

**Trickster in the Wiltshire landscape: E. M. Forster and
The Longest Journey**

[1] The *genius loci* has only inspired me thrice, and on the third occasion did me out of £1.¹

[2] 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.²

[3] 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'.³

[4] One belongs to the place that one sleeps in and to the people one eats with.⁴

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*.⁵ 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.⁶ His

1 E. M. Forster, 'Memoirs', reprinted as Appendix B in *The Longest Journey*, edited by Elizabeth Heine, with an Introduction by Gilbert Adair (London, 2006), p. 362. *The Longest Journey* was published in 1907.

2 Forster, 'Memoirs', p. 366.

3 *The Longest Journey*, p. 155.

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

5 Throughout Foster's fiction, we have to remember that he retained the idea of the narrator/author as having knowledge of the minds of all the characters; the narrator was consistent and paramount. In that sense, as well as several others, Forster's novels look backwards.

6 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 Mary Lago and Furbank, eds, *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster* (2 vols, Cambridge, MA, 1983-5), 1. I have only had a chance of a cursory glance at Philip

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. 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 places and regions.

Place is experienced from the inside, but represented from the outside. Some authors will 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. Forster belonged to the latter category, but more as a participant-observer anthropologist in the case of Wiltshire, for he was a repetitive visitor. In 1911, he expressed this particular affinity with Wiltshire, even if evanescent.

Wiltshire still draws me, and gives vivid thoughts. More than Italy now.⁷

In April 1907, he wrote from Holmleigh at Salisbury to Edward Dent, the publisher, about *The Longest Journey*.⁸ 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':

Gardner, ed., *The Journals and Diaries of E M Forster* (3 volumes, London, 2011). Philip Gardner, ed., *E. M. Forster. Commonplace Book* (Stanford, CA, 1986) 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; only a couple of headings in the commonplace book engage with place, but other entries accommodate some reflections on rural place, as related below. Forster especially worried 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? *Commonplace Book*, p. 51 under the rubric 'Place'.

⁷ Gardner, *Journals and Diaries of E M Forster*, 2, pp. 36-7. The occasion was one of his repetitive excursions to Salisbury. His recollection in the 'Locked Diary' for 1911 contains comments on people of Wiltshire which resonate of Mrs Failing's criticisms of them in *The Longest Journey*.

⁸ *Selected Letters*, I, p. 87 (64).

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.⁹

Later in the year, in August, he described his walking tours from Hilton Young's cottage near Marlborough.¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.¹²

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 that time a special place for his forays.¹³ Forster regarded *The Longest Journey* with great affection and satisfaction. In an interview with Angus Wilson, he professed that:

9 *Selected Letters*, I, pp. 103-4 (79).

10 *Selected Letters*, I, pp. 112-15 (84-87).

11 *Selected Letters*, I, p. 114 (86).

12 *Selected Letters*, I, p. 115 (87).

13 *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'.

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.¹⁴

Forster's reflections were also ideologically informed, although he no doubt regarded himself as a pragmatist. He belonged to a generation and class which was concerned by the erosion of rural England, less by the burgeoning cities, than the diminution 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.¹⁵

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.'¹⁶ 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.'¹⁷ 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

14 J. H. Stape, ed., *E. M. Forster. Interviews and Recollections* (Basingstoke, 1993), p. 36.

15 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* 6th 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). Another important influence on Forster was A. E. Housman, an interest not reciprocated (more because of Housman's dark solitariness).

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

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

soul), and Proust (modern consciousness).¹⁸ By implication, then, he considered an appreciation of place in the English novel as somewhat insignificant for the genre.¹⁹

Perhaps quite paradoxically, then, an attempt to elucidate Forster's attitude to place in his novels might seem self-defeating.²⁰ There is, nonetheless, an apparent development of place within Forster's novels.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³

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*.²⁴

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

19 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.

20 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: *E. M. Forster. Commonplace Book*, edited by Philip Gardner (Stanford, 1985), p. 12.

21 The exception is *Maurice*, where place is undeveloped. 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: E. M. Forster, *Maurice*, with an Introduction by David Leahy (London, 2005), p. 74. In the denouement, 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'. *Maurice*, 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.

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

23 *The Longest Journey*, p. 58.

24 If, however, we take into account his short stories, which also elucidate the mystical quality of some places, he also

The 'Englishness' of Forster's novels has received comment, often associated with his recollection of his childhood at Rook's Nest near Stevenage in the guise of *Howard's End*.²⁵ In *Howards End*, Dorset, from the Purbeck Hills, is taken for the best characteristics of England.²⁶ Equally, in *The Long Journey*, Wiltshire receives that accolade:

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

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.²⁹ 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 *Howard's End* by suburban sprawl, the 'flux' of modernity, associated with the bifurcation of the middle class into its upper and lower components.³⁰ Not all rural enclaves, however, received Forster's approbation. His relative disdain

addressed in his pseudo-science fiction the magical non-place: E. M. Forster, *Selected Stories*, edited with an introduction and notes by David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell (London, 2001), especially 'The Celestial Omnibus', which can, however, be read as an escape from the dull suburb of Surbiton, and 'The Machine Stops'.

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

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

27 *The Longest Journey*, p. 126.

28 *The Longest Journey*, p. 126 – and passim!

29 *Commonplace Book*, p. xiv (Forster inherited a house in Abinger Hammer from his aunt Laura in 1924 and resided there for many years).

30 Andrew Thacker, 'Through modernity: Forster's flux', chapter 2 in his *Moving Through Geography: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester, 2003). Forster reiterates 'continual flux' at pp. 92 and 117. For cosmopolitanism, Thacker, 'Through modernity', p. 47. For 'cosmopolitan' London, *Howards End*, p. 135. In 1915, just five years after the publication of *Howards End*, Patrick Geddes adopted the description 'world city', adopted from the earlier German *Welldstadt*: 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, Cal., 1989), pp. 62-3. The development of 'world cities' is associated with modernism. *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

for Northumberland is manifest in his memoranda.³¹ The male space of the Wilcoxes pertains to the City, disembodied, fluid, equivalent to Bauman's 'liquid modernity'.³² 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* and particularly in Swanage and the Purbeck Hills.³³

Despite his acerbic comments 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. 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.³⁴ For Caroline, however, Sawston had its redeeming features.

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

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': Forster, *A Room with a View*, with an Introduction by Malcolm Bradbury (London, 2000), 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*, I, p. 108 (82).

31 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: 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).

32 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000).

33 *Howards End*, pp. 128, 142-3, but note the ambiguity about Englishness at p. 150, and the 'dull valley' at p. 145.

34 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, edited by Oliver Stallybrass, with an introduction by Ruth Padel (London, 2007), p. 56.

sin, and at Sawston, either with the Herritons or with herself, the baby should grow up.³⁵

She was here to champion morality and purity, and the holy life of an English home.³⁶

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 fee-paying school, where, *faute de mieux*, Rickie obtained occupation as a teacher.³⁷ When Stephen journeys to Sawston and encounters Ansell, the voice of the narrator informs us that 'He had not the suburban reticence'+ he represented the openness, if lumbering, of Wiltshire against the narrowness of bourgeois, suburban Sawston.³⁸ When Stephen later stumbled 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.³⁹

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 'rounded' characters.⁴⁰ 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 into that 'abyss' which Forster didn't really understand, despite his reading of Jack London.⁴¹

35 *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, p. 64. The school was a fee-paying school based on Forster's own *alma mater*, Tonbridge.

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

37 *The Longest Journey*, p. 32: the school again an epitome of Forster's Tonbridge School.

38 *The Longest Journey*, p. 213.

39 *The Longest Journey*, pp. 255-6.

40 *Aspects of the Novel*, chapters 3-4.

41 Jonathan Rose, 'What was Leonard Bast Really Like? ', in idem, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class*

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 world structured in black and white (the Chalk and the Cheese, downs and vale): 'One nips or is nipped.'⁴²

'He [Stephen] worried infinity as if it was a bone. Gnashing his teeth, he tried to carry the eternal subtleties by violence.'⁴³

'He [Stephen] was more genial, but there was the same brutality, the same peevish insistence on the pound of flesh.'⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ The significance, as has often been remarked, in the denouement is that Rickie dies, sacrificially, in saving his drunken half-brother, Stephen.⁴⁶ 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

(London: Yale, 2001), pp. 393-438; Frank Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster* (London, 2009), pp. 97-110 (two points here: perhaps Kermode classifies Bast slightly incorrectly; and he correctly indicates how Forster's attitude to class altered later).

42 *The Longest Journey*, p. 117.

43 *The Longest Journey*, p. 90.

44 *The Longest Journey*, p. 106 (Rickie's assessment).

45 'The other [Stephen], who was always honest, stayed away [from Rickie's funeral]'; *The 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.' *The Longest Journey*, p. 213. 'He [Ansell] looked at the face [of Stephen], which was frank, proud, and beautiful, if truth is beauty. Of mercy or tact such a face knew little. It might be coarse, but it had in it nothing vulgar or wantonly cruel.' *The Longest Journey*, p. 216.

46 *The Longest Journey*, p. 282.

perpetuated.⁴⁷

'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.'⁴⁸

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 one of the finest valleys out of Salisbury Plain."⁴⁹

Stephen epitomized that part of the county which he inhabited and to which he returned.

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...'⁵⁰

47 *The Longest Journey*, p. 289.

48 *The Longest Journey*, p. 289.

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

50 *The Longest Journey*, p. 89. "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": *The Longest Journey*, p. 98. Not indigenous to the county, but transplanted there at marriage, her perception of the county remained cynical.

Stephen's return to the Downs in the denouement is not surprising. By contrast, Rickie had a predilection for the valleys and their clustered villages:

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 Avon valley below Amesbury.⁵¹

[For the full contrast, Quotation 3]

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.⁵²

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.⁵³

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. 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:

51 *The Longest Journey*, p. 111.

52 *The Longest Journey*, p. 111.

53 We must beware, of course, excess in this interpretation, a determinism sometimes propelled at David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion. Popular Culture in England, 1603-1660* (Oxford, 1985).

Much lies behind this entry. It recalls an emotional thrill which set my pen going.⁵⁴

Although compelled to abandon that special place 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.' The prescience of future events is indicated too, for 'Agnes was here, as she had once been there.'⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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

54 *The Longest Journey*, p. xxii.

55 *The Longest Journey*, p. 128.

56 *The Longest Journey*, p. 130.

running, missed the exit, stumbled on an inner barrier, fell into darkness - ⁵⁷

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.⁵⁸

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 genre of modernism.

Undoubtedly Forster would have denounced the notion that his fiction belonged to the sub-genre of the so-called 'regional novel'.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

57 *The Longest Journey*, p. 130.

58 '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: *Commonplace Book*, p. 39. Trees and woodland are the sprites that make things happen in Forster's short stories.

59 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).

60 Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes this World. How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Edinburgh, 2008).

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.⁶¹

Pan shows his cloven hoof in almost everything he wrote, and I always felt, and still feel, that Morgan never actually met the god.⁶²

What a pity the poetry in me has got mixed up with the Pan.⁶³

Disabused later in his longevity, he had, however, expected the Wiltshire Downs 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'⁶⁴

Eternity did not last, however, as Forster later realized.

It was much easier to write when I believed that Wessex was waiting to return ...⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶

61 *Selected Letters*, I, p. 119 (91): to Christopher Benson on 13 December 1910 about *Howards End*.

62 David Garnett in *E. M. Forster. Interviews and Recollections*, p. 57.

63 *Commonplace Book*, p. 40.

64 *The Longest Journey*, p. 85.

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

66 *Commonplace Book*, p. 156. His lament about the ploughing up of Rockingham Forest in 1943: *Commonplace*

Longer quotations

[1] '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 pattern grew one small tree.’⁶⁷

[2] '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 gray 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.’⁶⁸

[3] '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

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.

67 *The Longest Journey*, p. 97.

68 *The Longest Journey*, pp. 109-10.

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 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.⁶⁹

[4] '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 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

69 *The Longest Journey*, pp. 110-11.

clean rolling outlines of the land, and favoured the grass and the distant coronals of trees.⁷⁰

[5] [Mrs Failing's topographical description] '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.'⁷¹

70 *The Longest Journey*, pp. 125-6.

71 *The Longest Journey*, p. 101.

Figures

Fig 1 Forster's imaginary locality

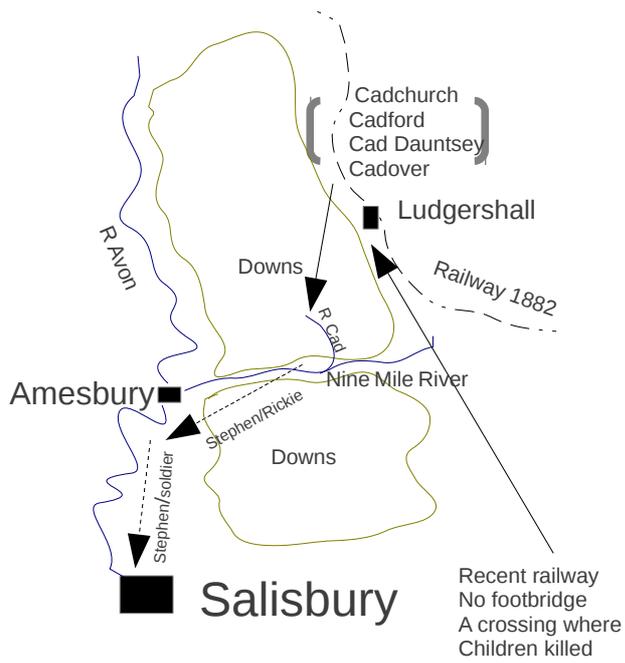


Fig 2 Figsbury Rings

