ...' In fine, she 'would double her kingdom by opening the door that concealed the stairs'.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> *Howards End*, p. 189.

<sup>229</sup> *Howards End*, p. 128.

<sup>230</sup> *Howards End*, p. 128.

<sup>231</sup> *Howards End*, p. 137.

<sup>232</sup> *Howards End*, pp. 172-3.

## Conclusion

Forster has been approached from a variety of directions: as belonging to the revival of the 'condition of England' novel between the 1890s and 1910s; as representative of the persistent divergence of the 'country and the city', contrasting the equanimity of the pastoral with the disturbance of the suburban; and, inclusive of all these specific issues, an ambiguous relationship to the modes of modernism.

Undoubtedly Forster would have disclaimed any notion that his fiction belonged to the sub-genre of the so-called 'regional novel'.<sup>233</sup> His reflections on the places which he had visited were unconscious and unselfconscious. His portrayal of Wiltshire conforms to external perceptions of that county by the educated, upper-middle-class elite who had imbibed, in his case again, unselfconsciously, an ideological position of dignifying rural England as Englishness. In the process, however, because of the freight which he carried, he distinguished between the solitary, isolated locales and the more sociable village society, between upland and lowland. The fertility of the soil in the valleys appealed to his own presumed fertility of the mind. That fertility of his mind, nonetheless, engendered a mystical dimension, the spirituality of Nature. That magical dimension passed beyond the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place, to the sprite of the place. Trickster inhabited these punctual places in the rural landscape.<sup>234</sup>

What a pity the poetry in me has got mixed up with the Pan.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> W. J. Keith, *Regions of the Imagination. The Development of British Rural Fiction* (Toronto, 1988); K. D. M. Snell, ed., *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland 1800-1990* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>234</sup> Hyde, *Trickster Makes this World*.

<sup>235</sup> *Commonplace Book*, p. 40.



Forster's novels were resolutely redemptive. Space was allowed in the dénouement for a serendipitous outcome. Redemption inhered in the countryside of Old England, in Wonham's return to the Downs with his child, for example. Perhaps even more utopian is the allusion of *Maurice* to the liberation of the 'greenwood', the forests of rural England.<sup>236</sup> After his liaison with Scudder, Maurice reflects:

He was not afraid or ashamed any more. After all, the forests and the night were on his side, not theirs [conformist society]; they, not he, were inside a ring fence.<sup>237</sup>

At the upshot, Maurice manages to dispel his suburban strictures and repression. In the process of sexual liberation, 'England belonged to them', implicitly the England of the open countryside epitomized by the 'greenwood'.<sup>238</sup> He fulfills his expectation of 'big spaces where passion clasped peace, spaces no science could reach, but they existed for ever, full of woods some of them, and arched with a majestic sky and a friend ...'<sup>239</sup> The idea of redemption through the persistence of rural Old England and its landscape is reiterated by Margaret Schlegel towards the end of *Howards End*.

Because a thing is going strong now, it need not go strong for ever ... This craze for motion has only set in during the last hundred years. It may be followed by a civilization that won't be a movement, because it will rest on the earth, All the signs are against it now, but I can't help hoping, and very early in the morning in the garden I feel that our house [Howards End] is the

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<sup>236</sup> *Maurice*, introduction by David Leavitt, pp. xxiii-xxiv, xxvii, xxix..

<sup>237</sup> *Maurice*, p. 190.

<sup>238</sup> *Maurice*, p. 212.

<sup>239</sup> *Maurice*, p. 169.

future as well as the past.<sup>240</sup>

The redemptive possibilities of the novels are embedded in the continuation of the countryside of rural England despite the creeping urbanization, the suburban 'red rust'.<sup>241</sup>

Disabused later in his longevity, Forster had, however, expected the Wiltshire Downs (and the 'greenwood') to endure to represent the solidity of rural England, a refuge for the individual.

while out on the slopes beyond them stood the eternal man and the eternal dog, guarding eternal sheep until the world is vegetarian.<sup>242</sup>

In the dénouement of *Maurice*, Forster returned to the theme of the dissolution of traditional rural England with its persistent remnants: 'the greenwood' (which, as Forster acknowledged in his 'Terminal Note', owed much to Edward Carpenter's influence). Forster was a fairly prescriptive author through his later comments on his novels. In the 'Terminal Note', composed in 1960, he recognized the almost complete eradication of the isolate in the English landscape: his novels, including *The Longest Journey*, pertain to 'the last moment of the greenwood'.

There is no forest or fell to escape to today, no cave in which to curl up, no deserted valley for those who wish neither to reform nor corrupt society but to be left alone.<sup>243</sup>

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240 *Howards End*, p. 290. The passage is cited by Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 213.

241 *Howards End*, p. 289.

242 *Longest Journey*, p. 85.

243 *Maurice*, 'Terminal Note', pp. 223-4; rather idiosyncratically, one might infer, since Forster himself was seemingly not attracted himself by those remote, isolate places; to him, we might suppose, they fell into the category of 'the imagination of rural places as fixed and immutable "elsewheres"': Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, 'Introduction', in *Senses of Place*, edited by Feld and Basso (Santam Fe, Mexico, 1996), p. 6.

Eternity did not last, however, as Forster later realized.<sup>244</sup>

It was much easier to write when I believed that Wessex was waiting to return ...<sup>245</sup>

What would the world be, once bereft

Of wet and wildness? Let them be left

O let them be left, wildness and wet:

Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.<sup>246</sup>

When he composed the novels, however, he had greater optimism for the persistence of traditional rural England, rooted in 'the endless strength of the earth' and 'the unconquerable chalk',<sup>247</sup>

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244 'Introduction' and 'Author's Introduction', *Longest Journey*, pp. xv, xxv.

245 *Commonplace Book*, p. 37, under the rubric 'Peace of the countryside'.

246 *Commonplace Book*, p. 156. His lament about the ploughing up of Rockingham Forest in 1943: *Commonplace Book*, p. 151 ('Agriculture'); his satisfaction after describing Sandy Field: *Commonplace Book*, p. 98; his intention to learn the names of all the fields in his parish and regret that he had not 'talked to old men': *Commonplace Book*, pp. 37-8.

247 *Longest Journey*, pp. 102, 109



